

O Holy Knights

By Claudia Mathis/ SUN staff writer

Syracuse Diocese benefits from various Knights organizations

Religious service organizations are a valuable enhancement to any diocese. The Syracuse Diocese is fortunate to have four exceptional orders of knighthood in its midst. They are the Order of the Knights and Dames of Malta, Knights of Columbus, Knights of the Holy Sepulchre and Knights of St. John International. During the 1800's, European immigrants who had left their homelands to find religious freedom in the U.S. and other countries formed benevolent societies within their parish churches, often named after medieval knight societies, which had courageously defended the church in the Crusade era.

KNIGHTS OF ST. JOHN INTERNATIONAL



Knights of St. John

After the American Civil War, a real need existed for physical and spiritual healing and more benevolent societies were formed, often with a military theme. In 1879, in Baltimore, Md., many of these groups agreed to merge, forming the Roman Catholic Union of the Knights of St. John. The name was later shortened to the Knights of St. John. The word "international" was added in 1992 to reflect the fact that the order had spread throughout Europe, Africa and the Caribbean. The organization took St. John the Baptist as its model and patron. The Knights of St. John work directly with their parish priests for the good of the parish community. The founders of the Knights of St. John wished to spread and foster certain ideals among Catholic men. In applying to the Legislature of New York State for a charter, they stated their purposes: to create and foster a feeling of fraternity and fellowship among the various Commanderies; to improve their moral, mental and social condition; to aid, assist and support members and their families in case of want, sickness and death and to promote a more generous and filial respect for the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. The charter was approved May 6, 1886.

The knights' uniform is impressive. It resembles the uniform of the Civil War and consists of a chapeau, double-breasted military-styled coat which displays a military rank of office, trousers and a sword. The Syracuse Diocese boasts 265 Knights of St. John members. Commandery 41 in Utica has 100 members and Commandery 385, also in Utica, 150. Syracuse's commandery 37 has 15 members. Tom Zdanowicz, a parishioner of St. Anthony of Padua Church in Utica, serves as Supreme Secretary of the Knights of St. John. He's been active in the organization for the last 15 years. He worked through the ranks and was appointed to his present position last July at the organization's international convention in Philadelphia, Pa. Zdanowicz said the commaderies are living out the ideals and purposes of the organization. "One of the goals is to further the growth of the Catholic Church by spreading the faith as much as we can and by also financially supporting our parishes," he noted. In 1990, the Knights of St. John established the Msgr. Carl Denti Foundation to benefit sick and disabled children.

The Knights of St. John's Commandery 385 are extremely active in financially supporting St. Anthony's. Their fundraising activities include raffles, dinners, pancake breakfasts and the recently discontinued Bingo program. "We also made a generous donation for the purchase of new carpeting at St. Anthony's," added Zdanowicz. He said he really appreciated the closeness that has developed through the fellowship among the members of the Knights. He recalled the way his fellow Knights supported him when he was recently hospitalized. "You could see that they really cared," Zdanowicz said. "I couldn't thank them enough." John Ryznar serves as Grand Secretary for the Knights of St. John. He got involved with the Knights of St. John when he was 16 years old after watching his grandfather serve as a member. He said his commandery is very active and its membership is growing. "Over the last year, six individuals under the age of 30 have joined," he said.

Commandery 41 is actively involved in the parish life of St. Joseph/St. Patrick Church in Utica, of which Ryznar is a parishioner, and supports the parish financially with fundraisers. In addition to serving as honor guard at confirmations, First Communions and feast days, the knights serve as Eucharistic ministers, as sextons, church groundskeepers and parish council members. The members also extend themselves to the surrounding community, volunteering with the Mother Marianne Soup Kitchen and at the Big Brothers/Big Sisters bowling tournament, among other things. Fundraising activities include an annual Turkey Fest Auction, clambake and venison dinner.



Order of the Knights and
Dames of Malta

ORDER OF THE KNIGHTS AND DAMES OF MALTA The Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta, commonly known as the Order of Malta, traces its origins to Jerusalem, where, before the First Crusade (1099), it was founded by its first rector, Blessed Gerard when the Holy City was recovered by the Christians. The Order of Malta is the fourth oldest religious order of Christendom. The organization began as a hospice-infirmary that was founded in Jerusalem in approximately 1080 to provide care for the poor, sick or injured pilgrims to the Holy Land. After the Western Christian reconquest of Jerusalem in 1099 during the First Crusade, it became a religious/military order under its own charter and was charged with the care and defense of the Holy Land. Following the conquest of the Holy Land by Islamic forces, the order operated from Rhodes, over which it was sovereign, and later from Malta.

In 1798, Napoleon ordered an attack on Malta. The knights capitulated and their island-state fell to the French. Napoleon seized the treasures of the order and forced its members to abandon the island. In 1834, the order established its headquarters in Rome, where it has remained ever since. With its military role reduced, service to the sick and poor became its foremost mission. Today, the order's ideals of defending the faith and taking care of the sick and poor are being put into practice daily. The Order of Malta in the Syracuse Diocese is accomplishing these goals. "The beauty of our program is that almost 100 percent of our members participate," said Kathy Mezzalingua, Order of Malta Regional Hospitaller for the Syracuse region. "We have 20 active members in addition to two candidates this year and one next year."

Dennis Owen, parishioner at St. Mary of the Lake Church in Skaneateles, started the Syracuse chapter of the Order of Malta in 1989. Owen was asked by the Federal Association of the Order of Malta to start a group in the area. "When I found out what the order represented, I thought it would

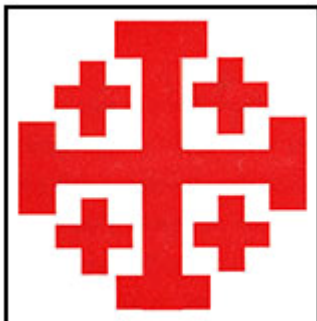
add greatly to my experience of my Catholic faith,” he said. “I was thrilled to be the first Knight of Malta here.” Owen initiated the program by inviting people to First Friday Masses. Before long, he said, over 100 people had joined the order. The First Friday Masses are still being held today on the first Friday of the month at the Century Club in Syracuse. An average of 50 people attend the Mass. Another way in which the Syracuse Order of Malta lives the faith is through a special Mass on St. John the Baptist’s feast day, special Masses for the Sanctity of Life held several times a year, a healing Mass and an anointing Mass. The Order of Malta is dedicated to helping the sick and poor in the area. The members supply, cook and serve the food at monthly pancake breakfasts at Franciscan Northside Ministries in Syracuse. “This is one of our favorite things that we do,” said Mezzalingua. “Over 200 people show up and they really appreciate it. We visit with them while we’re there.”

The order also provides three doctors who volunteer every Wednesday night at the St. Joseph Health Clinic in Syracuse. They also donate medical supplies to the health clinic at St. Lucy’s Parish in Syracuse. After visiting Unity Acres, a residence for homeless men in Orwell, they donated funds to them through their national office. The order’s major project has been the construction of Malta House and Malta Manor, low income housing for the elderly, in North Syracuse. “We minister to the residents there,” said Mezzalingua. “At least once a month we celebrate their birthdays and we also have special dinners, holiday parties and special Masses. We make them feel special. We’re a caring and giving organization.” In addition, six or seven times a year, members of the order travel to New Orleans to help rebuild the community that was affected by Hurricane Katrina. The members are each required to make a pilgrimage to Lourdes, France. The purpose of the trip is to enrich the life of the ill person that they bring along with them. “Our job is to help the malades [ill people], to watch over them and take care of them,” said Mezzalingua. “It’s a special and beautiful experience — it affects every one of us.”

Mezzalingua said that she has had many volunteer experiences in the past, but she feels that being a member of the order is a lifelong commitment. She values the fellowship that has been established with her fellow members. “We feel and believe the same about our works and faith — we all feel blessed,” she said. “We are working the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.”

Noreen Falcone, President of the Federal Association of the Order of Malta, said she feels privileged to be a member of the 11,000 worldwide Order of Malta in 59 countries. She explained that the organization is a sovereign state as well as a religious organization. “I joined in 1993 because I had done philanthropic work before and this order brought a new philosophy to my Catholic faith,” Falcone said. “The work that we do becomes a prayer.”

KNIGHTS OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE



Knights of the Holy Sepulchre

The history of the ancient order of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre goes back nearly 900 years. The First Crusade ended with the re-capture of Jerusalem to the crusaders in 1099 and the establishment of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. At this time, Sir Godfrey De Bouillon, the military leader of the combined forces of the crusaders, called for volunteers from among his knights to spend their lives guarding the newly-liberated tomb of Christ. This new order of the Knights of the

Holy Sepulchre quickly won papal approbation and was formally approved as an order by Pope Paschal II in 1113.

The emblem which had been worn on the tunics of De Bouillon's knights, a design of five red crosses, became the distinguishing mark of the order — the "Jerusalem Cross" or the "Cross of Godfrey." After the fall of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, the great Orders of Knighthood were dispersed and modified in various ways. Throughout the centuries, the Order of the Holy Sepulchre managed to retain its identity, establishing houses in France, Spain, Poland, Belgium and Italy. The modern history of the order began with the restoration of the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem in 1847, after nearly 40 years of vacancy. The reigning pontiff, Pius IX, established the four classes of knighthood. Pope Leo XIII authorized the conferring of the honors on the order with equivalent ranks and dignity to the Ladies of the Holy Sepulchre.

The Eastern Lieutenancy of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre traces its founding to 1926 when the order was first recognized in the U.S. In 1951 the order was recognized worldwide. Tina Dyer, executive secretary of the Diocesan Pastoral Council Office, has been a Lady of the Holy Sepulchre since 1996. Retired Bishop James Moynihan asked her to join the order. "I was the seventh person to be chosen," said Dyer. "He singled out people who he felt had not been recognized and honored for all the work they had done."

Today, the number of Knights in the Syracuse Diocese is 42 and their goal is to support the Holy Land. Dyer said that the members' yearly dues are used to support hospitals and schools among other things in that area. Dyer said that traveling to the Holy Land to visit the institutions her order supports changed her life. "They have nothing," she said. "We need to do anything we can to evangelize and reach out to those people." The diocesan order participates in several annual activities. The group meets to have dinner with the bishop and it also meets with the Eastern Lieutenancy in New York City to have dinner at the Waldorf Astoria and for an investiture ceremony at St. Patrick's Cathedral.

KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS



Knights of Columbus

The Knights of Columbus, the largest lay organization in the Catholic Church, was founded in 1882 by Father Michael McGivney of New Haven, Conn. Father McGivney believed that the knights, who were (and still are) devoted to the principles of charity, unity, fraternity and patriotism, would be a way to strengthen men's faith and help provide financial assistance to struggling families. Due to the remarkable virtues of Father McGivney, he is presently being considered for canonization for sainthood. The order got its start with only 10 men at the first meeting. Now the order boasts 1.7 million members internationally.

The Syracuse Diocese chapter alone has close to 7,700 members, according to Marshall-to-the-Master Jim Brown of the Christ the King Council No. 4114. Brown said that the goal of the Syracuse chapter is to have a council for each individual parish. The men of the Knights of Columbus Council 3717 in North Syracuse formed their council 56 years ago in the basement at St. Rose of Lima

Church. As Council 3717 has grown over the years, so has its benevolence to dozens of individuals and groups assisted by its charity.

Throughout the year, the men host numerous events to raise money for things such as Catholic school scholarships and financial support of diocesan seminarians. The knights also lend financial support to St. Rose of Lima Parish, St. Margaret's Parish in Mattydale and Sacred Heart Parish in Cicero. They also support the local police and fire departments. Angelo LaVerne has been a member of the knights for the last 35 years. "Knighthood has made me and my brother knights better Christians," LaVerne said. "We are the right arm of the church." The membership of Council 3717 has declined over the years from 600 to 400 men. "We invite and encourage any Catholic gentlemen to join our organization."