



News Release

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Knights of Columbus Concludes Review Process Regarding Display of Mosaic Artwork at Saint John Paul II National Shrine and Knights' Headquarters

Decision is made to cover mosaics in D.C. and Connecticut at least until the Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith issues its decision on pending cases

Washington, D.C. — The Knights of Columbus announced today the conclusion of a careful and thorough process to review the display of mosaic artwork in worship spaces at the Saint John Paul II National Shrine in Washington, D.C. (installed 2015), and in the Holy Family Chapel at the Knights' headquarters in New Haven, Conn. (installed 2005). As a result of this review, the Knights of Columbus will cover the mosaics in fabric, which will remain in place at least until the Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF) issues its decision on the pending sexual abuse cases against artist Father Marko Rupnik, at which time a permanent plaster covering may be in order.

Rupnik, who previously incurred excommunication (subsequently lifted) and was expelled from the Jesuit order in 2023, has been accused by multiple women of grave and disturbing instances of abuse when they were adults, from the mid-1980's until at least 2015. Rupnik was a religious superior of most of these women. These cases are pending before the DDF, which has described them as being at "a fairly advanced stage." While Rupnik's cases are under formal investigation, he remains a priest in good standing of the Diocese of Koper, Slovenia. The Knights of Columbus was unaware of any sexual abuse allegations against Rupnik until they came to light in December 2022.

"The Knights of Columbus has decided to cover these mosaics because our first concern must be for victims of sexual abuse, who have already suffered immensely, and who may be further injured by the ongoing display of the mosaics at the Shrine," said Supreme Knight Patrick Kelly. "This decision is rooted in a foundational purpose of the Knights of Columbus, which is to protect families, especially women and children, and those who are vulnerable and voiceless."

"Today's decision is the fruit of an extensive process," Kelly said, "including confidential consultations with individual victims of sexual abuse and those who minister to them, individual pilgrims, moral theologians and art historians, as well as bishops and other clergy. While opinions varied among those consulted, there was a strong consensus to prioritize the needs of victims, especially because the allegations are current, unresolved, and horrific."

“The Knights are also committed, from their founding, to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. In the end, that is our reason for sponsoring the Saint John Paul II National Shrine, and for our patronage of sacred art at the shrine and elsewhere. The art we sponsor must therefore serve as a steppingstone — not a stumbling block — to faith in Jesus Christ and his Church.”

“The decision also reflects common elements of the mission of the Saint John Paul II National Shrine and the Knights of Columbus, which include strengthening families, prioritizing persons over things, strongly and clearly proclaiming the Catholic faith, and fostering a culture that helps faith and families thrive,” Kelly said.

“We were also particularly grateful for the thoughtful decision of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes, which both informed and confirmed us in our own decision-making,” Kelly said. “Shrines are places of healing, prayer and reconciliation. They should not cause victims further suffering.”

Finally, Kelly made clear that the situation of the Saint John Paul II National Shrine is unique and that the decision is tailored to its particular circumstances.

“Context and mission matter,” he concluded. “Every situation is different. In the United States, Catholics continue to suffer in a unique way from the revelations of sexual abuse and, at times, from the response of the Church. It is clear to us that, as patrons of a national shrine, our decision must respect this country’s special need for healing.”

In addition to removing the mosaics from sight, the Knights will immediately implement several pastoral measures to express the Knights’ solidarity with victims of sexual abuse. These include:

- Providing educational materials about the mosaics that will make clear that the continued display of the mosaics at the shrine during the process of consultation was not intended to ignore, deny, or diminish the allegations of abuse;
- Including in all shrine Masses a prayer of the faithful for victims of sexual abuse; and
- Specially commemorating at the shrine, the feast days of saints with a special connection to victims of abuse, such as St. Josephine Bakhita.

About the Saint John Paul II National Shrine

Located in Washington, D.C., the Saint John Paul II National Shrine is a place of prayer, pilgrimage, and cultural formation dedicated to promoting in the United States the life and legacy of its patron. The shrine has been a major pastoral initiative of the Knights of Columbus since 2011. It was designated a national shrine by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2014.

About the Knights of Columbus

In 1882, Blessed Michael McGivney, a young parish priest in New Haven, Connecticut, founded the Knights of Columbus to serve the needs of a largely immigrant Catholic community. What began as a small fraternal benefit society has since grown into the world’s premier lay Catholic

men's organization, with more than 2.1 million members in over 16,800 local councils. As members of one of the world's leading international charitable organizations, Knights around the world donated approximately 50 million service hours and nearly \$185 million for worthy causes in their communities in 2022. The Knights of Columbus also offers a range of life insurance products to members and their families and was named by Forbes as one of America's Best Insurance Companies 2024 in the permanent life insurance category. Knights of Columbus Insurance currently has more than \$123 billion* of life insurance in force. In addition, the organization offers investment services in accord with Catholic social teaching through its wholly owned subsidiary, Knights of Columbus Asset Advisors, which holds more than \$27 billion** in assets under management. Based on the founding principles of charity, unity and fraternity, the Knights of Columbus is committed to strengthening Catholic families and parishes, and to practicing faith in action through service to all in need. To learn more or to join the Knights of Columbus, please visit kofc.org/join.

*As of December 31, 2023

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