



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 9, 2025

Contact: communicationsdept@kofc.org

Knights of Columbus Launches New Pilgrim Icon of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

For more than 45 years, the Knights' Pilgrim Icon Program has brought sacred images to parishes around the world for prayer and devotion.

New Haven, Conn. — On Friday, Jan. 3, the Knights of Columbus launched its new Pilgrim Icon of the Sacred Heart of Jesus during a Holy Hour organized by San Salvador Council No. 1 and held at the birthplace of the Knights of Columbus, St. Mary's Church in New Haven. During the prayer service, an icon depicting the most famous image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, painted by Pompeo Batoni in 1767 and now venerated in the Church of the Gesù in Rome, was displayed. This reproduction of the original image is one of more than 300 icons, each bearing the Apostolic Blessing of His Holiness Pope Francis, which are now traveling around the world as part of the Knights of Columbus Pilgrim Icon Program.

The Holy Hour included readings from Sacred Scripture and reflections from Pope Francis on the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as well as the Divine Mercy Chaplet, prayers to the Sacred Heart, and time for silent prayer and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

The Knights' new Pilgrim Icon Program coincides with the publication of the fourth encyclical of Pope Francis, *Delxit Nos (He Loved Us)*, which is devoted to the Sacred Heart.

"In many ways, *Dilexit Nos* can serve as a mission statement for the Knights of Columbus in today's world," said Supreme Knight Patrick Kelly. "The pope observes that we live in a fragmented and divided society, but the heart of Christ is a unifying center. It is the source of truth and goodness that we all need."

On Dec. 20, 2024, Pope Francis received Supreme Knight Patrick Kelly in a private audience at the Vatican. The Supreme Knight presented Pope Francis with an icon and booklet for the Sacred Heart Holy Hour and provided an update on notable activities of the Knights of Columbus in the past year, including the growth of the *Cor* men's faith formation initiative, charitable work around the world, and support for vocations in the United States and Canada.

The Holy Father's encyclical and the Knights' new Pilgrim Icon Program both coincide with the Church's commemoration of the 350th anniversary of the visions of the Sacred Heart received by the French nun St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, who has given us the Twelve Promises of the Sacred

Heart and the First Friday devotions. In one of the apparitions, Our Lord told her: “Behold this Heart which has so loved men that it has spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming itself, in order to testify its love.”

Knights of Columbus Founder Blessed Michael McGivney also had a deep devotion to the Sacred Heart, fostered in him from childhood. The McGivney family had in their home an ornate devotional plaque of the Sacred Heart that is still in the Knights’ possession. In one of his few surviving letters, Father McGivney wrote to one of his seminary professors and concluded “Yours truly in the S.H.” — referring to the Sacred Heart. In 1881, when Father McGivney accompanied convicted murderer Chip Smith to the gallows, Smith wore a Sacred Heart badge given to him by the priest. A century later, when Father McGivney’s body was exhumed in 1981, it was discovered that he had been buried with a cloth image of the Sacred Heart.

For more than 45 years, the Knights’ Pilgrim Icon Program has enabled more than 23 million people to honor Our Lord, Our Lady, and the saints through 191,000 prayer services featuring icons of different subjects, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Holy Family, and St. Joseph. The Sacred Heart of Jesus icon is the 20th icon venerated through the program since 1979.

Supreme Knight Kelly has called upon Knights to “bring reproductions of this beloved image to parishes around the world and invite their families — and all families — to consecrate their homes and themselves to the Sacred Heart.”

For more information on the Knights’ Pilgrim Icon Program and to download materials, please visit: kofc.org/sacredheart.

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 more than 47 million service hours and over \$190 million for worthy causes in their communities in 2023. The Knights of Columbus also offers a range of life insurance products to members and their families. 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 \$29 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, 2024

**As of November 30, 2024

###