

Baltimore and the Knights of Columbus

The Knights of Columbus will acknowledge an important part of their roots Aug. 7-9, when the world's largest Catholic fraternal organization holds its 136th annual Supreme Convention in Baltimore.

The Knights were founded in 1882 in Hartford, Conn., by Father Michael J. McGivney. Five years earlier, on Dec. 22, 1877, he was among the first men ordained to the priesthood by then-Archbishop James Gibbons of Baltimore at what is now the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Father McGivney had studied at St. Mary's Seminary, then located a 10-minute walk west of the basilica, and was one of three men from the Diocese of Hartford ordained by Archbishop Gibbons. It was 25 years before the first Ford Model T rolled off an assembly line, and The Catholic Mirror of Dec. 29, 1877, noted that "Only a few of the parents were enabled to gaze on this scene, for most of the students have their homes far away, and their parents were, in consequence, deprived of the happy spectacle."

Twenty years later, Baltimore Council No. 205 was instituted Feb. 21, 1897, as the first in Maryland. It remains in existence, as the Shehan Council, headquartered on Harford Road in Hamilton.

This will be the third Supreme Convention to be held in Baltimore.

In August 1965, The Catholic Review reported that more than "2,000 delegates from 50 states, Canada, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Panama, and the Phillipines" attended the 83rd annual Supreme Convention, the first in Baltimore.

More than 1,700 attended the States Dinner at the Baltimore Civic Center, where the head table included Mayor Theodore McKeldin, eight bishops and Cardinal Lawrence Shehan, who said that the Knights "must be in the forefront of activities beneficial to the church and the nation."

He “challenged” them to be involved in activities such as “getting personally involved in fighting poverty ... joining with other community groups to relieve racial tension,” and lauded them “in your attempt to dry up the sources of pornography.”

The Supreme Convention returned in 1989, when the Archdiocese of Baltimore was marking its bicentennial. Approximately 2,500 Knights gathered at the Baltimore Convention Center, where they heard from then-Archbishop William Keeler and Vice President Dan Quayle.

“The Knights,” the Review reported, “ended the convention with a seven-part pro-life resolution which commits the members to fighting for a human life amendment to the U.S. Constitution. ... ”

Since 2005, Archbishop William E. Lori has served as the Knights’ Supreme Chaplain. They number more than 27,000 in the state of Maryland alone.