

Oh, feathers

Monday 7 September 2009 — Phoenix, Arizona — Labor Day

Did you happen to notice in a recent edition of *The Anchor* a full-color photograph of three bishops? “Above the fold” on the front page (as we say in the newspaper business) and wearing a tri-cornered hat was **Bishop George W. Coleman**. The caption explained that the hats identified the three bishops as members of the Massachusetts delegation attending the 127th Supreme Convention of the Knights of Columbus. The convention was held in Phoenix, Ariz. I hear that the temperature reached 115 degrees in Phoenix that week. What attracted more than 80 bishops and archbishops and eight cardinals (including **Sean Cardinal O’Malley**) to the sweltering southwestern desert in August? The answer is the 1.78 million members of the Knights of Columbus, all of whom are pledged to stand in solidarity with bishops and priests. Conversely, bishops and priests stand in solidarity with the Knights.

Over the past 10 years, the Knights have donated more than \$1.3 billion to charity. Just last year, during the worst of the recession, Knights’ charitable giving rose to more than \$150 million. But money isn’t everything. While so many people complain about being too busy to get involved, the Knights’ volunteer service increased to almost 69 million hours in the 2008 fraternal year alone. In the past decade, that adds up to nearly 626 million volunteer hours (valued at \$11 billion.)

The bishops were in Phoenix to encourage the members of the largest lay Catholic organization in the world. Even the desert heat couldn’t deter them from their mission.

At the Supreme Convention, the Order honored the best of the best out of more than 14,000 councils worldwide. A Minnesota council won the Church Activities Award for restoring a dilapidated church. The Council Activities Award went to a council in Virginia for providing members with support (including business networking and career counseling) during times of hardship, unemployment or catastrophic family health issues. The Community Activities Award

went to a council here in Massachusetts — The **Richard Cardinal Cushing** Council, No. 6267, in Pembroke. This council, working with other councils, businesses, and organizations, sponsored a Prom Night for 75 special needs youth and young adults.

The idea of the special-needs prom came from then **Grand Knight Kevin McKenna**. The concept was to give the

The Ship’s Log Reflections of a Parish Priest

By **Father Tim Goldrick**



young people the opportunity to experience the fun and excitement of a prom and to help teach the community about living with disabilities. The night of the prom, while the young people danced, parents adjourned to another room to, over a meal of pasta, share personal experiences and helpful advice. As a result of the program, the Knights in Pembroke earned the most prestigious Community Service Award that can be presented to any Knights of Columbus Council in the world.

The men of St. Nicholas Parish are preparing to apply to Supreme Headquarters in New Haven, Conn., for a council

charter. The Knights of Columbus was founded in New Haven by **Father Michael J. McGivney** in 1882. It is dedicated to the principles of charity, unity, and fraternity. We already have several new members in different stages of initiation. In order to apply for a charter, we need 30 men. We’re almost there.

Initiation into the Order consists of three steps called “degrees,” each marked with solemn ceremony. When a new council is in formation, a team is sent by the State Council to formally conduct the initial meetings and to receive men applying for membership. I was pleasantly surprised to welcome Massachusetts **State Deputy Bill Donovan** to our very first meeting. At this point, we have now held two ceremonies for first degree membership and one ceremony for second degree membership. Our candidates seeking full membership in the third degree will join with others at a centralized location to complete their initiation into the Order. Then it’s on to the election of our own council officers. Council officers must be Knights in the third level of membership.

Although one does have to be a Knight to attend a business meeting, there is really nothing secret about the Order. The ceremonies of first, second, and third degrees are held in “executive session.” Participants are asked not to divulge the particulars simply because that would spoil it for incoming members.

Not all Knights carry swords and wear *chapeaux* adorned with feathers. This is the formal uniform of the fourth degree. The fourth degree is a distinct organization, primarily ceremonial and patriotic. There are other specialized groups under the umbrella of the Knights of Columbus. These include schoolboy councils (Squires), college and university councils, military councils, Eastern Rite councils, Spanish-speaking councils, etc.

This is the Year for Priests. I am a priest. This priest gladly accepts all the help he can get. If necessary, I will even wear a tri-cornered hat. I can’t do feathers, though. I’m allergic.

Father Goldrick is pastor of St. Nicholas of Myra Parish in North Dighton.



KNIGHT LIGHTS — Supreme Knight Carl Anderson (center) presents the International Community Service Award to Kevin McKenna for the Pembroke Council’s Special Needs Prom Program. From left: Mass. State Deputy Bill and Annmarie Donovan, Anderson, Hope (with five-week-old Liam) McKenna and Mass. District Deputy Kevin McKenna. (Photo by Dick Guerreiro)