

FATHER MICHAEL MCGIVNEY

"It was a face of wonderful repose. There was nothing harsh in that countenance although there was everything that was strong."

— Father Gordian Daley

Born in Waterbury to Irish immigrant parents on August 12, 1852, Father Michael Joseph McGivney worked at Holmes, Booth & Haydens before embarking on the path to the priesthood. After earning his theological degree at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore on December 27, 1877, he was assigned to Father P.A. Murphy of St. Mary's Church in New Haven. A few days later he said his first Mass at the Immaculate Conception Church in Waterbury.

Known as an energetic and zealous priest, he was active in promoting parochial total abstinence societies and participated in the Red Knights, a social organization whose roots traced back to an Irish military unit during the Civil War. Through his work, Father McGivney learned the importance of creating societies to further the best efforts of men and dedicated his life to the establishment of an acceptable Catholic fraternal order that would compete with the secret societies not open to members of his religion.

The fruits of his labor was the Knights of Columbus, chartered in Connecticut on March 29, 1882. This semi-secret fraternal insurance society was open to practicing Catholics not associated with the liquor traffic. The Order's principles then were "Unity" and "Charity". "Fraternity" and "Patriotism" were added later. The Knights quickly earned the Bishop's approval and its popularity spread throughout the state. A papal delegate's acceptance launched the organization nationally and it has grown to over a million and a half members with 9,000 councils in 12 countries. While providing greater financial security, the organization strengthened self-esteem and fortified Catholics in their faith.

Father McGivney was the Knights' national chaplain and member of the supreme council until his death August 14, 1890, in Thomaston where he had served as pastor of St. Thomas Church for the last six years of his life.

The bronze statue of him, located at the end of Grand Street in Waterbury, was dedicated on March 13, 1957. In 1982, his remains were moved from St. Joseph's Cemetery in Waterbury to St. Mary's Church in New Haven where he had founded the Order. Father McGivney's sarcophagus there has become a shrine for pilgrimaging Knights.

