



Knights of Columbus hold global convention in Philadelphia

By Lou Baldwin

Approximately 2,000 members of the Knights of Columbus from around the country and abroad gathered Aug. 4 at the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia to open the Catholic fraternal organization's 133rd Supreme Convention.

The theme for the three-day convention was "Endowed by Their Creator with Life and Liberty," paraphrasing the famous words penned by Thomas Jefferson in the same city 239 years ago.

The choice of words also played into a theme that echoed over the course of the convention — a new initiative of the Knights to raise awareness and funds for persecuted Christians in the Middle East.

The convention opened with due pomp and circumstance, including a procession by more than a hundred prelates — 11 cardinals, 98 archbishops and bishops and another hundred or so priests who concelebrated Mass with Archbishop Charles J. Chaput.

Because Philadelphia's Cathedral Basilica of SS. Peter and Paul would not be large enough for the congregation the Knights did the next best thing: the backdrop behind the altar in the convention hall depicted the façade of the cathedral, incorporating in its center an image of the Holy Family.

That touch was also appropriate because "family" could be called a secondary theme of the convention.

Archbishop Chaput in his homily used the opportunity to promote the upcoming World Meeting of Families in that same convention center on Sept. 22-25, followed by the visit



Some of the more than 100 priests and more than a hundred bishops exit the exhibition hall after Mass at the Pennsylvania Convention Center Aug. 4. (Knights of Columbus)

of Pope Francis Sept. 26-27.

"It's a joy to welcome you here to Philadelphia for this first chapter in the World Meeting of Families," he quipped.

After the Mass Archbishop Chaput inaugurated this year's Holy Family Prayer Program with the distribution of framed images of the Holy Family, which the Knights' state deputies will take home to their jurisdictions to be used at prayer liturgies.

The program was begun in 1979, he explained, and since that time 17 million people have participated in more than 147,000 prayer services.

The framed images, which were blessed by Pope Francis, depict the same image as was on the altar backdrop. They are copies of a 17th century etching by Giovanni Batista based on a 16th century painting.

While most lay convention-goers were clearly senior members of their local branches of the Knights with many accompanied by their spouse, there were also a fair number of younger members that gave credence to the Knights as a family organization.

For example, Major Peter Thayer, in the dress uniform of an Army paratrooper from Fort Bragg, attended with his wife Melinda and six beautiful children aged 10 to 18 months — Kathryn, Reese, Emily, Evelyn, Kyra and Kilian, the youngest.

Thayer was invited to the convention to serve in an honor guard, he explained. As to why he is a Knight of Columbus, "I initially joined for the insurance," he said, "but the fraternity really drew me in and I've been involved ever since."

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Philadelphia's Ukrainian archbishop touts the Knights

It is a general custom at the annual Supreme Convention of the Knights of Columbus that the ordinary of the diocese or archdiocese where the convention is held celebrates the opening Mass.

This year in Philadelphia for the Aug. 4-6 convention the Knights got a twofer, because Philadelphia happens to have two sitting Catholic Archbishops.

Archbishop Charles Chaput of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia celebrated the opening Mass Aug. 4 at the Pennsylvania Convention Center.

The next day Archbishop Stefan Soroka, of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia and the Metropolitan Archbishop for Ukrainian Catholics in the United States, celebrated the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom in the same venue.

For those unfamiliar with the Ukrainian Catholic Church, Archbishop Soroka explained they are "one of 23 Eastern Catholic Churches in union with the See of Peter, of which 18 serve their faithful in the United States."

In his homily Archbishop Soroka related how some years ago when he was a parish priest he helped organize a K of C council in the parish. Men who had never been active in parish programs and appeared shy and hesitant nevertheless joined the council, and were transformed into energetic leaders both in the parish and the community.

"They became so bold, so confident, that they were not hesitant to even advise me as to what I should be doing," he said. "Their natures changed. The power of fraternal prayer and works of charity in

an atmosphere with a patriotic love for God, Church and country transformed these men and their families."

Very clearly Archbishop Soroka endorses the Knights of Columbus. He could even write their recruitment brochures.

Transit plans during papal visit include road closures

Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter and other officials described road closures, traffic restrictions and other transportation details Aug. 5 for the visit of Pope Francis to the city during the weekend of Sept. 26-27, which will conclude the World Meeting of Families Sept. 22-25.

An area described as a "traffic box" will be designated in center city from 6 p.m. Friday, Sept. 25 to prepare for the projected 1.5 million people expected to attend the papal Mass on the 27th on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway near the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

During that weekend cars will be allowed to travel within the traffic box and leave it but will not be allowed back into the perimeter. The restrictions include personal vehicles and any sort of bus — including motor coaches, school buses, mini buses, RVs and passenger vans with a capacity of eight to 14 people.

Pedestrians and cyclists, however, will face no restrictions leaving and re-entering the traffic box.

Various city and state officials also presented information on how visitors would get to that stage on the last weekend of September.

Pennsylvania Department of Transportation Secretary Leslie Richards said several area highways — key arteries into the city from southeastern Pennsylvania — would close effective 10 p.m. Friday, Sept. 25.

They include: I-76 East (the Schuylkill Expressway), from I-476 (the Blue Route) to

I-95; I-76 West from I-95 to U.S. Route 1 (the Roosevelt Extension); I-676 (Vine Street Expressway) in both directions from I-76 to I-95; Route 1 (City Avenue) from Route 30 (Lancaster Avenue) to Belmont Avenue.

Joe Casey, general manager of SEPTA, said the regional transportation agency intends to more than double its normal train passenger capacity Regional Rail lines, up to 350,000 for the weekend.

Of all the travel options to the weekend's events, bus transportation appeared the most effective, a point underscored by an analysis of projected visitors.

An early estimate last spring projected some 5,000 buses would carry passengers into the city. Assuming 60 passengers per bus, 300,000 could be expected to use that means of travel, especially on Sunday for the papal Mass on the parkway.

Adding another 175,000 people per day from the Regional Rail trains brings the total to 475,000.

Cars could bring in thousands more people, but major highway closures would leave local roads as drivers' only options. And once all those drivers arrive they would face the challenge of parking. Buses will have priority ahead of cars, according to PennDot's Richards. That means drivers would have to seek parking farther from the sites of events, requiring a longer walk into center city.

The dilemma for cars makes transportation by bus, because of its high passenger capacity, the ideal way to get into the city that weekend.

"It is the most effective and efficient way to travel," said Donna Crilley Farrell, executive director for the World Meeting of Families.

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