

# INTRODUCTION

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In founding the Knights of Columbus, Venerable Father Michael J. McGivney sought to respond to the crisis in family life affecting Catholics in 19th-century America. As a young man he witnessed firsthand the challenges his widowed mother faced with seven children at home. Later, as a priest, he confronted on a daily basis the problems affecting the families of his parish community due to poverty, violence, alcoholism, immigration, anti-Catholic prejudice and discrimination.

Father McGivney's vision for family life was not only that each family might find financial and material aid. He understood that holiness is the calling of all baptized Christians. And considering that two brothers followed him into the priesthood, we can understand how truly important the sanctuary of the home was to the McGivney family.

His family was a living example of what the Second Vatican Council later taught: Each man, woman and child is called to holiness through proclaiming the Gospel and communicating the divine gift of love in the activities of their daily lives.

When Christian families respond in this way to the design of the Creator, they become a "domestic church" that, as Pope Paul VI explained, mirrors "the various aspects of the entire Church."<sup>1</sup>

The modern family recently has been a topic of particular focus for the Church, with the two-year Synod on the Family and the post-synodal exhortation by Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (*The Joy of Love*). During this time, the Knights of Columbus has been involved in supporting families in their Christian vocation through our new Building the Domestic Church While Strengthening Our Parish initiative. This initiative, which includes The Family Fully Alive program, is designed to help families become more centered on their task of serving God, neighbor and parish.

Since the Second Vatican Council, and especially during the pontificate of St. John Paul II, it has become clear that the family is "the way of the Church."<sup>2</sup> In one sense, this obviously means that the family is the object of the Church's evangelization efforts.

But the Christian family too has its own indispensable mission. As St. John Paul II wrote in *Familiaris Consortio*, “The family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love.”<sup>3</sup> This mission is at the heart of the “community of life and love”<sup>4</sup> that begins with the married couple in the sacrament of matrimony.

To lead us in that mission we are fortunate to have a guidebook — Pope Francis’ exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* — to help us build the Catholic family as a domestic church. In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis describes the Church as “a family of families.”<sup>5</sup> He reminds us to view the family as the sanctuary of life and love that is at the heart of the domestic church.<sup>6</sup> Our Knights’ families can take special guidance from Pope Francis as he calls us to a new “family apostolate” based upon “joy-filled witness as domestic churches.”<sup>7</sup> Our parish-based councils also have a role in connecting men and their families with the parish.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us, “Conjugal love involves a totality, in which all the elements of the person enter. ... It aims at a deeply personal unity, a unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, sacramental marriage involves not just an agreement between the spouses but a radical transformation of the spouses.

As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in *Deus Caritas Est*, “Marriage based on an exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God’s way of loving becomes the measure of human love.”<sup>9</sup>

In this way, the witness of husband and wife within the daily life of the family can guard, reveal and communicate love as they make their own the gifts of marriage — unity, indissolubility, faithfulness and openness to new life.

A Vatican document on the role and mission of the family states, “The family needs to be rediscovered as the essential agent in the work of evangelization.”<sup>10</sup> It also points to the necessity to better understand the “missionary dimension of the family as a domestic church.”<sup>11</sup>

These observations echo those of St. John Paul II, who said, during a meeting with the Latin American bishops in 1979, that “in the future, evangelization will depend largely on the domestic church.”<sup>12</sup>

Clearly, the role of the family in the work of evangelization is not primarily a matter of programs, projects or strategies. These all have their place, but they are secondary. Their place is to be at the service of what is essential — the love between a husband and wife that, sanctified through the love of Christ, radiates to each member of their family.

The family as domestic church is a place of encounter with Christ within the community of a particular Christian family — a place where each member of the family has an important role.

The “mission” of the family in the task of evangelization is to be what it is called to be — that is, to live its daily life as a Christian family. As St. John Paul II said so often, “Families, become what you are!”<sup>13</sup>

The family’s mission to “guard, reveal and communicate love”— like the parish community — does not exist in an ideal place. The truth and beauty of the family must be communicated to every Christian family, even those that are fragile, wounded or broken. These families too may read the words of St. Paul with confidence: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom 8:35). And they may find in that confidence a path of hope and healing.

During his visit to the Philippines, Pope Francis cited the need for “holy and loving families to protect the beauty and truth of the family in God’s plan and to be an example for other families.”<sup>14</sup> Our Building the Domestic Church initiative and The Family Fully Alive monthly devotions are concrete ways that Knights of Columbus, in solidarity with Pope Francis, can offer holy and loving families for the Church’s mission of evangelization in our time.



*Supreme Knight Carl Anderson*