

State Deputy Report to the 117th Knights of Columbus State Convention

Worthy State Chaplain, Supreme Director, State Officers, Directors, District Deputies, Past State Deputies, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My wife Lisa and I, along with the members of Sioux Falls St Lambert Council 13302, want to welcome you to our 117th South Dakota Knights of Columbus State Convention. We return this year to the birthplace of the Knights of Columbus in South Dakota- the first council chartered in the state was Council 815 Marquette in October of 1903, the council that still serves St Joseph Cathedral Parish today. This council has since created 7 other councils in Sioux Falls, and many others in the region. One of those 7 councils is our host council for this weekend, Council 13302 which serves the St Lambert Parish in eastern Sioux Falls. This council was chartered in 2003 with its first Grand Knight being Sir Knight David McCoy, who still serves the council. I want to Thank Convention Chairman Dan Johnson, current Grand Knight Robert Nelson, and their entire committee for all the preparations and tireless efforts to make this convention a success. Thank You Brothers and to your wives!

This fraternal year began similar to how the last one ended- our state, along with the rest of the world, was in the midst of a pandemic that brought sickness, death, and great anxiety brought on by the unknown. The seemingly endless lockdowns, changes in mandates, and separation from our places of worship may have slowed the spread for a while, but the separation also increased depression, suicides, and slowed the learning of our students. There were many heartbreaking stories of family members dying alone because loved ones were not allowed to visit them in the nursing homes. In South Dakota, we now appear to be emerging from the pandemic with many in our state either receiving the vaccination or building immunity to the virus, and there is renewed hope that we soon can return to somewhat normalcy. But we cannot forget our family members and Brother Knights that will be forever affected by this pandemic; and while we can again attend Mass in our parishes across the state, we must remember our Brother Knights and fellow Catholics in other states and around the world that are not as fortunate, and in some cases Priests arrested for Celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Let us continue to pray for them, and pray for an end to this terrible virus.

The pandemic has also had a similar detrimental effect on the Knights of Columbus in South Dakota. Many councils were not allowed to hold their normal yearly activities and assisting their parishes. Activities held to raise funds for charity were cancelled- this not only affected their charitable giving, but also kept them from spending time in fraternity. Many councils went dormant, struggling to create new ways to serve their parish and community, especially during times of lockdown, or finding it difficult to embrace technology to continue communication with council members. This shutdown of councils will have a lasting effect long after this fraternal year is over.

But as dark and challenging the last year has been, I believe the Knights in South Dakota have a bright future ahead. When parishes began opening up, many councils came up with creative ways to serve their parish and the needy. I want to share with you just a couple examples:

- When it became safe to hold a breakfast last fall, Grand Knight James Schaefer and council 8844 worked out a plan to have both drive-up service as well as distanced dine in options. A drive-up lane was created and the servers outside communicated to the kitchen when to deliver more meals. Dine-in patrons were served their meal safely and with a smile. Other councils followed suit to offer their fellow parishioners and members of the community an opportunity to have some social interaction

and still stay safe. I want to thank Council 8844 Rapid City Blessed Sacrament, and all other councils, that used their creativity and continued to serve their community.

- Many councils found ways to continue to raise funds for those with intellectual disabilities, but two councils really took it to the next level. Tootsie Roll Chairman Elton Rokusek of Council 4002 didn't let the pandemic stop him from his goal. He not only received donations for all the council's initial Tootsie Roll allotment but also requested additional cases and went to other businesses and had great success. Grand Knight DJ DeJager and Council 8025 also went above and beyond their impressive numbers from last year. They increased their locations and setup their tables so donors could safely give their donation and also receive their Tootsie Rolls. I want to thank these two Brother Knights for their perseverance to significantly increase their funds given to Intellectual Disabilities.

It has also been a very challenging year with membership growth. As I write this, we have 59 of our 82 active councils that have not added a new member this fraternal year. But we are also seeing signs of optimism in this area recently. The pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Sioux Falls, Fr Kristopher Cowles, is encouraging his parishioners to start a council in the parish. This effort is in its early stages, and I ask the future State Officers and District Deputies in the Sioux Falls area to continue to support this effort so that all parishes in Sioux Falls will have a Knights of Columbus council. One new council that is forming is in St John the Baptist Parish in Rosholt. On March 21st, an exemplification was held in the parish, where we saw 18 new Knights join and participate in the exemplification. We have two members of this new council joining us this weekend at the convention so please give them a warm welcome if you see them. The efforts to start this new council came from one of our dedicated Field Agents, Brother Philip Carlson. Philip has been working behind the scenes to develop interest among the parishioners, and to help them understand the benefits the Knights of Columbus can offer their families. Our District Deputy, Scott Schroeder is now working with the new members to elect their first slate of officers and to begin serving their parish. I want to thank Scott for his guidance during these first months for the new council, and especially want to thank Phil for inviting these new Brothers to join us. The momentum is continuing to grow- this past weekend, 3 councils held exemplifications- 2 new Knights joined Council 6605 Sioux Falls St Therese on Saturday, 13 new Knights joined Council 9809 in Armour and 8 new Knights joined Council 1536 in Yankton on Sunday for a total of 23 new members in two days! Brothers, I believe it is possible for each and every council in the state to invite at least one new member to join between now and June 30, and many councils have the capability to invite more than one. I want each Grand Knight to accept this challenge. If we truly believe that being a member of the Knights of Columbus has made us a better Catholic, a better husband, a better father, a better friend, then should we not want this for every man and family in our parish? Brothers, we should desire this for every man in our parish, and even in our community. Sometimes, an invitation from a Knight is all it takes for a man and his family to join us- sometimes, it takes our invitation and then trust in the Holy Spirit to guide and nurture the soul before he becomes a member. But it always starts with an invitation from one of us, Brothers. As Deacon Thane Barnier said, "men are hungry and want to serve- they are like fertile soil". Brother Knights, let's water that fertile soil so that more life can grow!

I want to also mention a couple changes that, because of the pandemic, are still fairly new to most councils. The first is the Faith in Action programs. The Faith in Action program was released just 2 years ago, and combined activities from the 'Surge with Service' and 'Building the Domestic Church' initiatives. All Knights of Columbus activities can now be classified in 4 categories- Faith, Family, Community, and Life. There are many great suggested programs, such as Coats for Kids, Wheelchair mission, Into the Breach, Spiritual Reflection, Food for Families, support of Special Olympics, and

Ultrasound Initiative. Most of these programs are already familiar to councils, however, many councils have yet to fully embrace this new Faith in Action model. I call on each council to appoint a council Program Director, and Directors for the Faith, Family, Community and Life programs, so that these directors can be trained in their particular areas and lead their councils to provide these programs to their councils and parishes. Brothers, if your council has strong Faith in Action programs and you have your parish participating, your membership growth efforts will take care of themselves. Our State Program Director, Jay Cudzilo, and his team of directors will have training during this convention, and are also ready to travel to your council to provide assistance. Every council should take full advantage of this assistance.

The second major change is the Exemplification of Charity, Unity, and Fraternity. This new exemplification was developed through the efforts of the Ceremonials Committee of the Supreme Council Board of Directors, of which our own Supreme Director, Paul Lambert, served as a member. It allows a new Knight to learn all three lessons on the first three principles of our Order in one exemplification that is about thirty minutes in length. Councils are then asked to instruct these new Knights more fully in these principles as they grow through the years being a Knight of Columbus. Another significant change with this new format is that families are now encouraged to view this exemplification and share in these important lessons and principles of our order. The first presentation of this new exemplification was held in Madison in February of 2020, and has been well-received at many councils since. During the pandemic, the Supreme office made this new exemplification available on demand via video, so that councils could invite new members to join and still remain safe. I call on all councils to familiarize themselves with this new exemplification, create their own teams, and present it to new members as often as possible.

Today we live in a time of great concern in our Church. Our State Program Director, Jay Cudzilo, has been sharing with us various statistics at our organizational meetings- Mass attendance is down, baptisms have decreased, and a high percentage of our young adults choose to leave the Church shortly after graduation. A recent survey revealed that only about a third of Catholics believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Studies have also shown that members of society disagree with the teachings of the Catholic Faith, yet when asked to state the disagreements, these participants listed items that are not part of Catholic teaching, and many contrary to actual beliefs. If there was ever a time for missionary discipleship, it is now. I have always believed that the Knights of Columbus could be summed up in 5 words- Our Catholic Faith in Action. But as I prepared for my time of State Deputy, the Holy Spirit revealed to me that we as Knights need to be filled with zeal to spread the Good News - to Be His Voice. You will recall from Scripture, that discipleship work was not a suggestion from Jesus- it was a command not just to his apostles or to his ministerial priesthood, but to all of us as kingdom priests that we are. The writings of the Second Vatican Council reinforce this, quote "As Christ was sent by the Father, so in his turn he sent the apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit. They were sent to preach the Gospel to every creature, proclaiming that we had been set free from the power of Satan and from death by the death and resurrection of God's Son, and brought into the kingdom of the Father. They were sent also to bring into effect this saving work that they proclaimed, by means of the sacrifice and sacraments that are the pivot of the whole life of the liturgy." Brother Knights, we must take up this call, this command, to go out into the Breach. We cannot sit at home in our comfort, but to Go Out Into the Deep, for Pope Benedict XVI reminded us 'You were not made for comfort, you were made for greatness'. Yes, greatness to become a saint. We must remove the fear from our hearts and all our trust must be placed in the one we can trust- the Author of Mercy- Jesus I Trust In You! This life of

ours is not about us, as St Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans: “None of us lives as his own master and none of us dies as his own master. While we live we are responsible to the Lord, and when we die we die as his servants. Both in life and in death we are the Lord’s. That is why Christ died and came to life again, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.” Brother Knights, let us all continue to put our Faith in Action, but let us also spread Christ’s message to all we meet.

I believe another major crisis of our time is that of caring and preserving life at all stages, especially protecting the lives of the most vulnerable- the unborn children. Our Founding Fathers listed Life first when they stated the inalienable rights in the Declaration of Independence, and they did this for a reason, because if you don’t have a right to life, you have no liberty nor can you pursue happiness. When the Framers of the Constitution created the Bill of Rights, Life was not included because if it is an inalienable right, it was unthinkable to consider that a free society would ever support the taking of innocent life. Yet fast forward to today, where we in the United States have murdered over 60 million babies since 1973, and we also have states with laws in place to permit assisted suicide. When we as a society cheapen life at the beginning and end of life, why are we surprised when mass shootings and other horrible acts of violence happen? The latest administration in its first few months in office is doing all it can to increase abortion on demand not only in our country but sending taxpayer funds to other countries to do the same. During a senate confirmation hearing, the current vice president called a judicial nominee an extremist because he was a Knight of Columbus. Why? She said it was because of what our Past Supreme Knight Carl Anderson spoke about the Knights of Columbus being unapologetically Pro-Life. Brother Knights, if being Pro-Life makes us extremists, then we must say ‘guilty as charged’. But I believe the abortion industry and its supporters are the real extremists and they must be stopped. If we as a society want to survive then this is a battle we must fight and we must be victorious! We as Knights of Columbus have been some of the leaders in this fight, but we must continue to do more. We must increase our efforts and provide a public witness for Life and to pray daily for the end of the senseless killing. We must continue to partner with organizations such as Liferunners and pregnancy centers across the state such as Black Hills Pregnancy Center, Alphacenter, Option One, and ZoeCare just to name a few. To date, councils in South Dakota have donated over \$115 thousand dollars since 2010, which the Supreme council matched with funds from the Culture of Life fund- and these funds were used to donate and install 6 ultrasound machines across the state. The Ultrasound Initiative is one of the most successful programs in Knights of Columbus history when you measure it by its results- the thousands of lives saved by each and every machine. I would like to Thank PSD Maynard Konechne for chairing the first campaign and the State Deputy at the time, Terry Andersen for beginning the Ultrasound Initiative efforts in our state. Brother Knights, if we increase these efforts, I believe we can see an end to abortion in our state by finally closing the last abortion facility that is here in Sioux Falls, and win this battle for Life!

One thing we can never forget is the love and compassion our founder Blessed Michael McGivney, had for his parishioners. From its inception, the new organization that they decided to call the Knights of Columbus in 1882, had as one of its main purposes- that of the care of the widow and orphan of a departed Brother. The insurance team of Field Agents continue this mission still today- Brother Knight helping Brother Knight to protect his family and provide for them should he leave them too soon. Our General Agent Jon Beebe and his field agents are truly some of the best in the agency, and I encourage every Brother Knight to give them the opportunity to explain the benefits that you can provide your family. Even during the pandemic, Jon and his team quickly developed and implemented new technology to stay connected to the brothers and families they served. I want to Thank all of our Field Agents for all your tireless dedication to care for your Brother Knights.

I want to also recognize our Worthy Supreme Director, Paul Lambert of Madison. Brother Paul has been serving on the Board of Supreme Directors since 2011, after serving with distinction as State Deputy for the years 2003-2005, and afterward as District Master and Vice Supreme Master for the 4th Degree. He also spent hundreds of hours donating his time building the ten cabins at Broomtree Retreat Center. Paul and his wife Julie have traveled thousands of miles and volunteered countless hours while serving as Supreme Director, and I'm sure they would admit that it has been worth every minute. Paul and Julie have been great mentors for Lisa and I, and I'm sure other State Deputies before me- there to make sure we knew what to expect when traveling to State Deputy meetings, and always available to give sound advice. I'm not sure what Paul would say that his greatest achievement or memory has been since serving on the Board, but I hope all Knights are appreciative of his recent work on the Ceremonials Committee that formulated the new Exemplification of Charity, Unity, and Fraternity. Paul will be retiring from the Board of Directors this year, and we are very happy to have him here at our convention this year as our Supreme Representative. Worthy Supreme Director Paul, on behalf of all the Knights of Columbus in South Dakota, I want to express our deep appreciation for your years of service to the Order!

This year draws to a close my tenure as State Deputy. I want all Knights in South Dakota to know that it was my honor to serve you, my Brother Knights, especially during these challenging times of the pandemic. Even though I was not able to travel as I'd hoped for because of the lockdowns, I was able to still to make it to some of your parishes and communities and meet many of you during activities you held and you have always been in my prayers. I want to thank the entire state team, especially my fellow state officers, for all their dedication and efforts toward serving our Brother Knights across the state. Finally, I want to especially thank my wife Lisa for her guidance and assistance. She joked about making a cardboard cutout when I first became State Deputy because she didn't think I would ever be home. It started out that way until the pandemic, then I think she wished she could get me out of the house! We both have cherished this time and so happy to be together through this journey of leading the greatest jurisdiction in the Order, the South Dakota Knights of Columbus. Jesus, I Trust in You!

Vivat Jesus,
Gerald Dvorak, State Deputy