

HOLY TRINITY CATHOLIC CHURCH

OFFICE OF THE PASTOR

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Dear Parishioners,

I write to alert you to an unfortunate situation which I have done my best to avoid, but to no avail. As you are aware, each year Norfolk is home to the annual Saint Patrick's Day Parade. The local Knights of Columbus Council #3548 have been the sponsors and originators of the parade since 1967. As a Catholic men's fraternal organization, the Knights of Columbus sought to bring a celebration in honor of one of our Church's greatest Saints to the people of Norfolk. Each year, the Knights pay special honor to one particular "Grand Marshall" who is given the title, is honored at an annual Emerald Ball, and is then given the charge of leading the parade.

It had been the custom to honor a local resident or community member with that title for a number of years. Last winter, I wrote to the Knights of Columbus at the request of the Bishop's Vicar for the East, advising them that it would be best if we allowed the parade to remain a non-political event. I asked them not to honor *any* political candidate, office holder, or former office holder above the city level, as politicians at those levels often make decisions about issues which Catholics hold as non-negotiable to our Catholic faith. It was our strong urging that they not honor any political persons, but that if they did, they should not honor anyone who stands in opposition to the teaching of the Church on issues of life, marriage, or religious liberty. I wrote that letter at the request of our own Bishop to be sure that the Knights understood this is an important part of distinguishing our Catholic identity in public forums and awards.

After receiving the letter in the winter of 2014, two members of the Knights of Columbus parade committee met with me because they had already chosen a Grand Marshall last year who did, in fact, stand publicly against the teaching of the Church and who had, in fact, campaigned specifically on positions against the Church. I met with the committee members and after extensive conversation, they agreed to name a new Grand Marshall for last year's parade. They chose an excellent second option, the Chief of the Norfolk Police, and I was relieved to be able to participate in the Emerald Ball and Parade. In that meeting they specifically agreed to avoid political persons going forward as it could send a very mixed message for a Catholic organization to honor someone who stands in opposition to the Church's teachings. They gave me their word they would not do this again.

I was saddened and shocked to learn only two weeks ago that the Knights of Columbus had, again, decided to give the honor of Grand Marshall to a politician. Going against their word to me last year, this year they decided to honor Governor Terry McAuliffe. Governor McAuliffe stands contrary to the Catholic Church in not one but *many* of the most essential teachings of the Church in the political arena. He himself promised to be a "brick wall" against restrictions on abortion, has taken away commonsense protections for women in abortion facilities and lowered safety standards, and consistently takes money from pro-abortion lobbying groups. Further, he not only favors the re-definition of marriage, he himself performed a gay "marriage" as soon as a court overturned the law of the Commonwealth. Marriage and Life are two of the foundational efforts of the Knights of Columbus as a national organization, so it is dumbfounding how the Knights could then decide to honor the Governor.



Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end. Amen.

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The council kept the decision from me until just a few weeks ago, when I was informed via a bulk mailing. At that point, I followed the advice and counsel of the Office of the Bishop. He asked that I refer the matter to the State Council of the Knights of Columbus and to also advise the National Office. I was told immediately by the State Deputy that the Knights would name another Grand Marshall. Ten days later, the State Deputy informed me that the Knights had reversed their decision and have decided to leave Governor McAuliffe as the Grand Marshall of the parade.

Bishop DiLorenzo believes strongly in the Catholic principle of subsidiarity – that decisions in the Church should be made at the lowest level possible. I agree with him that this decision should be handled internally within the Knights of Columbus as an organization. While it is a sad and unfortunate thing that the Knights would decide to allow this to continue against our request, I have to consider that I have done my part as the pastor to teach the Truth of the Church and allow them to operate in freedom. It is the clear teaching of the Bishops of the United States in *Catholics in Political Life* that, “the Catholic community and Catholic institutions should **not honor** those who act in defiance of our fundamental moral principles. They should not be given awards, honors, or platforms which would suggest support for their actions” (emphasis in original text). There is a difference between respecting the Office of Governor and allowing the Governor to march in the parade and honoring the Governor by naming him the Grand Marshall and official host of the parade. The Knights have chosen to act on their own, against the clear advice and teaching of the Church.

As a result of their decision, the parish will not support or participate in the parade. I will not attend the Emerald Ball or Parade. Sadly, this also unnecessarily severs the relationship between Council #3548 and Holy Trinity parish.

Again, it is unfortunate that the Knights have decided to make something that should be a community event into something that is political. I am aware that some members of the Council disagreed with this decision, and that there are some who had nothing to do with the decision. I am grateful to those men for the support of what is right, and to Knights who are active members of the parish who stand for the truth. In a time where things of so much more importance exist, I am sad that this much energy has been devoted to something of this nature. Please pray for unity in the Church.

Faithfully in Christ,



Father Dan Beeman
Pastor

+The Third Sunday of Lent