

Knightline Article

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How Michigan Is Reversing the Trend and Finding Committed, Catholic Men

Michigan Knights are growing thanks to these helpful recruiting strategies

Michigan has had a steady decline in membership for 10 years. It's a decline that matches the sharply decreasing numbers of Catholics in Michigan parishes. The state council had to do something fast if it was going to ensure the future of the Knights — and the Church — in the state.

The state has more than 430 councils. State Deputy William Chasse said the state's leadership realized that growth would depend on all of them working together.

To achieve this, state officers created the "Fresh Start" program that rolled out July 1, 2018. At the program's center is the phrase "council sustainability." The state officers chose this term as a way to avoid talking about "membership" or "membership numbers." "[We need] to always be here to help our community as they count on the Knights of Columbus," Chasse said. "This sustainability is a key to our renewed success — to support our priests, our parishes and our communities." Another key to success was creating membership and retention teams. The state held training sessions for these teams, who were taught to think of membership as a lifelong process. "Retention starts with having a Form 100 signed and continues until we present the family with a Bible after the member passes away," Chasse said.

As part of the Fresh Start Program, council retention teams were encouraged to keep in touch with fallen away members. They hoped this regular contact would help inactive Knights remember the joy of being involved and get re-engaged. Online membership was also promoted as a way to welcome new men. "We have seen a strong trend of these members converting to their local councils," Chasse said. "We inform the council leadership and district deputy within a day of the new member joining, so they can reach out to the man about their council and share with them how to join."

Another benefit of the Fresh Start program is that it helps keep state leadership accountable, as it allows Knights on the council level to offer their own suggestions. This communication process "has seen a positive return of council engagement" and has helped ensure that "councils remain strong and able to remain a vital part in our faith communities," Chasse said.

And it's working, too. Not only were two new councils formed at the end of April, but the state is on track for earning the Circle of Honor Award.

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