



Supreme Master  
Michael McCusker  
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# The Catholic Patriot

Supporting our Country, Community, and Church  
With

Respect and Honor

*Knights of Columbus Fourth Degree*



***Class of VSM's Installed Sept 9, 2023 at St. Mary's Church. This event took place during the Supreme Assembly Meeting in New Haven Connecticut.***

During the meeting VSM's received reports from the Supreme Secretary, Supreme Master and comment from the Deputy Supreme Knight. To see the Supreme Master Report [Click Here](#).

Some key points take away from the Meeting:

1. Training is key to successful leadership. This is why the Supreme Master quickly determined he needed help and has created a new staff to engage with the leaders of the 4th Degree.
2. The lifeblood of a successful assembly is its programs. It is programs that engage the membership and draws the interest of new members.
3. Emphasized the importance of building relationships with your state deputies and the hierarchy of the Church in your province is a recipe for success.

As we approach the 125th Anniversary of the 4th Degree of the Knights of Columbus we enter a period of change. Michael McCusker of Memphis, Tennessee, was elected to lead the Fourth Degree of the Knights of Columbus as supreme master; he will also continue as a member of the Board of Directors, following his election to that position last August. McCusker, a decorated military veteran, succeeds Dennis Stoddard, who retired March 1 after 13 years as supreme master. In recognition of Stoddard's distinguished record of accomplishments, the Board of Directors voted to accord him the honorary title of Supreme Master Emeritus.



Michael McCusker has been a member of the Knights of Columbus since 1988, served as state deputy of Tennessee from 2019 to 2021 and was elected to the Board of Directors in August 2022.

McCusker has worked as a criminal prosecutor for more than 20 years and currently is assistant district attorney general for the 30th Judicial District of Tennessee. He also served in the U.S. Army Reserves, and then the Tennessee National Guard, for more than two decades, including a deployment to Afghanistan from 2005 to 2006. McCusker was awarded a Bronze Star for his service in Afghanistan, as well as an Army Commendation Medal for his actions during a search-and-rescue mission there in 2005.

McCusker is a graduate of the University of Tennessee and earned his law degree from the University of Memphis. He is a member of St. Michael the Archangel Council 17578 in Memphis. He and his wife, Theresa, live in Germantown, Tennessee, and have three children.

Director of Ceremonials Micheal Thumm, FVSM thummer75@md.metrocast.net 301-904-4373	Director of Communications Matthew Maly, PSD, FVSM mattmaly602@gmail.com 405-708-1978	Director of Membership Bret Ladenburger, PSD ladenburgerkofc@gmail.com 307-760-1003	Director of Programs Ron Boyce, PSD rboyce39@aol.com 503-730-1986	Director of Training Michael Porter, PSD, FVSM mjpknight9282@aol.com 615-308-6777	Administrative Assistant Justyna Padilla justyna.padilla@kofc.org 203-752-4437
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4. Had a complete afternoon of training conducted by new staff members in Ceremonials, Training, Programs, Membership, and Communications.

5. Started a new tradition, The Transferring of the Provincial Sword. During Mass Saturday evening, each Vice Supreme Master was installed with their medal of office and received a provincial sword to be handed down as new VSMs as they take their role within the province.



6. Supreme Master announced those VSM's achieving the Supreme Master's Circle of Honor

- Reddin Province VSM Chris Foley
- DeSmet Province VSM Brian Heger
- De Jesus Province VSM Alexandro Isaac
- Marquette Province VSM Craig Larson
- Our Lady of Guadalupe Province VSM Matt Maly
- Healy Province VSM Rich McDermott
- Magellan Province VSM Anthony Nazario
- Bienville Province VSM Pete Parrish
- Hennepin Province VSM Ed Ponder
- Fraser Province VSM Andy Sambrielaz
- Blanchet Province VSM Joseph Schaecher
- Jogues Province VSM Wally Wych

7. Membership is the lifeline to our service to others. Far too often, we seek to recruit members who joined long ago and have grown complacent in their membership. Instead, let us now reach out to those men newly joined to our ranks. Let us reach out to them while their hearts are still on fire. And let us do so by having a greater presence at the outset of their lives as Knights.

## A Special THANK YOU for Special Man!



During the Supreme Master Report, Supreme Master McCusker expressed his gratitude to another proud veteran who served with distinction in the United States Marine Corps, completing several tours of duty in Vietnam. Past State Deputy Chuck Gallina has given many years of dedicated service to the Order and to the Fourth Degree. Through his commitment and dedication to duty, he has ensured that year in and year out the Supreme Convention has been enhanced by a well-trained and presentable Honor Guard and Color Corps. Moreover, he has been the heart and soul of the Warriors to Lourdes program which not only brings healing to wounded warriors, but often-times, saves lives. There are not enough words to express to Colonel Gallina how proud we are of him on a career of excellence while extending you warmest wishes for a long and happy retirement.

## Dates to Remember

November 11, 2023

Veterans Day

January 22, 2024 Quarterly Training

"Preparing for Biennial Meeting 2024"

Planning and Implementation

April 2024 Biennial District Meetings

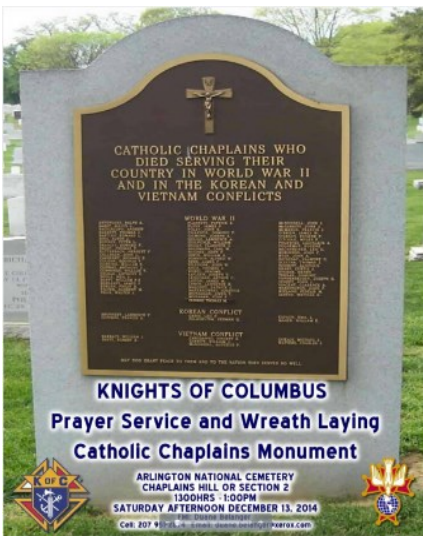


For the months of October and November, Veteran's Day will be the Program of the Month. Now is a good time for all the Assemblies to start planning and start collaborating with their local Councils on a program to Honor our Veterans.

The origins of Veterans Days started in 1921, when an unknown World War I American Soldier buried in Arlington National Cemetery on a hillside overlooking the Potomac River and Washington D.C. On the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month the United States, England (Westminster Abbey), and France (Arc de Triomphe) all held memorial gestures known as Armistice Day. In 1926, a Congressional resolution was issued and 12 years later Congress acted on November 11<sup>th</sup> as Armistice Day, but only a few years after the holiday was proclaimed a war broke out in Europe. The first celebration using the term Veterans Day occurred on November 11<sup>th</sup> in Birmingham, Alabama in 1947. Raymond Weeks, a World War II veteran organized "National Veterans Day," which included a parade and festivals to honor all veterans. A bill was proposed and in 1954 Congress passed that bill proclaiming November 11<sup>th</sup> as Veterans Day.

The Bishop Healy Province is participating in Wreaths Across America (WAA) , this will allow the District Masters with an

opportunity to see a well-oiled Veterans Support Mission to empower Assemblies to support a wholesome patriotic program. WAA kicks off what is known as the world's largest Patriotic Parade beginning at Cheverus High School in Portland, Maine on December 10th with a Fourth Degree Honor Guard. The weeklong convoy travels from Maine to Arlington National Cemetery and arrives on December 16, 2023 (WAA Day). Vice Supreme Master Duane Belanger will be holding a Veterans Wreath Ceremony for the Province at the Supreme Museum on December 14, where he plans to have a wreath placed at the WWI monument. He also plans to carry another wreath to Arlington National Cemetery and place it at the Catholic Chaplains Monument on WAA Day. Peter Sonoski will be promoting the Veterans Wreath Ceremony at the Supreme Museum, and it will include the Fourth Degree. Check out the parade video held several years ago on Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/duane.belanger/videos/10204388077674877>



Belcourt Assembly 1867 & Council 9025 of North Rustico Prince Edward Island are joining forces in conducting a Remembrance Day. They have been doing this Remembrance Day Program for the past couple of years. The project includes a white cross with the name of residents who lost their lives in conflicts dating back to the First World War. There are now well over four hundred names in the registry with new names being added each year. The alphabetical registry at the entrance to the cenotaph. (As shown on the picture on the right.)





All the Assemblies in Newfoundland and Labrador District of Rev. Francis E. Kelley Province will participate and commemorate Remembrance Day on November 11<sup>th</sup>, in conjunction with the Royal Canadian Legion or other patriotic group. Assemblies will also hold memorial services in cemeteries to honor the deceased veterans or visit schools and participate at the school services.

Assemblies with their local council, can celebrate Veterans Day by holding a fundraising event to raise money for the Warriors to Lourdes program. This will help provide the means for our wounded, non-wounded, ill and injured U.S. warriors to participate in the Warriors to Lourdes pilgrimage for prayers and spiritual guidance.



Assemblies are encouraged to collaborate with their local councils to hold a Rosary for their local Veteran's on Veterans Day. Rosary Program encourages councils and assemblies to schedule a regular rosary prayer services on any day of the week, with the guidance of their pastor.

Another idea is for the members in your Assembly is to reach out to a local veteran either within your Assembly or with your local VA to have a cup of coffee with them. We are all busy, but it would be good to talk with them over a cup of coffee. Our veterans have sacrifice so much for our Country and this would be a nice way to honor them. We can call this program "A cup for you, cup for me".



Please let me know what your local Assemblies are doing to Honor our Veterans.

Ron Boyce, PSD, 4<sup>th</sup> Degree Director of Programs

## Provincial News



Our Lady of Guadalupe Province holds Provincial Meeting in Moore, OK Oct. 13-15. After meeting on Saturday Honor Guard and wives said a rosary at the top of Tepeyac Hill in Oklahoma City. Pictured to side is the VSM and Masters with two guards. After the Rosary, the Honor Guard lead the group to Mass at Blessed Stanley Rother Shrine.

After Mass said by Archbishop Coakley Our new VSM was presented with the Provincial Banquet of Roses while being Congratulated by SD Chris Victor of Oklahoma and Terry Fruge' of Texas. Also pictured, is FVSM Matt Maly, FVSM Dan Hogan, and FVSM Paul Weigl .



**SUPREME MASTER'S REPORT**  
**113<sup>th</sup> SUPREME ASSEMBLY MEETING**  
**NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT**  
**SEPTEMBER 9, 2023**

It is my duty pursuant to Article III, §8(d) of the Laws and Rules Governing the Fourth Degree of the Knights of Columbus to annually report to the Supreme Assembly. This report marks my first to this assembled body, and I would be remiss to not begin by expressing my gratitude to our Worthy Supreme Knight for his confidence in me to serve as his Supreme Master. Further, I wish to express my appreciation to the Supreme Officers and Directors for their confidence in my abilities as demonstrated by their vote in Mexico City this past February to appoint me upon the Supreme Knight's recommendation.

Further, I recognize that my ability to perform effectively in my first five months is directly attributable to the support of the Vice Supreme Masters who have long endeavored to keep the light of the Fourth Degree shining bright. In particular, I wish to acknowledge today the service of those Vice Supreme Master's whose terms ended on August 31, 2023: Richard P. McDermott (Healy Province), Micheal Thumm (Calvert Province), Denis Lapointe (Champlain Province), Thomas M. Monahon (DeSoto Province), Craig Larson (Marquette Province), Matthew Maly (Guadalupe Province), Alexandro Xavier Isaac (de Jesus Province), Andy Sambrielaz (Fraser Province), Walter J. Wych (Jogues Province), and David M. Ryan (Serra Province).

I also thank all the members of the Supreme Staff who worked to make this Supreme Assembly Meeting a success, especially Stephen Feiler, Daniel Isabel, Tom Hamling, Karen Brady, Gary Morrisey, Tom Milardo, Nicole Simone, and Michele Naglieri. I know many others assisted, and even if not named herein, I express my sincere gratitude.

Specifically, I would like to thank Vanessa Kelly for her support of my wife, Theresa, in preparing for this meeting, and her willingness to stand in for Theresa because of our absence due to my recent surgery.

Finally, I know that my success and the success of all the Fourth Degree, each and every day, is attributed to Justyna Padilla, who has worked many long hours across many months to make this meeting a success. We are all indebted to Justyna for her tireless service to the Order, and we thank you.

It would be easy to report to you that the state of the Fourth Degree is strong, but that would not be the case. I do not say this to be despairing but instead to honestly assess where we are at this moment so that we can more capably advance toward our goals. At the same time, I do not say to you that the state of the Fourth Degree is weak. In fact, it is incredibly strong, when measured from the perspective of our ability to have persevered through a global pandemic during a time of momentous change in the Fourth Degree.

Instead, I say to you that the state of the Fourth Degree is enduring. We have weathered the storms of pandemic and change that have tossed us about the turbulent seas of time, and now, we mend our sails, determined to continue our journey in the service of the Church. Our ability to do so is attributable to the demonstrated leadership of our former and returning Vice Supreme Masters, and now contingent upon our new Vice Supreme Masters who will be installed this evening at beautiful, historic St. Mary's. As we have endured these challenging times, let us now commit to advancing the cause of the Fourth Degree by reenergizing and reengaging the patriotic arm of the Order.

It begins with each of you.

To progress, we must first evaluate where we are. Last year, the Fourth Degree was challenged to grow by one new assembly per district, which means we should have grown by 129 new assemblies. Instead, we only grew by 32 assemblies, a mere 24.8% growth. We must and will do better! In spite such low growth, I want to express my gratitude to Vice Supreme Master Anthony Nazario whose 19 new assemblies amounted to 59.3% of the overall new assembly development Order-wide.

The Philippines ability to develop new assemblies reflects their consistent rate of growth in Membership, which is beyond impressive. In recent years, due to the challenges of the pandemic, the Fourth Degree was encouraged to reach at least 50 percent of its annual quota. However, two provinces nearly reached 100 percent. De Jesus Province led all provinces with 96.65% increase in membership, closely followed by the Magellan Province with a 95.04% increase. My sincere appreciation goes out to Former Vice Supreme Master Alexandro Isaac of Mexico and current Vice Supreme Master Anthony Nazario of the Philippines. Several other provinces did exceed the 50% requirement. My sincere appreciation goes out to the following former and current Vice Supreme Masters:

SUPREME MASTER'S CIRCLE		
III	Chris Foley	Reddin
IV	Brian Heger	DeSmet
IV	Alexandro Isaac	De Jesus
II	Craig Larson	Marquette
I	Matt Maly	Guadalupe
II	Rich McDermott	Healy
I	Anthony Nazario	Magellan
II	Peter Parrish	Bienville
II	Ed Ponder	Hennepin
IV	Andy Sambrielaz	Fraser
III	Joseph Schaecher	Blanchet
I	Wally Wych	Jogues

You have proven your ability to accept and meet a challenge. Your dedication and devotion during these recent trials is a credit to all the Order. However, if we are to preserve the Fourth Degree for future generations, we must now rise to the challenge of increasing membership. We must entirely devote ourselves to turning the rising tide of diminishing growth. Last year, we initiated 12,971 new members while reinstating 774 Sir Knights for a combined growth of 13,745.

Conversely, 1,714 Sir Knights were suspended. Another 320 withdrew their membership, and 3,397 were moved to affiliate membership status, decreasing our growth by 5,431 members. Meanwhile, time took its toll as 8,869 Sir Knights went home to their Lord. At the end of the fraternal year, our net gain was -555 members. In 2022, we grew by 12,608 members, only to realize a net gain of 155 new Sir Knights.

We must endeavor to reverse these numbers, and we must do so now. The life of the Fourth Degree depends on it, and I have selected each of you to lead the way to saving our beloved degree from extinction. The days of complacency are at an end. No longer can we point to pandemics and turbulent waters of change to give ourselves a pass. In the past year, while the Fourth Degree continued to decline in membership, the Knights of Columbus achieved its highest membership growth in more than eight years, a direct result of the highest first quarter of growth in more than forty years.

As the Order records unprecedented growth, the Fourth Degree declines, and we, gathered here today, bear the responsibility for preserving the patriotic arm. The moment is piled high with challenges, and in our ranks, as Thomas Paine penned more than two centuries ago, are summer soldiers and sunshine patriots who when put to the crisis will shrink from the challenge, but not you. Not ever you!

Although the moment is piled high with difficulties, we recall the words of Sir Knight John F. Kennedy, who at his inauguration in 1961, told the world, "I do not shrink from this responsibility -- I welcome it!"

And in the spirit of those words, we are blessed to be that generation of Sir Knights called to defend the Fourth Degree in its darkest hours, and in spite of these challenges, I know that none of us would ever exchange places with any other leader in any other time of the patriotic arm of the Order.

It begins with our commitment to growth, and so today, I tell you that nothing less than 100% membership growth this fraternal year will stem the tide that now seeks to engulf us. I am relying on each of you to rise to this challenge. Not only in words but in actions. Not only in idealistic notions but by dedicating yourself to thoughtfully planning for and managing growth in your province while training your district masters to do the same. You must plan, prepare, and execute membership plans, and understand that hope is never a plan!

Today, we will begin that process. Unlike past Supreme Assemblies, our goal is to quickly dispense of the business required of us here today (notwithstanding this address) and to move on to training sessions designed to prepare you for your roles as Vice Supreme Masters. For far too long, Vice Supreme Masters have been tasked with an incredible responsibility without being trained to perform their duties. That time is ended.

Since taking office, I have concluded that the Supreme Master alone cannot managed the responsibilities of this office, which is why I am proud to announce the establishment of a staff to help each and everyone of you succeed. Please join me in welcoming PSD/FVSM Michael Porter of Tennessee as Chief of Staff and Director of Training. FVSM Micheal Thumm of Maryland as Director of Ceremonials. PSD/FVSM Matt Maly of Oklahoma as Director of Communications. PSD Bret Ladenburger of Wyoming as Director of Membership, and PSD Ron Boyce of Oregon as Director of Programs. Soon, they will be joined by a Director of New Assembly Development, and collectively they will work to ensure your success in all areas of the Fourth Degree.

Any leader will tell you that to achieve success in membership growth, we must have success in how we operate as assemblies. The lifeblood of a successful assembly is its programs. It is programs that engage the membership and draws the interest of new members.

We must embrace innovative programs to not only reenergize the Fourth Degree, but to increase our presence in the lives of the councils and parishes that make up the assemblies. I challenged each of you this year to work with your state deputies to ensure that the Fourth Degree is committed to helping each of them accomplish their goals for their respective jurisdictions. To that extent, I ask each of you to endeavor to bring the Third and Fourth Degrees closer in mission and purpose. We are not separate organizations, but much like the Church different parts of the same body.



Last year, we grew as an Order by 90,000 new members. Let us endeavor to bring twenty-five percent of those new members into the Fourth Degree, growing by 22,500 members this year. Far too often, we seek to recruit members who joined long ago and have grown complacent in their membership. Instead, let us now reach out to those men newly joined to our ranks. Let us reach out to them while their hearts are still on fire. And let us do so by having a greater presence at the outset of their lives as Knights.

We can achieve this by having an increase presence in the Exemplification of Charity, Unity, and Fraternity by offering to our councils an honor guard to enhance the splendor of the degree, allowing new members to see their future as patriotic members of the Order.

Equally important to building relationships with your state deputies is to build relationships with the hierarchy of the Church in your province. In particular, by being properly informed of the need for change to ensure the survival of the Fourth Degree, our priests, bishops, and cardinals can become our greatest allies in successfully completing the transition to the new regalia while ending the continued, but rare, use of the retire regalia in their dioceses. Avail yourself of the opportunity to meet with the hierarchy, introduce yourself, and let them know you are there to serve them as needed.

Today, we stand at the threshold of our rebirth as the Fourth Degree. We eagerly look forward to our 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in seventeen months, and the opportunity that this presents to make the Fourth Degree relevant once more. Now is the time to reengage our assemblies with new programs, and before the opportunity slips away, it is time to dedicate ourselves to conducting a census of Brother Knights in our ranks who served in the Korean War and Vietnam Conflict. We must secure the history of their sacrifice before it is lost to memory, and once done, we must then reach out to Brothers from Desert Storm and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan so that their records of service may be preserved in the Order's archives along with those Brother Knights who served in the Spanish American and First and Second World Wars.

As we momentarily reflect upon the service of our veterans, it is appropriate that we recall and offer a silent prayer for the memory of Former Supreme Master Nestor Barber of California who passed away on August 20<sup>th</sup>. Nes led the Fourth Degree with distinction from 2000-2004. We give thanks to his leadership and more importantly his example as a Catholic gentleman.

I would also like to take a moment to express my gratitude to another proud veteran who served with distinction in the United States Marine Corps, completing several tours of duty in Vietnam. Past State Deputy Chuck Gallina has given many years of dedicated service to the Order and in particular to the Fourth Degree. Through his commitment and dedication to duty, he has ensured that year in and year out the Supreme Convention has been enhanced by a well-trained and presentable Honor Guard and Color Corps. Moreover, he has been the heart and soul of the Warriors to Lourdes program which not only brings healing to wounded warriors, but oftentimes, saves lives. There are not enough words to express to Colonel Gallina how

proud we are of him, and I know that later today Mike Thumm will expound on these thoughts but let me congratulate you Chuck on a career of excellence while extending you warmest wishes for a long and happy retirement.

Finally, let me close by giving thanks to Supreme Master Emeritus Dennis Stoddard for his thirteen years of service as Supreme Master, tying him with Daniel McCormack as the third longest serving Supreme Master. I draw strength from the examples of his life as both a Marine and a Vietnam veteran, a law enforcement officer and teacher, and especially as Supreme Master where he never hesitated to do what was right for the Order, even when it was not popular. Dennis never listened to the voices of dissent and derision, but always focused on the need to ensure the survival of the Fourth Degree so that it could continue to play a vital role in the life of the Order and the Church.

Thank you so very much and may God bless both Linda and Dennis as they now enjoy the fruits of their labor in a well-deserved retirement.

My Vice Supreme Masters, as I conclude these remarks, I know that each of you are eager to begin your service, but like all great leaders, you are aware of your limitations and abilities. Perhaps, you feel complex and conflicting emotions about how you will be capable of performing in the days of ahead when so much is at stake.

Tonight, you will stand in the majesty of St. Mary's Church where Blessed McGivney first conceived of this great Order of which we are privileged to be members. As you stand there, know this. In your mothers' wombs, when He counted all your days, He counted among them this day and this moment. He has created you for greatness in the service of His divine Church.

This evening, you will be presented with the provincial sword of your province. It is not yours and soon you will pass it on to your successor. Instead, you are called to keep it safe and shining bright, so that one day a Vice Supreme Master in another 125 years will be able to look back at this moment and give thanks to you for your willingness to serve, to preserve the Order, and boldly lead.

This is your time. Deliver yourself into His hands and listen always to the Holy Spirit as He guides you each and every day.

Vivat Jesus!



