

Cor Session Guide

Blessed Michael McGivney







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Blessed Michael McGivney



Blessed Michael McGivney founded the Knights of Columbus in March 1882. As our founder, Father McGivney serves as an inspiration and intercessor for all Brother Knights. But who was he, why did he found our Order, and how can we grow closer to him today? These sessions of *Cor* seek to help men answer those questions and forge a stronger connection with our Blessed Founder.

Ten sessions about the life and legacy of Father McGivney are included in this guide. We encourage you to use all ten sessions in the order presented. Facilitators should read through each session prior to *Cor* to familiarize themselves with each session's content. It is recommended that each participant silently read the text before it is read aloud. There is no need to use all the suggested questions; please use only what you think will be helpful for your group.

You will need

- A copy of each session for each participant
- A rosary for each participant
- Volunteers to read aloud the selections

Cor Key Elements for these sessions:

- **Prayer:** Begin with Mass, if possible, or the Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and read aloud each session's short Bible verse before concluding the opening prayer. End with the Prayer for the Canonization of Blessed Michael McGivney or Litany of Blessed Michael McGivney (see reverse).
- **Formation:** Read the selections and use the questions to prompt discussion about Father McGivney. Encourage men to recognize how his life relates to their lives today.
- **Fraternity:** Suitable fraternal activities include sharing a meal, playing a sport or outdoor game, or simply having time for regular conversation before and/or after the session. Do what works best for your brothers. Consult the [Cor Startup Guide](#) for additional examples.

Helpful Context

This *Cor* session guide may be the first way the men in your group encounter Blessed Michael McGivney. It is important to understand that the aim of this guide is **to foster deeper love for the Lord through fostering devotion to Father McGivney**. Blessed Michael McGivney is an excellent model of Christian discipleship, and, like the Blessed Mother, he most assuredly wants any consideration of his earthly life to facilitate encountering Christ and increasing love for God.

That said, men should feel free to ask serious questions, challenge one another in a spirit of charity, and enjoy each other's company as friends and brothers in the Lord. A prayerful attitude should be observed when appropriate, but men also should be able to have fun at the right times, too.

The material presented in this *Cor* session guide has been gathered from numerous KofC sources and checked against the best information available about Father McGivney. While it is not an academic document and should not be treated as such, it is reliable in terms of the accuracy of its depiction of Father McGivney's life and circumstances. While some editorial decisions were made to help men who use this guide draw more spiritual benefits from it, the material presented is true.

Helpful information about facilitating small group discussions is included at the end of this document.



A Litany of Blessed Michael McGivney

Lord, have mercy on us.

Christ, have mercy on us.

Lord, have mercy on us.

Christ, hear us.

Christ, graciously hear us.

God, the Father of heaven,

have mercy on us.

God, the Son, Redeemer of the world,

have mercy on us.

God, the Holy Spirit,

have mercy on us.

Holy Trinity, One God,

have mercy on us.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, *pray for us.*

Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, ...

Our Lady of Guadalupe,

Star of the New Evangelization,

St. Joseph, Spouse of Mary and

Guardian of the Redeemer,

St. Michael the Archangel,

Blessed Michael McGivney,

Humble Servant of God,

Faithful Disciple of Jesus,

Son of the Immaculate Heart,

Obedient Son of the Church,

Exemplary Priest of Purity,

Zealous Priest of Christ,

Gentle Shepherd of Souls,

Devoted Parish Priest,

Wise Counselor,

Teacher of the Faith,

Servant to All,

Protector of the Poor,

Defender of the Widow and Orphan,

Friend of the Lonely and Suffering,

Companion to the Imprisoned,

Comforter of the Sick and Dying,

Apostle of Christian Family Life,

Father to the Young,

Advocate of Workers,

Evangelizer of Those Gone Astray,

Champion of the Gospel of Life,

Guardian of the Laity,

Pastor of Immigrants,

Exemplar of Charity,

Model of Unity,

Builder of Catholic Fraternity,

Instructor of Christian Patriotism,

Founder of the Knights of Columbus,

Blessed Michael, humble in service,

Blessed Michael, devoted to the Sacred Heart,

Blessed Michael, pure in heart,

Blessed Michael, faithful in priestly duties,

Blessed Michael, strong in suffering,

Blessed Michael, peaceful in dying,

Blessed Michael, conformed to Christ crucified,

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
spare us, O Lord!

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
graciously hear us, O Lord!

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us!

V/ Pray for us, Blessed Michael McGivney,

R/ That we may be made worthy of the promises
of Christ.

Let us pray. God, our Father, inspired by the heroic example of the life and virtue of your priest, Blessed Michael McGivney, may we follow your Son, Jesus Christ, more closely, fulfilling His commandment of charity and building up His Body, which is the Church. Let the inspiration of your servant prompt us to greater confidence in your love so that we may continue his work of caring for the needy and outcast. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.





Session One: Obedient Son of the Church

Prayer: The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

“Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” Luke 6:20b, RSVCE

Read: Famine forced them from their homeland, like so many of the Irish of that time.

Patrick McGivney and Mary Lynch met in Waterbury, one of mid-19th century Connecticut’s industrial centers. They remained in the city and married at St. Peter’s church in 1851. God soon blessed them with their first of thirteen children, a son they baptized in the church in which they wed.

They named him Michael Joseph McGivney.

Michael’s home in Waterbury was described by the local newspaper as “a romantic spot, ... beneath the shade of the dense foliage the surrounded the cottage, where the music of the river, the song of myriads of wild birds and an occasional shriek from a locomotive were the only things that broke the stillness...”¹

This alternating natural music and stillness complemented the spiritual rhythm of the Catholic faith, which was the center of life in the McGivney household. Patrick and Mary raised their children to seek, love, and serve the Lord in all things, and they were fully part of their parish community. Young Michael was deeply inspired by Father Thomas Hendricken, his parish priest and teacher, and saw in him a model of what a priestly life should be.

But life for the McGivney family was far from idyllic. Patrick McGivney’s work in the brass factory was physically punishing, and Mary lost six of the thirteen children she bore when they were very young. Anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant sentiments were rampant, and the McGivneys knew well the bitterness of discrimination. Furthermore, their adopted country was on the brink of civil war. The Cross overshadowed their lives and left its mark on Michael.

Yet even in his youth, Michael McGivney did not run from the Cross. Despite poverty, hatred, and suffering, Michael excelled in learning, virtue, and piety. He graduated school three years early, at 13, and sought permission from his father to enter seminary.

Patrick McGivney told his son no. Michael would join him molding brass.

But the desire to serve God as a priest never left Michael’s heart, and Patrick saw that it was no whim, but a deep longing. God was calling his son, who would never leave without his father’s blessing.

Finally, after three years, with encouragement from Father Hendricken, Patrick McGivney told his son yes.

¹ “K of C Memorial Day,” *Waterbury Democrat*, June 9, 1900



For Discussion

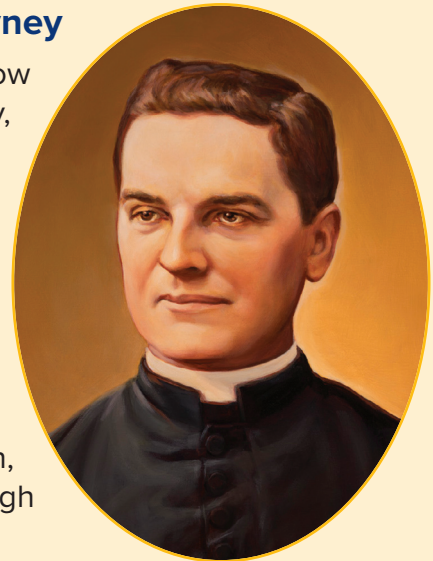
1. What most strikes you about this description of Michael McGivney's childhood? Why?
2. How was the early life of Blessed Michael McGivney similar to yours? How was it different?
3. The Knights of Columbus has a legacy of fighting unjust discrimination, due in part to the experience of the McGivneys and of so many Catholics in America. Do Catholics in your country experience discrimination today? What forms does that discrimination take?
4. What can we learn from Blessed Michael McGivney's obedience to his father? What can we learn from his father's change of heart?
5. How do you think Blessed Michael McGivney's childhood experiences of suffering and loss affected him as a man? As a priest?

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to voice your special intentions and listen to the intentions of your brothers, and then pray for your brothers' intentions.

Prayer for the Canonization of Blessed Michael McGivney

God, our Father, protector of the poor and defender of the widow and orphan, you called your priest, Blessed Michael McGivney, to be an apostle of Christian family life and to lead the young to the generous service of their neighbor. Through the example of his life and virtue, may we follow your Son, Jesus Christ, more closely, fulfilling his commandment of charity and building up his Body which is the Church. Let the inspiration of your servant prompt us to greater confidence in your love so that we may continue his work of caring for the needy and the outcast. We humbly ask that you glorify Blessed Michael McGivney on earth according to the design of your holy will. Through his intercession, grant the favor I now present (here make your request). Through Christ our Lord. Amen.





Session Two: Humble Servant of God

Prayer: The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Matthew 5:4, RSVCE

Read: The train took Michael far away from his family.

It was September of 1868, and Michael was bound for Canada, where he would attend seminary. He studied hard, earned the respect of his instructors and classmates, and drew closer to the Lord as he advanced toward priesthood by attending three different institutions. But one letter changed everything.

In 1873, Michael learned that his father had died at 48 years old. He had been the McGivney family’s sole breadwinner. Michael, as the eldest son, felt the weight of his responsibility to return home to provide for his mother and siblings, so he left the seminary.

Convinced that he was called to the priesthood, Michael’s family worked to ensure that their needs were met, freeing Michael to complete his studies. However, there was one more roadblock for Michael. He could not pay to finish his education on his own.

Providentially, the bishop of Hartford intervened. He offered Michael a scholarship to complete his studies at St. Mary’s Seminary in Baltimore, the first Catholic seminary in America. With deep gratitude, Michael accepted the bishop’s gift, and traveled to Baltimore.

His instructors regarded him as “the ideal vocation,”² and he was beloved by his classmates: “His good humor too was often apparent; for everywhere that he is spoken of, his happy words, his genial utterances, weighing more than nuggets of gold, are still remembered, and still treasured up. His piety too has been referred to. That piety crystallized itself in his immense charity.”³

He was both a favored sacristan and the vice president of his baseball club (and batted fourth, incidentally), demonstrating both his reverence for the awesome liturgical responsibilities of a priest and his leadership capability among his fellow men. And on December 22, 1877, he was ordained a priest of Jesus Christ.

He returned to Waterbury. Standing before the altar in the presence of his family and friends, he celebrated his first solemn Mass. It was a Christmas Mass.

Father Michael McGivney had come home.

² Father Joseph G. Daley, June 1900 issue of the *Columbiad*, reprinted as “The Personality of Father McGivney,” *Columbia*, August 2017

³ Ibid.



For Discussion

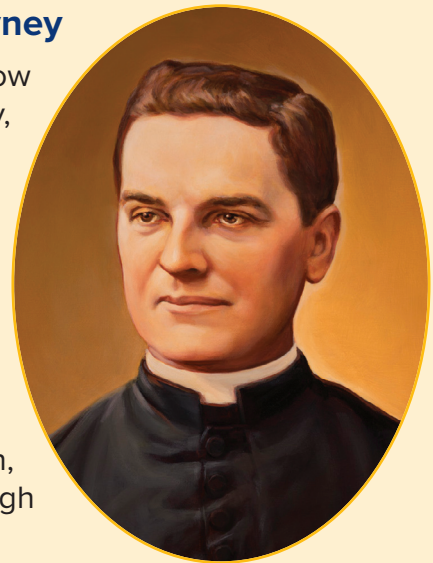
1. What does the fact the Michael McGivney left seminary to care for his family after learning about his father's death say about his character?
2. Michael McGivney had a "blue collar" background but received a (literal and figurative) white collar education. How do you think this combination prepared him for his ministry? What sort of impact do you think it had on his effectiveness as a priest?
3. What sort of man is "the ideal vocation" to the priesthood? Why? Do you see Blessed Michael McGivney as possessing those characteristics?
4. What do you think about Blessed Michael McGivney not just playing baseball but being vice president of his club? What does that tell you about him?
5. Blessed Michael McGivney chose to celebrate his first solemn Mass at home in Waterbury. Why do you think he did so? What do you think that meant to his family and church community?

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to voice your special intentions and listen to the intentions of your brothers, and then pray for your brothers' intentions.

Prayer for the Canonization of Blessed Michael McGivney

God, our Father, protector of the poor and defender of the widow and orphan, you called your priest, Blessed Michael McGivney, to be an apostle of Christian family life and to lead the young to the generous service of their neighbor. Through the example of his life and virtue, may we follow your Son, Jesus Christ, more closely, fulfilling his commandment of charity and building up his Body which is the Church. Let the inspiration of your servant prompt us to greater confidence in your love so that we may continue his work of caring for the needy and the outcast. We humbly ask that you glorify Blessed Michael McGivney on earth according to the design of your holy will. Through his intercession, grant the favor I now present (here make your request). Through Christ our Lord. Amen.





Session Three: Servant to All

Prayer: The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

“Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Matthew 5:11-12, RSVCE

Read: In Father McGivney’s day, America was no friend to Catholics.

Anti-Irish, anti-Catholic rhetoric was inescapable. Catholic immigrants were accused of being seditious foreign agents seeking to overthrow the Constitution and install the Pope as king. Or they were reviled as being less intelligent and virtuous than other Americans.

To be an Irish-American Catholic priest was, in the eyes of many non-Catholic Americans, to be a self-declared traitor. It was in this context Father McGivney began his priestly ministry.

In 1879, one year after he became curate (assistant priest) of Saint Mary’s parish on Hillhouse Avenue in New Haven, the *New York Times* ran a front-page story presenting the church as a “blemish” on the aristocratic street: “Its parishioners live some distance from the church, and they are mostly servant-girls. Consequently, its financial condition has been steadily growing worse. ... the close of the year 1878 found only 85 cents in the treasury. It is considered almost impossible to continue the church in its present condition. ...The result shows how foolish were those who persisted in building the church on the spot where it stands. ... It is an eye-sore on the avenue, a source of annoyance and injury to neighboring residents, and a complete failure as a business enterprise.”⁴

But Father McGivney bore such things with patience and met hatred with love.

“A blind, aged man used to live by charity, but who was not Catholic went every Sunday to Mass at St. Mary’s to hear ‘that voice.’ Non-Catholics found in Father McGivney a soul of immense sympathy which invited them strongly toward investigating the religious truths his lips proclaimed.”⁵

Father McGivney had a voice that spoke words of comfort and charity in response to vilification and demonization. His voice drew even non-Catholics closer to the Lord.

It was a sign that in him, everyone could find a friend, brother, and loving spiritual father.

⁴ *The New York Times*, July 28, 1879

⁵ Father Joseph Daley



For Discussion

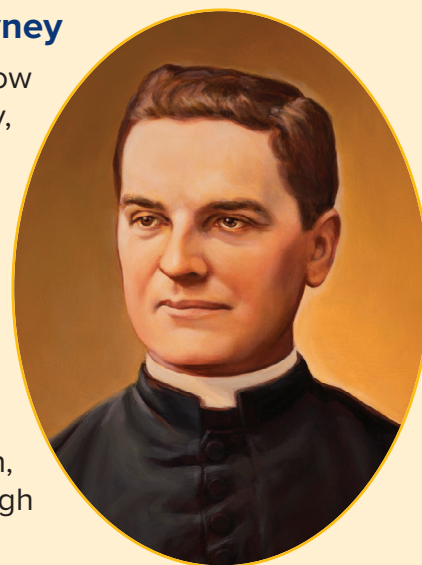
1. How is the situation for Catholics in your country today similar to how it was for Father Michael McGivney? How is it different?
2. In Father Michael McGivney's day, priests were met with suspicion and hostility from non-Catholics. How are things similar today? How are they different? What can you do to show your love and respect for the holy priests in your life?
3. There are "voices" today that respond to discrimination against and hatred of Catholics and the Church differently than Blessed Michael McGivney did. Contrast those voices with his voice. Which one most resembles how Christ would respond?
4. Have you or anyone you know faced discrimination due to being Catholic? How have you responded? In light of Blessed Michael McGivney's example, how would you hope to respond to such discrimination in the future?
5. Who in your life needs you to be a friend, brother, and loving spiritual father? How – specifically and concretely – can you answer that need?

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to voice your special intentions and listen to the intentions of your brothers, and then pray for your brothers' intentions.

Prayer for the Canonization of Blessed Michael McGivney

God, our Father, protector of the poor and defender of the widow and orphan, you called your priest, Blessed Michael McGivney, to be an apostle of Christian family life and to lead the young to the generous service of their neighbor. Through the example of his life and virtue, may we follow your Son, Jesus Christ, more closely, fulfilling his commandment of charity and building up his Body which is the Church. Let the inspiration of your servant prompt us to greater confidence in your love so that we may continue his work of caring for the needy and the outcast. We humbly ask that you glorify Blessed Michael McGivney on earth according to the design of your holy will. Through his intercession, grant the favor I now present (here make your request). Through Christ our Lord. Amen.





Session Four: Defender of the Widow and Orphan

Prayer: The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

“Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.”
Matthew 19:14, RSVCE

Read: New Haven was a place both of wealth and beauty and of squalor and suffering.

Hillhouse Avenue, where St. Mary’s church stood, was once called “the most beautiful street in America” by Mark Twain. It was an icon of American aristocracy, at the heart of Yale’s Ivy League campus.

But not everyone could live on Hillhouse Avenue. One report about New Haven during the time of Father McGivney said that “there are not a few children of Irish birth who need help, moral as well as physical help. Hundreds of Irish youth of both sexes are growing up in our midst, in abject poverty, in filth, wretchedness and crime for want of help and sympathy.”⁶

Father McGivney knew how quickly tragedy could render a family destitute. His heart ached for the poor of New Haven, especially the poor children, so many of whom were Catholic.

There were Catholics that had escaped poverty, however. The Downes family was more well-off and more respected than any other Catholic family in New Haven. They seemingly were becoming part of the American aristocracy.

It was not to be. One day in 1880, Edward Downes, the father of the family, died. His widow could not prove to the courts that she had sufficient funds to care for all her minor children, so the state intended to place those it deemed insufficiently-provided-for in institutional homes that often actively undermined the Catholic religion of their wards. Alfred Downes’s fate was to be decided on February 6, 1882. It was expected that he would be legally wrested from his family and his faith.

Father McGivney was there in probate court. He stood up and pledged to arrange financial support for Alfred, and the Downes family remained together.

It was an act of great charity on the part of Father McGivney, and it would not be his last.

⁶ *New Haven Evening Register*, 1880



For Discussion

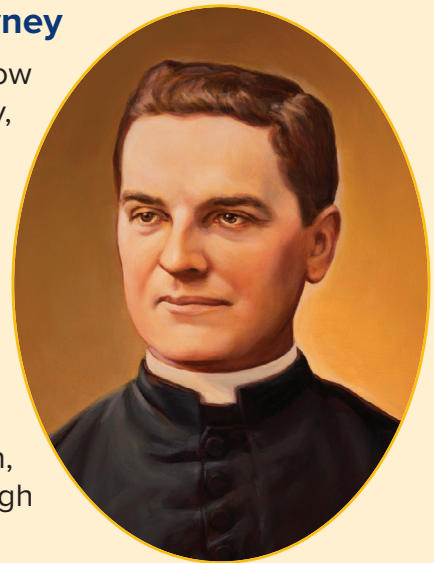
1. Are there children suffering in your local community, or a community nearby? What can you or your KofC council do to help them?
2. Economic mobility is an attractive promise America offers to people. What are the benefits to Catholics of such economic mobility? What are the dangers?
3. What responsibilities do Catholics have toward the poor? Why? When you answer this question it is helpful to think more of the poor in or near your local community before thinking of the more distant poor.
4. How can you grow in your love for the poor?
5. Though it is difficult to consider, it is important to ask yourself, "In the case of my own untimely death, will my loved ones have the material resources they need?" What do you think about your answer? It is perfectly acceptable to keep your answers to these questions to yourself if you prefer not to share them.

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to voice your special intentions and listen to the intentions of your brothers, and then pray for your brothers' intentions.

Prayer for the Canonization of Blessed Michael McGivney

God, our Father, protector of the poor and defender of the widow and orphan, you called your priest, Blessed Michael McGivney, to be an apostle of Christian family life and to lead the young to the generous service of their neighbor. Through the example of his life and virtue, may we follow your Son, Jesus Christ, more closely, fulfilling his commandment of charity and building up his Body which is the Church. Let the inspiration of your servant prompt us to greater confidence in your love so that we may continue his work of caring for the needy and the outcast. We humbly ask that you glorify Blessed Michael McGivney on earth according to the design of your holy will. Through his intercession, grant the favor I now present (here make your request). Through Christ our Lord. Amen.





Session Five: Companion to the Imprisoned

Prayer: The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” Matthew 5:9 RSVCE

Read: Father McGivney faced his “most trying ordeal” with a prisoner on death row.

James “Chip” Smith was a member of a local gang who after a drinking spree took to the streets of Ansonia with his gun. When the police chief, Daniel Hayes, found him, Chip shot him as they wrestled.

Daniel Hayes died, and Chip Smith was sentenced to the gallows.

Father McGivney was no stranger to prison. He regularly visited incarcerated criminals to show them the love of Christ. He went to Chip Smith and offered him the mercy of God, and Chip Smith accepted. Over the course of a year, Father McGivney counseled and accompanied Chip Smith up to the very day of his execution.

Shortly before the execution, Father McGivney spoke: “To me, this duty comes with almost a crushing weight. If I could consistently with my duty be far away from here next Friday I should escape perhaps the most trying ordeal of my life, but this sad duty is placed my way by providence and must be fulfilled. If we receive your prayers, Mr. Smith and I shall be sustained by the supreme power in the hour of our great trial.”⁷

The day before his execution, Chip Smith’s mother came to visit him for the last time. Chip tried to comfort her, telling her not to cry and that he was ready for death because he was reconciled with God. Witnessing that scene, Father McGivney broke down, but still stayed with Chip until he fell asleep, and walked with him to the gallows the next day.

Father McGivney had given Chip Smith a pin made to resemble the Sacred Heart of Jesus. After Smith died, it was discovered he had been wearing the pin, directly above his heart. Though he had few other possessions, Chip Smith did write a will, and he left Father McGivney one thing: a plant that was blossoming in his cell.

How fitting that, after the priest tended so well to his heart and soul, Chip Smith left to Father McGivney a flower in bloom.

⁷ “High Mass Last Sunday,” *New Haven Palladium*, Aug. 28, 1882, p. 1.



For Discussion

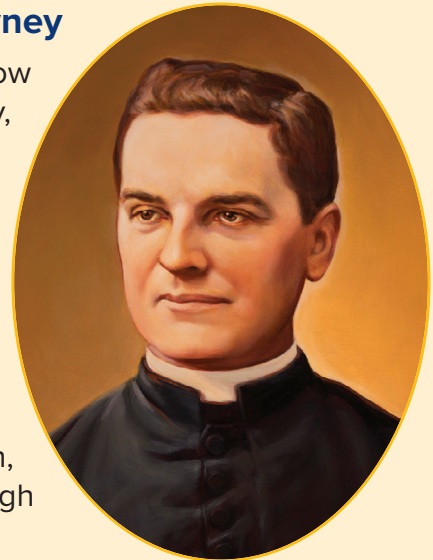
1. What do you think can cause young men to act as Chip Smith did before his conversion? What can you do to help young men who are at risk of engaging in dangerous and/or self-destructive behavior?
2. What do you think motivated Blessed Michael McGivney to minister to prisoners, particularly Chip Smith?
3. What did Chip Smith mean when he told his mother he was ready for death because he was reconciled with God? Why is reconciliation with God before death so important?
4. What virtues did Blessed Michael McGivney need in order to minister so effectively to Chip Smith?
5. What are you doing to bring God's mercy to the imprisoned and others often forgotten by our society?

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to voice your special intentions and listen to the intentions of your brothers, and then pray for your brothers' intentions.

Prayer for the Canonization of Blessed Michael McGivney

God, our Father, protector of the poor and defender of the widow and orphan, you called your priest, Blessed Michael McGivney, to be an apostle of Christian family life and to lead the young to the generous service of their neighbor. Through the example of his life and virtue, may we follow your Son, Jesus Christ, more closely, fulfilling his commandment of charity and building up his Body which is the Church. Let the inspiration of your servant prompt us to greater confidence in your love so that we may continue his work of caring for the needy and the outcast. We humbly ask that you glorify Blessed Michael McGivney on earth according to the design of your holy will. Through his intercession, grant the favor I now present (here make your request). Through Christ our Lord. Amen.





Session Six: Founder of the Knights of Columbus

Prayer: The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

“Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.” Proverbs 27:17 RSVCE

Read: Men were not going to church, and Father McGivney wanted to change that.

He had children put on plays that educated audiences about the faith. He initiated parish celebrations designed to foster good cheer and good will. He promoted baseball leagues to bring men together for healthy competition and recreation.

His efforts were not in vain: “Father McGivney’s influence over men was something extraordinary. Young men particularly were attracted to him and hung upon his words with an eagerness which he himself often wondered at; hundreds petitioned for the light of his counseling and sent others too, to share his advice.”⁸

But Father McGivney was not content with words alone. He wanted men to take action to address the plight of poor and working-class Catholic families.

On October 2, 1881, at the invitation of Father McGivney, the Catholic “young go-ahead men of New Haven” met in the basement of St. Mary’s Church to begin the work that would culminate on March 29, 1882, with the official founding of the Knights of Columbus.

In Father McGivney’s own words, the primary purpose of the Order was “to prevent people from entering Secret Societies, by offering the same, if not better, advantages to our members. Secondly, to unite the men of our Faith throughout the diocese of Hartford, that we may thereby gain strength to aid each other in time of sickness; to provide for decent burial, and to render pecuniary assistance to the families of deceased members.”⁹

But other factors may have influenced Father McGivney, too. Some of the first Knights were veterans of the Civil War. Places like Antietam and Gettysburg were not just historical landmarks to them; they were where these men lost neighbors, friends, and brothers. It would have been easy to let anger over those losses turn to hatred and a desire for vengeance. But Father McGivney, perhaps inspired in part by the words of Abraham Lincoln at his second inaugural – “with malice towards none, with charity for all” – called the first Knights to be dedicated to the principles of charity and unity. After being broken by war, charity and unity were exactly what America needed.

Father McGivney’s genius was his insistence that laymen take up the leadership of the Order, not as inferiors of but as partners with their priests. Due to that key insight, which anticipated a similar theme of the Second Vatican Council by nearly a century, the Knights of Columbus flourished. The Order was a combination of insurance endeavor, charity, and faith-based fraternal organization. It transformed strangers into friends, and friends into brothers. And it grew more quickly than even Father McGivney could have foreseen.

God called men to charity, unity, and fraternity through Father McGivney; that call has echoed through the generations and still can be heard today.

⁸ Father Joseph Daley

⁹ Father Michael McGivney, letter to Connecticut parish priests, April 1882



For Discussion

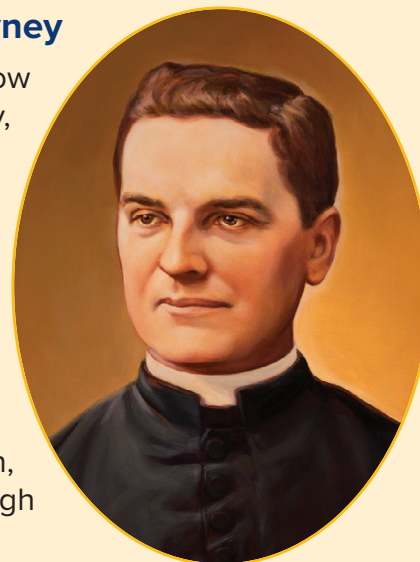
1. Blessed Michael McGivney tried many creative ways to attract men to Mass. What are some of the creative methods you've seen used to attract men to Mass? How would you rate their effectiveness? Why?
2. Blessed Michael McGivney was a leader of men. What qualities does a leader need? Why?
3. In addition to being a leader, Blessed Michael McGivney was also a mentor to men. What qualities does a mentor need? Try to focus on qualities that make a great mentor rather than qualities that are common to both leaders and mentors, if possible.
4. The secret societies Father McGivney referenced were anti-Catholic, taught anti-Christian doctrines, and functioned as replacement religions for some men. Given this context, it is clear that, from the beginning, Father McGivney intended for the Order to help strengthen Catholic men in their faith. Why do you think this was important to Father McGivney? Is it still important today? In your opinion, how can the Order help to strengthen men in their Catholic faith?
5. Father McGivney wanted members to have "strength to aid each other" when the need arises. He provides very practical examples of the kinds of needs that were critical to meet in his time. What practical needs arise today that the Order can address? Are there needs in your community that are going unmet? What are they? What can you do to help?
6. Charity and Unity were the two original principles of the Knights of Columbus. How might those principles have been a response to the Civil War? How can those principles be applied to the circumstances in your country today?
7. Fraternity was added as a third fundamental principle of our Order soon after its founding. What is Fraternity? How do men experience Fraternity in modern society? Do they experience it at all? What do you think Fraternity looked like in Father McGivney's day?
8. How much do you know about the Order's insurance work and charitable efforts? How do you think those efforts are similar to the way things were at the Order's founding? How do you think they have changed? What do you think that change means for the Order?
9. Based on what is written in the reading above, how would you sum up the purpose of the Knights of Columbus? How can you help fulfill that purpose today?*

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to voice your special intentions and listen to the intentions of your brothers, and then pray for your brothers' intentions.

Prayer for the Canonization of Blessed Michael McGivney

God, our Father, protector of the poor and defender of the widow and orphan, you called your priest, Blessed Michael McGivney, to be an apostle of Christian family life and to lead the young to the generous service of their neighbor. Through the example of his life and virtue, may we follow your Son, Jesus Christ, more closely, fulfilling his commandment of charity and building up his Body which is the Church. Let the inspiration of your servant prompt us to greater confidence in your love so that we may continue his work of caring for the needy and the outcast. We humbly ask that you glorify Blessed Michael McGivney on earth according to the design of your holy will. Through his intercession, grant the favor I now present (here make your request). Through Christ our Lord. Amen.



* Note for facilitators: with the permission of the members of your group, please record answers to this question and send them to Cor@kofc.org.



Session Seven: Zealous Priest of Christ

Prayer: The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed; for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9 RSVCE

Read: Father McGivney knew that nothing worth doing would come easily.

Though the Knights of Columbus would eventually spread throughout the world, that growth was by no means a certainty. Infighting among the first Brother Knights made the early years of the Order difficult. Skepticism from Father McGivney’s brother priests threatened to confine the Knights to St. Mary’s. And his duties as a parish priest did not cease.

The challenges Father McGivney encountered were many:

- Anti-Catholic and Anti-Irish discrimination
- Media vilification of Roman Catholic clergy
- Few men attending Mass
- The poverty of so many of his parishioners
- Rampant, deadly illness
- The strains of ministry beyond the bounds of the parish
- Lack of time off
- Managing parish finances
- The early difficulties faced by the Knights of Columbus
- The weak health and eventual death of the pastor of St. Mary’s

Though this list is far from exhaustive, Father McGivney overcame these and other challenges with charity, leadership, and composure:

“I saw him but once and yet I remember his pale, beautiful face as if I saw it only yesterday; it was ‘a priest’s face,’ and that explains everything. It was a face of wonderful repose; there was nothing harsh in that countenance, although there was everything that was strong; there was nothing sordid, nothing mercenary, nothing of the politician, nothing of the axe-grinder. Guile and ambition were as far from him as from heaven. To meet him was at once to trust him[.]”¹⁰

It was this grace under pressure that enabled him to bring the love of Christ so effectively to so many. He even inspired the conversion of Alida Harwood, the daughter of a prominent Episcopal minister in New Haven. When she lay dying of malaria at age 25, it was Father McGivney she called for, and, after receiving permission from her father, he was by her side to offer the prayers of the Catholic Church.

Father McGivney met every challenge. He tirelessly gave his all in the face of discouragement, discrimination, and even death.

¹⁰ Father Joseph G. Daley, June 1900 issue of the *Columbiad*, reprinted as “The Personality of Father McGivney,” *Columbia*, August 2017



For Discussion

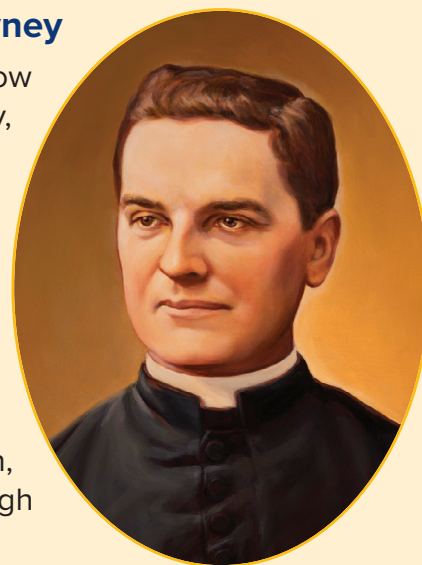
1. What challenges have you faced in your life? How are they similar to the ones faced by Blessed Michael McGivney? How are they different?
2. Which of Blessed Michael McGivney's challenges do you think were the most difficult? Why?
3. "It was a face of wonderful repose;" what does that mean to you? What does it mean to have such repose? How much repose is in your life?
4. What challenges are the priests you know facing? How can you help them?
5. What challenges is your KofC council facing? How can it overcome these challenges to fulfill Blessed Michael McGivney's vision?
6. The way Blessed Michael McGivney lived and fulfilled his ministry drew even someone of Alida Harwood's background to become open to the Catholic faith. Is the way you live – your demeanor, your habits, your speech, etc. – attracting people to the faith? Are there concrete changes you can make in the way you live that would better draw people to Christ and His Church?

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to voice your special intentions and listen to the intentions of your brothers, and then pray for your brothers' intentions.

Prayer for the Canonization of Blessed Michael McGivney

God, our Father, protector of the poor and defender of the widow and orphan, you called your priest, Blessed Michael McGivney, to be an apostle of Christian family life and to lead the young to the generous service of their neighbor. Through the example of his life and virtue, may we follow your Son, Jesus Christ, more closely, fulfilling his commandment of charity and building up his Body which is the Church. Let the inspiration of your servant prompt us to greater confidence in your love so that we may continue his work of caring for the needy and the outcast. We humbly ask that you glorify Blessed Michael McGivney on earth according to the design of your holy will. Through his intercession, grant the favor I now present (here make your request). Through Christ our Lord. Amen.





Session 8: Devoted Parish Priest

Prayer: The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

“Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13 RSVCE

Read: During the 12-plus years Father McGivney was a priest, 70 of the 83 priests of the Diocese of Hartford died.

That fact helps explain how Father McGivney lived. “He ordinarily walked fast,” friends recalled, with “strength of purpose ... he held his head straight like a leader, his eyes very determined.” He served his parishioners at St. Mary’s with zeal, but extended his concern to everyone he encountered, no matter who they were: “children actually loved him; and the very old people of the neighborhood, whom he hunted up and who got part of his time even on busiest days, called him a positive saint and meant it.”¹¹

It is no wonder that the people of St. Mary’s reacted as they did when they learned he was to be transferred to Saint Thomas Church in Thomaston, Connecticut:

“During the farewell address frequent sobs could be heard and at the close there was scarcely a dry eye in the congregation. Father McGivney was deeply affected and frequently the tears coursed down his cheeks [...]. At the conclusion of the services hundreds of the congregation sought the beloved pastor to bid him farewell. Strong men unaccustomed to tears cried like children when they clasped hands with him.”¹²

He did not slow down when he left St. Mary’s, and eventually his pace of life strained him. In 1890, during a worldwide pandemic, Father McGivney fell ill. He sensed what was coming, assured his parishioners of his prayers, and received last rites.

He died on August 14, 1890. It was two days after his 38th birthday, and the eve of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The cause of death was complications from infection that led to pneumonia and tuberculosis.

Since he died during a pandemic, nearly all his belongings were burned. But 92 years later, three items were discovered when Father McGivney’s earthly remains were moved to St. Mary’s Church. There were two scapulars, one of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and the other the white scapular of St. Dominic, and an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Sacred Heart showed his love of Christ and His burning love for souls that Father McGivney shared. The scapulars spoke of Father McGivney’s devotion to the Blessed Mother and his friendship with the Order of Preachers, also known as the Dominicans. With the Knights of Columbus, the Dominicans honored Father McGivney’s legacy for decades and worked tirelessly to preserve his memory.

Indeed, it was thanks to this great work of preservation that Father McGivney began his journey toward sainthood.

¹¹ Father Joseph G. Daley, June 1900 issue of the *Columbiad*, reprinted as “The Personality of Father McGivney,” *Columbia*, August 2017

¹² New Haven Morning News – report on Father McGivney’s last sermon as he departed St. Mary’s



For Discussion

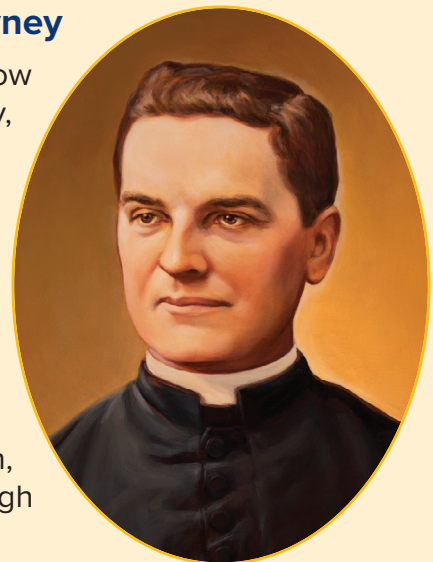
1. Father McGivney was loved by children and made it a point to visit the elderly. What does that say about his character? Why? What does our society's treatment of its youngest and oldest members say about its character? How do you treat children and the elderly?
2. It is evident from the reaction of his parishioners to his departure from St. Mary's that Father McGivney was a beloved priest. Are there "beloved" priests you remember who have had a significant positive impact on your life? What did they do that helped you become a better man and draw closer to the Lord? Do you thank God for these priests?
3. We read that "strong men unaccustomed to tears" wept openly when Father McGivney left St. Mary's. This fact speaks to the depth of the fraternity, rooted in Christ, Father McGivney brought into being at his parish. How can you build such fraternity with other Catholic men? With your parish priests?
4. Blessed Michael McGivney's scapulars testify to his devotion to the Blessed Mother. What do you know about devotions to the Blessed Mother? Do you practice any? What similarities are there between Blessed Michael McGivney and the Blessed Mother?
5. What do you know about the Dominicans? Other religious orders? If your son, other male relative, or male friend who was free to do so wanted to become a religious order priest, what would you say? Why?
6. The Knights of Columbus has promoted devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus with its pilgrim icon program. What do you know about the Sacred Heart, which draws us closer to the divine and human natures of Jesus? Are you more comfortable with seeing Jesus as divine or human, or both?

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to voice your special intentions and listen to the intentions of your brothers, and then pray for your brothers' intentions.

Prayer for the Canonization of Blessed Michael McGivney

God, our Father, protector of the poor and defender of the widow and orphan, you called your priest, Blessed Michael McGivney, to be an apostle of Christian family life and to lead the young to the generous service of their neighbor. Through the example of his life and virtue, may we follow your Son, Jesus Christ, more closely, fulfilling his commandment of charity and building up his Body which is the Church. Let the inspiration of your servant prompt us to greater confidence in your love so that we may continue his work of caring for the needy and the outcast. We humbly ask that you glorify Blessed Michael McGivney on earth according to the design of your holy will. Through his intercession, grant the favor I now present (here make your request). Through Christ our Lord. Amen.





Session Nine: Champion of the Gospel of Life

Prayer: The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

“Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.” Matthew 5:8 RSCVE

Read: It takes a miracle for a candidate for sainthood to earn the title, “Blessed,” and that’s just what God performed through the intercession of Father McGivney.

In 2014, Michelle and Daniel Schachle received devastating news about their unborn son. “I’ve been doing this for 30 years and I’ve never seen anybody survive,” said the doctor, “to have fetal hydrops and a chromosomal diagnosis together, it’s over.” The doctor suggested that terminating the pregnancy was the best solution. “It made me mad,” recalled Daniel. “My job as a dad is to protect my children, not kill them.”

When the couple was left alone, Daniel said, “Father McGivney needs a miracle. I just prayed that if Father McGivney saves him, I’m naming him Michael.”

“If there was a baby Father McGivney would help, this would be the one,” he explained. “I knew that McGivney was the oldest of 13 children. I had the feeling that he liked us, too.” Out of 13 McGivney children, six died before adulthood. The Schachle family had 12 kids and wanted to save the 13th, though modern medicine said there was no hope. After continual prayers asking the intercession of Father McGivney and a pilgrimage to Fatima, they received a second ultrasound. When the technician showed them the picture, the lethal fluid buildup had disappeared.

Michael “Mikey” McGivney Schachle was born on May 15, 2015.

On May 27, 2020, after extensive medical and theological review, Pope Francis recognized this cure as an event not explainable by medical science. This miracle was attributed to the intercession of Father McGivney, paving the way for his beatification on October 31, 2020.

Blessed Michael McGivney needs another miracle confirmed by the Vatican to be named a saint. Favors received from his intercession are constantly reported, and those reports should inspire us to seek his aid. Asking him to intercede on our behalf for any and all requests pertaining to our families is especially appropriate.

Blessed Michael McGivney, pray for us!



For Discussion

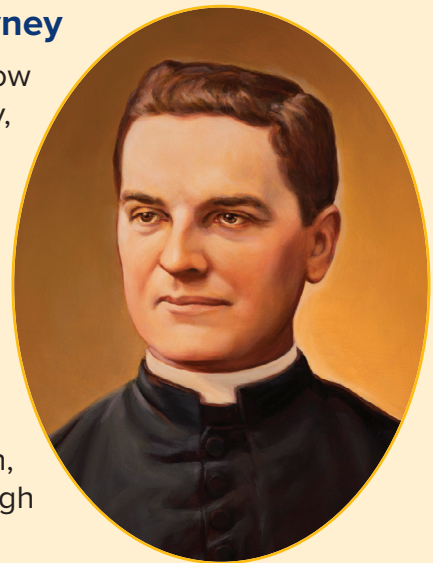
1. Which saints do you turn to for intercession? Though he is one step from official sainthood, do you ask Blessed Michael McGivney for his intercession? How can Brother Knights increase their devotion to the saints in general and to Father McGivney in particular?
2. What do you think about the miraculous healing of Mikey Schachle? Why?
3. Mikey Schachle was cured of fetal hydrops and is a healthy and joyful boy today. It is worth considering that Mikey's chromosomal abnormality remained after the miraculous cure of the fetal hydrops. Many children diagnosed in utero with chromosomal abnormalities are not allowed to be born. What might Father McGivney be telling us through this miracle and the beautiful life of Mikey Schachle?
4. What can you, your Brother Knights, and your parish do to welcome the life God sends?
5. What kind of miracle do you think would inspire more people to turn (or return) to Catholicism today? Why?

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to voice your special intentions and listen to the intentions of your brothers, and then pray for your brothers' intentions.

Prayer for the Canonization of Blessed Michael McGivney

God, our Father, protector of the poor and defender of the widow and orphan, you called your priest, Blessed Michael McGivney, to be an apostle of Christian family life and to lead the young to the generous service of their neighbor. Through the example of his life and virtue, may we follow your Son, Jesus Christ, more closely, fulfilling his commandment of charity and building up his Body which is the Church. Let the inspiration of your servant prompt us to greater confidence in your love so that we may continue his work of caring for the needy and the outcast. We humbly ask that you glorify Blessed Michael McGivney on earth according to the design of your holy will. Through his intercession, grant the favor I now present (here make your request). Through Christ our Lord. Amen.





Session Ten: Apostle of Christian Family Life

Prayer: The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20 RSVCE

Read: We need Blessed Michael McGivney now more than ever. Supreme Knight Patrick Kelly summarizes the situation for us:

“When Blessed Michael McGivney founded the Order 141 years ago, he didn’t envision his Knights simply as helpful men in the community, but rather as men who embraced a real responsibility — alongside their priests — to advance the mission of the Church. This is one reason Father McGivney entrusted the Order’s leadership to laymen. [...]

“Our cultural circumstances have changed. Christianity is no longer the formative basis of our society that it once was, which is evident in the large number of people who have left the faith or have no faith at all. If the Church is to thrive, each and every baptized Catholic — bishops and priests, religious, catechists, moms and dads — must engage actively in our shared responsibility to evangelize.

In other words, our co-responsibility for the mission of the Church is more vital than ever.

“On the individual level, taking on this responsibility can begin with Christ-centered friendships — friendships that seek to build up and challenge each other to something greater. It can involve taking the chance to share your faith with someone, explaining what your faith means to you and why you’re Catholic. And it includes the realization that **each of us is personally called to holiness, and then making the decision that I am going to do something about that.**”¹³

Blessed Michael McGivney demonstrated a model of Christian charity and holiness that was grounded in the realities of his life as a parish priest. We can strive to imitate his virtues as we live and worship in our parishes today.

But that was not all he left to us. He also gave us a legacy of collaboration between clergy and laity. This legacy invites lay men to come together as brothers and empowers them to lead their families and communities in works of charity and the pursuit of holiness, always in unity and fraternity with their priests.

This legacy is both a comfort and challenge to us. It is a comfort because it gives us a sure path to follow, walked by Blessed Michael McGivney himself, in our efforts to spread the Gospel. It is a challenge because following in Blessed Michael McGivney’s footsteps as he followed Christ is no easy task.

But we were made to meet the challenges of the modern day. With Blessed Michael McGivney interceding for us, Christ bestowing His grace upon us, and our brothers beside us, we can become the men — the saints — God is calling us to be.

¹³ Supreme Knight Patrick Kelly, “Our Shared Responsibility,” *Columbia*, June 2023 (emphases added)



For Discussion

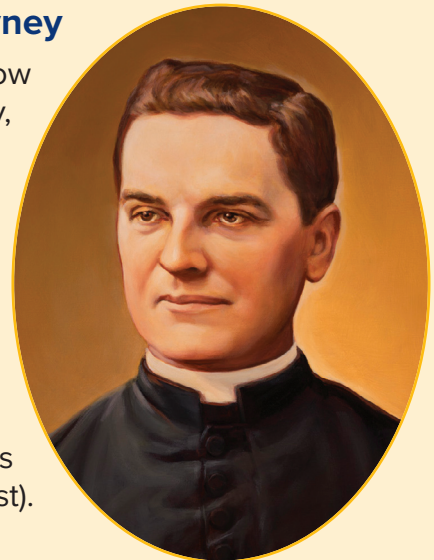
1. We live in a culture that is often indifferent toward and sometimes hostile to Catholic moral values and faith itself. What do you think of Supreme Knight Kelly's assessment of the current cultural circumstances in which we find ourselves? What, if anything, is the new "formative basis of our society," and how does it compare to Catholicism? How have you been navigating the current "cultural circumstances" in the different parts of your life?
2. Supreme Knight Kelly describes what Father McGivney envisioned for Catholic men. How would you express Father McGivney's vision in your own words based on what you currently know about him?
3. The mission of the Church is to bring the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ to everyone. Do you see it as your mission? How do you participate in this mission? What might God be calling you to do in the specific circumstances of your life to further this mission?
4. What do you think "co-responsibility" for the Church's mission looks like in your life? In your parish? What could your parish KofC council do to be co-responsible for the Church's mission?
5. How can you have Christ-centered friendships? Are your friendships Christ-centered?
6. Now that we have reached the end of these sessions, do you feel closer to Blessed Michael McGivney? What were some of the most important things you learned about him? If you were telling others his story, on which parts would you focus? Why?

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to voice your special intentions and listen to the intentions of your brothers, and then pray for your brothers' intentions.

Prayer for the Canonization of Blessed Michael McGivney

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How to Lead a Small Group Session

A small group session is an opportunity for a group to gather and discuss their thoughts, questions, and takeaways from a shared conversation that begins and ends with prayer. The task of a small group leader is to facilitate and direct the conversation, elicit contributions from all willing participants, resolve any conflicts that may arise, and summarize what is discussed.

As a small group leader, you are not asked to teach, but to make sure the conversation stays focused and respectful and includes all participants.

A small group is successful when there is meaningful discussion that helps people connect with each other and apply the concepts and themes to their daily life. You do not have to cover 100 percent of the material or questions. This is a framework for you to build upon that best meets the needs of the group you are leading.

General Tips to Lead a Small Group Session

Review and reflect before the session. As the small group discussion leader, make sure you review and reflect on the reading/video ahead of the session to familiarize yourself with the content.

Bring pens and paper. Consider providing paper and writing implements for the participants.

Ask questions that invite the participants to reflect on their experience. These small groups are designed for reflection, not a quiz on the content. Avoid yes-or-no questions unless you have a thought-provoking follow-up question. Make it comfortable for people to share their personal stories, but don't try to force them to do so.

Listen well. To facilitate a discussion, a leader must understand what everyone is saying. Sometimes it is easy to begin formulating your own response while another person is speaking, but that can compromise how well you are listening.

Rephrase, repeat, summarize, clarify. Together with listening skills, use these techniques to ensure each contribution to the discussion is heard and understood. Sometimes rephrasing a participant's idea to a sentence or two will help others in the room understand his or her contribution. Summarizing the course of the discussion occasionally will also help ensure that everyone processes what has been said as a group and encourage them to take the discussion to the next level.

Include all participants. In any group discussion, some members will speak up willingly, perhaps even dominating the conversation, while others will tend to be quiet. Not everyone processes information the same way or at the same speed. Some may need you to encourage them to share. Respect those who take time to process and who may not be as inclined to share.

Adapt the questions. Be aware throughout the small group discussion that the people in the group might be in diverse vocations or different stages in their lives. In such instances, adapt the question or encourage the participants to adapt their reflections accordingly.

Return to questions later if the answer is not known. If a particular question arises in a session involving Church teaching and the correct answer is not known, you can simply state you will ask your chaplain or pastor, or look to the Catechism, for clarification and share the answer during the next session.

Keep emotional discipline and mediate conflict. Some topics can be sensitive, so be prepared to diffuse anger and redirect the discussion in a constructive way. Diffuse the situation and help the disputing members find common ground or principles. If necessary, simply table the issue that is causing the tensions and move along to a new topic.



Know when it's time to advance the discussion. Moving a discussion forward too soon can lead to missing some good observations or contributions, but keeping a discussion going on too long can make the session boring or repetitive. Be mindful of how the discussion is progressing; when it seems to stall, it's time to move it forward.

Seek help when necessary. Sometimes, questions and situations occur that require outside assistance. A participant might have a particularly difficult question, require fraternal correction, or argue against Church teaching. In situations like this, it is best to talk to the participant out of the group setting. Most importantly, remember that it is best to reach out to your pastor for help in a situation you are uncomfortable with.

End with an invitation. If there are more group sessions to come, re-invite the members of the group and remind them of the date and time. These personal invitations offer the small group another opportunity to develop their faith. An invitation is especially important following your last small group.

The Three Elements of Cor

PRAYER - LIFTING OUR HEARTS AND MINDS TO GOD

Through prayer, we encounter Christ and animate our faith and relationship with him. We must first know Jesus and receive from him before we can share him with our families and communities.

Shared time in prayer will help men focus their minds and hearts on God and give depth and life to formation and fraternal brotherhood. Like all relationships, prayer requires commitment and consistency. Consider praying the rosary or spending time in Eucharistic Adoration.

FORMATION - BECOMING LIKE CHRIST

As disciples of Christ, the goal of Catholic formation is to become like Christ, taking on his character and virtue, his life of prayer, and his mission. He is the model of holiness.

Formation is life long and requires an intentional commitment. Alongside prayer, formation helps increase our knowledge and love of God and of neighbor. Intentional and structured times of formation help direct fraternity toward the shared pursuit of Christ, of holiness, and a life of faith and missionary discipleship. Formation requires the animation of prayer and the accountability of fraternity.

FRATERNITY - CENTERING BROTHERHOOD ON CHRIST

Fraternity is not just friendship or hanging out, it is a true brotherhood centered on Christ. This type of brotherhood has depth and trust, where men sharpen one another and accompany each other as disciples of Christ.

Brotherhood made up of Christ-centered friendships is necessary for men to grow in holiness, as leaders, and as missionary disciples. Like prayer and formation, fraternity must be intentional, requires proximity and consistency, and the shared mission of evangelization.



