

MEMORANDUM

To: Steve Koach, PSD, FDM, Programs Director
From: Deacon John Cooper
Date: July 11, 2020
Re: Faith Director Report

Steve:

I am deeply honored and humbled to have the opportunity to serve the Knights of Columbus at the state level as Faith Director. I hope and pray that my inexperience does not prove to be an impediment to your goals and expectations for Faith Programs in the 2020-2021 year. Please pray for me. I look forward to working with you and meeting you when it is safe to do so. Please do not hesitate to call me (205-930-5108 – office), e-mail me (jcooper@sirrote.com) or text me (205-960-5726).

Report

With all of the uncertainty, fear and even despair many are facing, we are all praying for an end to this pandemic and its adverse social, financial, psychological and spiritual effects, for an end to racial injustice of all types, for an end to the bitter and sometimes violent divisions in our nation and for healing.

As Catholics, we are called to take an active part in building a strong parish, a strong Church and a strong community. Our Knights of Columbus councils are perfectly positioned to be the leading organization within our parishes and communities to respond to that call.

As the COVID-19 Pandemic continues and even worsens, our duty is to lead our families, protect our parishes, and serve our communities. Supreme Knight Carl Anderson has challenged us to take this moment as an opportunity to “deepen our commitment to the very principles which define us: charity, unity and fraternity.”

To provide the necessary foundation for this work, we need to encourage all of us to increase our faith. Faith is a supernatural gift from God, which is infused in us by the Holy Spirit and enables us to respond to God’s initiative in calling us and bringing us to Him. It encourages us to strive for holiness and to love and work for the good of our neighbor.

Many of our Churches are beginning to reopen. This is great news because it's Our Lord's Body and Blood in the Eucharist that nourishes our souls and sustains us in times of need! St. Thomas Aquinas' Prayer After Holy Communion reminds us of the powerful effects of receiving the Blessed Sacrament:

I pray that this Holy Communion be not a condemnation to punishment for me, but a saving plea for forgiveness. May it be to me the armor of faith and the shield of good will.

May it cancel my faults, destroy all lustful desires, increase charity and patience, humility and obedience and all the virtues, may it be a firm defense against the snares of all my enemies, both visible and invisible, the complete calming of my impulses, both of the flesh and of the spirit, a firm adherence to You, the one true God, and the joyful completion of my life's course.

I pray too that You will deign to bring me, a sinner, to that ineffable banquet where You with Your Son and the Holy Spirit, are to your Saints true light, fulfilment of desires, eternal joy, consummate delight, and perfect happiness. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let's be thankful that we have the opportunity again to receive the Eucharist and encourage others who are able to attend Mass and benefit from this precious gift from Our Lord!

Unfortunately, the safeguards our civic and Church leaders have encouraged or required in order to resume Mass are creating further divisions in our Church. Many object to wearing a mask and criticize other measures being taken, which is sad because it creates unnecessary stress in an already stressful environment.

Satan would love nothing more than to divide our parishes and our Church over the issue of wearing a mask.

I am troubled that the mask has become such a divisive symbol. I recognize that there are conflicting voices of "expertise," but for Christians, it's important to consider what our faith calls us to with regard to considering the feelings of others and listening to our leaders. Shouldn't our view of wearing a mask be shaped more by our Christian identity than anything else? I personally hate wearing a mask. It's too hot, it fogs my glasses, it makes me feel uncomfortable, it's more difficult to breathe, and I don't know if it really helps. However, my civic leaders, my pastor and my wife have asked me to wear one, so I'm going to wear one. It is the charitable thing to do.

Charity is at the heart of our work and our faith. We are called to love our neighbors and isn't wearing a mask—though inconvenient—a relatively easy way to practice neighborly love. There

is no true love without sacrifice. Shouldn't we err on the side of more protective measures rather than less, for the sake of love of neighbor?

In this time of unprecedented challenges, shouldn't we show our civic and religious leaders mercy? Shouldn't we support our pastors and defend them against criticism, giving them the benefit of the doubt—honoring and respecting their authority and believing that they are trying to do their best. If our pastor has mandated masks for Mass, shouldn't we obey and happily wear one—practicing humility? In our Gospel last Sunday, Jesus says to learn from Him because He is meek and humble of heart. Aren't we called to imitate Christ?

Our witness as Christians is difficult in the best of times, and these are certainly not the best of times. When we sacrifice our personal desires, our personal beliefs, our personal comfort, and our personal freedoms out of love of neighbor, we are practicing charity — the first and guiding principle of the Knights. We Knights should take the lead in demonstrating our love of neighbor and support for our obedience.

Faith Through Prayer.

It is important that Alabama Knights of Columbus members have many opportunities to grow in our faith so that we can be the husband, father, grandfather and Catholic leader that God intends us to be. Our local parishes and our communities need us now more than ever!

Growing in faith begins with prayer!

Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God. — **St. John Damascene**

The highest good is prayer and conversation with God, because it means that we are in God's company and in union with Him. Prayer, at its most basic, is *engaging in conversation with God*. It is the desire for God, an indescribable devotion, not given by man but brought about by God's grace. — **St. John Chrysostom** (emphasis added)

Four things we should bring to our prayer life: Faith, Trust, Humility and Perseverance.

Faith and Trust:

Matthew 21:22: "Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive."

Proverbs 3:5-6: Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Humility:

James 4:10: "Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you."

Luke 18:14: "I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Perseverance:

Luke 18:1 "Then he told them a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary."

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18: "Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus."

The Four Stages of One's Prayer Life – Derived from the book Armchair Mystic by Father Mark Thibodeaux

Stage One – Talking at God (This is how we first learned to pray.)

Stage Two – Talking to God (This is where many of us still are in prayer.)

Stage Three – Listening to God (Conversations are two-way discussions. We have to listen to God. This requires silence, which is why Adoration is so important!)

Stage Four – Being with God (contemplative prayer)

Prayer has to be a priority in our lives, like eating and sleeping. This is not an exaggeration! All of the saints taught and lived this! Schedule a time for prayer each and every day. Even if the time for prayer is brief, see it as the high point of our day: it's the time when we can adore God with all of our heart and strength.

Opportunities for Prayer:

- **The Rosary.** Pray the Rosary daily, meditating on the mysteries for the day. (see suggested ways to pray the Rosary at <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/rosaries/index.cfm>).

Monday & Saturday	Joyful Mysteries
Tuesday & Friday	Sorrowful Mysteries
Wednesday & Sunday	Glorious Mysteries
Thursday	Luminous Mysteries

- Promote devotion to the **Rosary** in our families and parishes by scheduling regular rosary prayer services on any day of the week at any time of the year. The KOC

guidelines can be found here: <http://www.kofc.org/en/resources/faith-in-action-programs/faith/rosary-program/10600-rosary-program-guidesheet.pdf>

- Pray the **Novena for the Pandemic** from Pope Francis, which was suggested in March but can be prayed at any time. You can find it here: <http://www.kofc.org/en/news-room/articles/novena-prayer-for-protection>
- Pray the **Novena For National Unity & an End to Racism**, which was suggested in June but can be prayed at any time. You can find it here: <http://www.kofc.org/en/resources/communications/national-unity-novena.pdf>
- Encourage a deep personal encounter with God through a regularly scheduled Holy Hour of **Eucharistic Adoration**. For more information, visit: <http://www.kofc.org/en/resources/faith-in-action-programs/faith/holy-hour/10597-holy-hour-guidesheet.pdf>
- Pray the **Divine Mercy Chaplet**, which can be seen/prayed daily on www.ewtn.com.
- **Lectio Divina** or spiritual reading of Sacred Scripture: information can be found at: <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/meditations/index.cfm>
- Pray **Morning and Evening Prayer** from Liturgy of the Hours, also known as the Divine Office, which is the daily prayer of the Church.
- **Pray as a council** online through various online meeting options...GotoMeeting, Google Hangouts, Zoom, etc.
- **Pray in small groups** using Sacred Scripture, the Rosary or other Catholic devotion.
- Pray the attached four **daily prayers** for our parish, our pastor (and all priests), for humility and for the KOC. I give these to all members of our council and it is in the new member materials and orientation packet that we provide to new members.

Refund Support for Vocations Program

Then Knights of Columbus are committed to providing moral, financial and spiritual support to our future priests and religious at all stages of their formation. Consider adopting a seminarian or religious aspirant and sponsor programs through the council and the parish to raise funds to support them. They need our support and prayers. For more information, visit www.kofc.org/rsvp

Spiritual Reflection

Religious retreats are rejuvenating spiritual events that often leave a lasting impact on participants' relationship to their faith. Councils or men of the parish could organize or attend a retreat in their area. In the difficult times we now face, there are plenty of opportunities to

attend virtually a retreat or other type of spiritual reflection. This program is satisfied if at least 10 men or 10% of your council, whichever is fewer, attend a day-long retreat or reflection.

Examples:

2020 Virtual Catholic Men's Conference April 25, 2020

Theology of the Body Virtual Conference May 8-10

Ask a Priest or Deacon to lead a virtual retreat for your council. Even if most of the retreat is virtual, the program could be structured to include Mass and Reconciliation.

A wonderful opportunity for a day of spiritual reflection in North Alabama is a day-long pilgrimage to the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Hanceville. The pilgrimage includes a spiritual reflection, Mass, Reconciliation, a tour of the St. John Paul II Eucharistic Center, Rosary and Divine Mercy chaplet. For information, please visit <https://olamshrine.com/visit/#grouppilgrimage>.

Another terrific spiritual reflection opportunity in Birmingham is the Casa Maria Retreat Center. The Sister Servants provide weekend retreats open to individuals, couples, or groups that begin Friday evening and end Sunday afternoon. They include conferences by a priest, daily Mass, opportunities to pray the Rosary and Divine Office with the Sisters, and evening Benediction. Visit <https://sisterservants.org/retreats.php>

I plan to find similar opportunities throughout the state so that all councils will have the opportunity to participate in a day of spiritual reflection.

Into the Breach

In these troubled times, we are called to stand in the breach.

And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land... Ezekiel 22:30

In his Apostolic Exhortation Into the Breach, Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted outlines the challenges faced by men of faith in the world today, which are immense. Into the Breach is a call to battle — a spiritual battle — for Catholic men, which urges us to wholeheartedly embrace masculine virtues in our world at crisis.

The exhortation is excellent. At council 7548, we have studied the letter twice, and it was well-received. I recommend that all councils read and discuss this exhortation and the accompanying study guide. You can do this within your council or offer the study to all men in your parish. The accompanying 12 short videos are an outstanding way to introduce the various topics and begin the discussions. By going through this study, men will begin to devise a personal plan of

spiritual battle. To learn more, visit: <http://www.kofc.org/en/what-we-do/faith-in-action-programs/faith/into-the-breach.htm> |

Marian Prayer Program

Spread devotion to Our Lady and pray for our brothers and sisters of faith who are being persecuted around the world through the Marian Prayer Program. As the Marian image is brought on pilgrimage through the State (or Diocese), councils host the Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians icon for a prayer service at their parish. For a review of the various stops on the 2019-2020 pilgrimage, visit: <https://kofcalabama.org/programs/marion-icon-schedule/>.

Planning for the Post-Pandemic World

Although we can't engage in many of our activities in person right now, we can conduct many of them online, and we can begin planning now for 2021 and the 2021-2022 program year. Of all of the program categories of the Knights of Columbus, Faith Programs lend themselves to virtual participation more so than the other categories. Accordingly, councils should take the opportunity to use this difficult time to focus on strengthening our brother Knights and their families in the Catholic faith.

For more information about Supreme Faith programs, please visit <http://www.kofc.org/en/what-we-do/faith-in-action-programs/faith/index.html>

May the Lord bless you and keep you;
May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
May the Lord turn His countenance toward you and give you peace.
And may He bless your family and keep you safe during these unprecedented times.

Vivat Jesus and God bless you!

Cc: Joe Flaherty, State Deputy