

Background Paper for St. Columcille Council 5317 Membership Growth Planning FY21-23

PURPOSE. Provide background and context of assessing, planning, and implementing a Retention and Growth Campaign at St. Columcille Council during the period 1 July 21 to 30 June 23.

Background and Context. As the incoming Grand Knight (GK), about to serve my first term (FY 2021-2022), I conducted an informal assessment of the health of the organization – membership, programs, church and associated parochial school (supported organizations). The purpose was to provide me and the officers with a baseline for planning programs including what we needed to do for Retention and Growth. It was even more important to establish priorities, which once established were communicated in writing to members in summaries and Talking Points, and part of the Grand Knight's opening report at meetings.

Assessment. I reviewed data in the Supreme Membership database and Financial Secretary records relative to membership, demographics, residence, contact information and currency of dues. As the incoming GK, I spoke with the council's officers. In sum, I conducted an estimate of the current situation informed by a review of the Supreme database. The following observations were made:

- Over 50 Honorary and Honorary Life Members (many out of the local area)
- Average Age on par with State averages- aging organization
- Small, dedicated group of overworked Knights doing most of the heavy lifting with Faith-in- Action Programs (FIA)
- Significant Impacts of COVID (only Zoom council meetings) during the pandemic

I conducted a similar assessment of the Parish and School.

- Pastor & Deacon Supportive. Both were Knights.
- Changing Demographic: age and ethnicity; predominantly Filipino with aging demographic; children moving to other areas
- School and church supportive of Council but changes here as well (fewer people in pews and fewer Catholic children in school (about 55-60%% of total). As an aggregate, not many Knights have children oof school age or have a direct relationship with the school. This is a major difference from the late 70'-90's when the numbers were high.
- Apathy among eligible parishioners for becoming Knights.

Bottomline: Our council was not renewing itself and was failing in retention and growth. I assessed we could not sustain this situation very long and be successful with programs or viable as a council. Loss of contact with a large segment of Knights; databases lacked current contact information (Covid and death of the Financial Secretary contributed to this issue.

Overall, the council and the supported parish and school assessment suggested we needed to rapidly prioritize our council activities and employ a *get- well plan*. Council officers would need to support.

Plan of Action. As a result of the informal assessment, I decided on a plan of action. An outline of some of the steps taken follows:

1. Conduct Successful Program Planning and Execution using the **365 day – 90 day - 30 Day (strategic--tactical level) plan**. It was used for the FIA planning process with Growth integrated into it. I shared it with the Pastor to have him adjust it for optimal support consistent with his vision and programs. I briefed him soon after taking office and updated him regularly. Trust was built. I recognized we would not grow unless the Pastor supported *our programs-as his- and there was a benefit to the church, school, and local community*.

2. Improve Retention While Growing the Council (preferably younger). Through the Fall, we reviewed membership listings from Supreme to inform us of the scope of our retention issue based on delinquent dues and inability to contact many members. This drill assisted us with the Affinity process which we welcomed. In addition, we would grow through our programs and use it for outreach *as an opportunity* to inform parishioners about the KOC and our council's programs—"Tell our Story."

3. Form Partnerships. We initiated and promoted new FIA programs in partnership with the Parish and School beginning in my first term. A partial list of some of the new programs undertaken in FY 21-22 is below:

- SPIRITUAL REFLECTIONS
- Icon of St. Joseph
- Holy Hour (Exposition, Rosary, Litany, Adoration, Reposition)
- Lead the weekly food drive and the Archdiocese Lenten Food Drive
- ARC Blood Drive
- Green Team (Pope Francis' initiative to protect the earth/environment)
- Coats for Kids

Throughout the first year as GK, our council met all our goals except Growth. We established traction in that direction which would only be fully attained in FY 22-23. *For both years, we followed the KOC Growth instructions, almost literally, and had considerable assistance from the State Growth Team, particularly Jeff Kosco, who continued to advise and support our council in FY 22-23.*

Key aspects of our Growth Method during my first year:

- + Planned and Conducted two Delta Drives
- +Scheduling occurred early on the calendar (360 days).
- + Multimedia communications: Pulpit Announcements, Church Bulletin, GK and Officer pulpit talks and personal contact.
- +Brochures and other literature updated in Church Kiosk.

+Visibility and Presence in Church and Supporting activities by our council in multiple roles in the church and school.

+ Shared the State's priorities for Growth and encouraged members to contact Catholic men in church or elsewhere to recruit. Used intensive reviews and outreach to update contact lists, collect dues and check on welfare of members.

In sum, it was not enough to run excellent programs in the first year or to tell our story, we needed to retain what worked and apply the learning curve to modify our approach for attaining growth. Through the learning curve, we continued what was working, such as partnering with ministries and the school's Home & School Association, which showcased our council's support. Of particular significance, we invested heavily in partnering with the Fil-Ministry, the dominant and most active ministry in our Parish community, while ensuring a close relationship continued with the pastor, deacon, visiting priests and other religious.

Midway through Year 2, we modified Delta Drive expanding it into a Rolling Campaign/SPRING '23 --continuous blitz to find new members—it gained traction. It continued in effect through June 30th. Also, in FY22-23, our District Deputy underscored by my multimedia communications passed along the State Deputy's challenges and need to approach two Catholic gentlemen each month.

3. Conducted an Information campaign with Pastor, Religious and selected church key persons--told our story of what we do for parish-communities. Also, shared the need for Catholic men to step up to becoming Knights or we would not be here in about five years.

Synergistic effects of partnering, continuous recruiting and the information campaign enabled us to meet our goal, but it came late in the FY and would not have occurred without the persistence of the council and leverage we garnered through FIA programs.

A few vignettes offer some real highlights for our campaign:

-- Both Sister Luz and Sister Emily, who support the Parish administration and the PSR school were actively recruiting for us. At one Mass, Sister Emily, literally, "grabbed my sleeve" and rushed me to our choir's location near the altar to introduce me to two prospective candidates. She told them they needed to become Knights. I provided my elevator speech. Both gentlemen were brought into the council in late- May or early June. More recently, one of our newest members is the pianist-organist, who plays for the choir.

--At two Fil-Ministry hosted events and other church sponsored activities, Sister Emily and Luz were actively introducing me to other possible candidates.

--Unsolicited, at the Masses, the visiting priest and our priest in residence underscored the importance of becoming a Knight to lead their families, be fathers to their sons and do foundational work.

--Our Pastor and Deacon encouraged Parish Men and families to talk to Knights about becoming one of us. He provided us with possible candidates.

--We used the FBN presentations by our Field Agent to invite parishioners. At one session, we had over 30 guests in the. Audience.

Conclusion. Retention and Growth can only be accomplished with excellent planning and implementation of FIA programs which will benefit not only the council but the supported communities. Our growth mostly occurred as a consequence of our leadership in FIA programs, leveraging partnerships with the church ministries and parochial school and modifying the Delta Drive to a rolling multi-month campaign.

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