Opinion
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by NCR Staff

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Last week, NCR published a column from Fr. Peter Daly, in which he announced that after 33 years of membership, he is quitting the Knights of Columbus. Daly quit because of the June 2 visit that President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump made to the St. John Paul II National Shrine, which is owned by the Knights of Columbus. Hundreds of Knights of Columbus members also signed a petition urging the leadership of the Knights to acknowledge their "long history of complicity with prejudice and institutional racism." To which the NCR Editorial Staff responded that

the members were finally waking up to the organization's politicking. Below are letters to the editor responding to these events. Letters have been edited for length and clarity.

Although I was only 2-years-old when my grandfather died, he was one of the greatest influences in my life — the person I tried to hope would have been proud of me. In the 1930s, he and three other members of our local Knights of Columbus drove the Ku Klux Klan out of town. Because we shared the same name, people would hug me and tell me that their family wouldn't have made it out of the Depression or even have had a job during the reign of the KKK had it not been for him.

I have often wondered lately, watching the ultra-conservative organization the Knights has become, what Grandpa Mike would have thought of it. When Carl Anderson "hosted" racist President Donald Trump, I just knew that he would have been as boiling mad as I was. This is not the same Knights of Columbus that he and my father and my stepfather and my husband all belonged to and loved.

Thank you, Fr. Peter Daly, for taking a stand. It is not easy to leave a place that has been home to you and your ancestors. But these are not ordinary times and sometimes we just have to either change that home or call it for what it is.

MICKIE BURNS DISSETT

St. Louis, Missouri

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Amen, Fr. Peter Daly! I cannot thank NCR enough for its role in saving me from leaving the church. Since moving to the Washington, D.C., area a few years ago, I have encountered for the very first time a faction within the church, present in the local parish I joined, that I never knew existed as a proud, happy Catholic convert in Texas.

It is inconceivable to me that any Christian could continue to justify a man without any morals who lies every single day and stokes hatred, bigotry and divisiveness — all for the cause of "pro-life." You cannot bargain with the devil. Kudos to Washington Archbishop Wilton Gregory and Daly for speaking the truth,

unapologetically. Once again, I am a proud happy Catholic and have since found another local parish that I hope will be a better fit.

JACKI ABRAMS FARHOOD

Bethesda, Maryland



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In my senior years, I've come to expect more from myself and from Catholic clergy. I'm looking beyond the scandal of pedophilia amongst the clergy which has been absolutely devastating to the church. As an 80-year-old, I'm looking for kindness, understanding and love, not division and anger from the clergy.

I'm truly saddened when a priest decides to sever ties, scold and demean others in the flock. I know I'm setting the bar high for priests, but I long for peacemakers in their ranks. Unfortunately, I did not find any peace in Fr. Peter Daly's rhetoric.

KEN BOYER

St. Louis, Missouri

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"I'm done too!"

In full agreement with Fr. Peter Daly's article regarding the role of the Knights of Columbus in systemic racism, I'm done too.

In 1965, I received a Knights of Columbus scholarship for $100 toward my tuition at the University of Detroit, where my Jesuit education launched a 50-year teaching career. What I have learned from my students of color in those years prompts me to return that money now (times 50) to a scholarship program for students of color at the college where I teach.

Thanks to Daly for this inspiring article.

MARY BETH DUFFEY

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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I applaud this well-written piece and agree wholeheartedly. I had a similar reaction when I received a right to life newsletter containing an article about President Donald Trump receiving a newly created award because he was the first president to attend the National Right to Life rally in January. I immediately wrote a piece similar to yours and requested that they stop sending me newsletters, even though I am anti-abortion.

Sadly, some of our organizations turn people away from the church with their hypocrisy. This has happened so often with young people. I am a senior who finds it harder and harder to follow church doctrine when so many good people are excluded due to the church's black and white rules. I can't help but see gray areas when it comes to humanity.

MARIKAY SCHWALLER

Omaha, Nebrask

***

Fr. Peter Daly, don't quit the Knights of Columbus. Lead forward.

As a fellow Knight, I share much of your criticism of Knights of Columbus hierarchy policies and your disapproval of the invitation to President Donald Trump for

a disingenuous photo op at the

St. John Paul II National Shrine. At the same time, though, we should praise our brother Knights.

The soul of the Knights of Columbus really exists in those individual men and affiliated women who participate in social justice projects. They are Catholics striving to be more Christian. Their goodness must be praised. They contribute time and talent and make financial sacrifices to help others in coping with a multitude of needs.

Going forward, there is an immense need and opportunity to further address social justice obligations. The Knights of Columbus should consider having monthly council forums reflecting on the Beatitudes. And then live them. Invite others to participate.

The current social predicaments require immediate attention. At the same time, we must recognize that a longer duration pandemic has to be addressed. No one can attest to being a Catholic if he or she does not raise one's voice against many social justice abuses, racism being but one. We need to recognize Christ in each person.

Father Daly, stay in the Knights of Columbus. Lead forward. Provide a guide on ways to live the Beatitudes, recognizing that they are a distillation of Christ's teaching. Encourage other disciples, laity as well as religious, to do likewise in parishes, classrooms and other programs.

LUKE CHRISTOPHER HESTER

Bethesda, Maryland

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Last night, I watched the documentary "13th", which reveals that slavery did not end with the Civil War, but has continued to modern times through the Jim Crow era, the Civil Rights movement of the 60s, and continues to be fought by the Black Lives Matter movement.

I found it interesting to note the history of the Knights of Columbus is fraught with racism, that the emergence of the Knights of St. Peter Claver is as a result of a history of racism in the Knights of Columbus.

ROBERT MARZULLO

Shoreline, Washington

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Yes, the knights are far too right-wing political. They are also annoying.

On more than one occasion after Mass, some current member of the Knights of Columbus has approached me and asked if I'd like to join. My answer is always the same: I object to two-thirds of your name. "Knights" is far too warlike for a Pax Christi guy like me, and "Columbus" is far too genocidal. Only "of" is acceptable.

Also, I'm not a big fan of those special occasions commemorating deceased knights — not just the handful who have died in the previous year, but a much longer list of those who have died for several years. At the start of Mass, an honor guard of men with white gloves, ostrich feathers and swords troops down the aisle, and they sit right next to peace-loving people not comfortable with the rattling of swords inches away. As Jesus told Peter, put down your sword already.

OK, they do perform some charitable works, but they are far too jingoistic for my tastes. One of their guiding principles is patriotism, and to me, patriotism equals idolatry — a red, white and blue version of the golden calf.

So I'm glad to see NCR critiquing the way they conduct themselves.

BOB KEELER

Stony Brook, New York

Advertisement

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I am not a member of the Knights, only aware of their many charitable contributions. Your editorial stated it was in the billions.

This editorial is so poorly written that it begs for explanation. It mentions historical racism yet says nothing further to demonstrate that.

You state that the founder would not recognize the organization he founded. Of course not, he had hopes that it would grow and benefit the membership.

I can agree that it was wrong for President Donald Trump to parade himself in front of the statue, but how does this implicate the Knights of Columbus?

From my vantage point as a non-member, I see the Knights proudly representing themselves as Catholic

HENRY BROER

Somers, Connecticut

***

I had been a Knight of Columbus for more than 25 years having earned the fourth degree and having served in my council as an officer and a member of several committees. During the Obama administration, I started to see a drift from what I perceived as neutrality to one where the Knights of Columbus was engaging in political discussions and funding groups which opposed President Barack Obama. In our second-degree oath, we promise not to bring partisan issues into our council meetings. However, Carl Anderson brought partisan issues to the Knights as an organization.

I did not resign from the Knights, I just stopped not only attendance but dues. I was given an honorary membership possibly in recognition of my prior service. Although I missed the camaraderie and the charity events, I cannot in good conscience support an organization which refutes its own oaths and in so doing alienates a great percentage of our membership and beyond that the Catholic population.

The bishops as well as the Knights' administration seem to think all Catholics think as they do and we are compelled to be "loyal" sheep. At this juncture they have convinced many of us erstwhile "sheep" that we can find other shepherds.

CHARLES A LE GUERN

Granger, Indiana

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You criticize the Knights of Columbus as if you are the expert. You criticize the Knights for having a large insurance plan. The Knights work very hard to be successful. They donate huge amounts of money to relief all over the world. You sound jealous.

The Knights of Columbus, in defense of the Catholic Church, took on the racist Ku Klux Klan and won years ago. That was before you studied history!

The Knights of Columbus support widows and families. In general, the Knights do much good for conservative v. left causes.

DAVID NIEPORT

Dayton, Ohio

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As a longtime fourth degree member of the Knights of Columbus, I am distressed by the recent events at the Washington shrine. The Knights of Columbus should not be involved in any political activities whether of the right or left.

Our national leadership must call a halt to such activities immediately. To do otherwise threatens the integrity of an historic organization which has over 100 years of service to our church.

DANIEL P. SAVIANO

Kansas City, Missouri

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