News

Supreme Knight Patrick Kelly, CEO of the Knights of Columbus, speaks Aug. 2 during the frate

Supreme Knight Patrick Kelly, CEO of the Knights of Columbus, speaks Aug. 2 during the fraternal order's 140th Supreme Convention in Nashville, Tennessee. (CNS/Tennessee Register/Andy Telli)

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The U.S. Supreme Court's recent decision to throw out the precedent set in *Roe* v. *Wade*, which legalized abortion nationwide, is a landmark victory but not the end of the fight for life, said Supreme Knight Patrick Kelly.

"*Roe* v. *Wade* is finally gone. We now have a chance to win the fight for life," the CEO of the Knights of Columbus said in delivering his annual report to the Supreme Council Aug. 2, opening day of the Knights 140th Supreme Convention in Nashville.

The Knights have been involved in the effort to end abortion in the United States since the beginning of the respect-for-life movement soon after the 1973 *Roe* ruling, Kelly noted, by supporting the annual March for Life in Washington, providing ultrasound machines to pregnancy resource centers and a host of other activities.

"By ending *Roe*, the court has empowered us to end one of the worst injustices in American history," Kelly said. "*Roe* is overturned, but we have more work to do. We will continue to march for life until abortion is unthinkable."

With the Supreme Court's June 24 decision in *Dobbs* v. *Jackson Women's Health Center*, the question of abortion now moves to the states.

"Each state has a choice to make," Kelly said. "At least half will protect life to some degree. But others will keep the abortion status quo. And some states will even expand abortion, putting mothers and children in greater danger.

"They will double down on a culture of death. So we must push forward with a message of life."

"The good news is that the American people, in fact, are with us," Kelly added. "We have found that when you move beyond simplistic labels and ask Americans what they actually think about abortion, there is a clear pro-life consensus."

Polling by the Knights and Marist shows that seven in 10 Americans favor substantial restrictions on legal abortions, Kelly said. "Year after year, the overwhelming majority wants to protect life."

"But we can't just change the law. We must also change hearts and minds," he said.

"With *Roe* gone, many mothers will still experience fear and uncertainty," he continued. "Many will be tempted to seek an abortion in another state. But the Knights can point them in a different direction — toward life."

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Kelly called on the Knights to increase the fraternal order's support for pregnancy resource centers that help women experiencing an unexpected or crisis pregnancy.

The Supreme Council has launched the Aid and Support After Pregnancy initiative, known as ASAP.

"When a council donates to a pregnancy center or maternity home," Kelly said, "the Supreme Council will match" the amount 20%. "We've set an initial target of $5 million for this year alone. But I know we can exceed that goal."

"ASAP is a priority, and around the world, I urge every Knight to rededicate himself to supporting mothers and children," he said.

The Catholic Church in the United States and around the world is facing other challenges, as well, Kelly said.

"We are at risk of losing the freedom to practice our faith and even to speak openly about the most foundational truths," Kelly said. "Amid this crisis, it's getting harder to be a Catholic. And it's tougher than ever to hand on our faith to our children and our grandchildren."

Four out of five Catholics will fall away from the Church by their early 20s, Kelly said. "In these difficult times, each of us needs a living faith. And each of us needs to lead others to the faith. That's why we'll soon launch a discipleship and evangelization initiative."

Evangelization will be one of his top priorities as supreme Knight, said Kelly, who was installed in the position in 2021. "When I look back on the order's history, I see evangelization in virtually everything we've done," Kelly said. "Yet today, there is a special urgency."

"Trusting in God's strength, and not in our own, Knights of Columbus say, 'Yes.' For our faith, for our families — we will gladly step into the breach," Kelly said. "For us, going into the breach means strengthening families and spreading the faith. It means deepening our commitment to our highest principles — charity, unity and fraternity."

The Supreme Convention, which attracted more than 2,500 Knights and their families from around the world to Nashville's Opryland Resort and Convention Center Aug. 2-4, was the first one held in-person since 2019 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

With more than 2 million members worldwide, the Knights are the world's largest Catholic fraternal service organization. Membership is open to Catholic men 18 and older.

"I know exactly how to sum up the men of this brotherhood," Kelly said. "It's the heart of my message today and our mission moving forward: A Knight is a leader who stands in the breach.

"We protect the faith. We defend the family, and when a need arises, we rise to meet it — with charity, unity and fraternity."

In the last fraternal year, Knights donated nearly $154 million to charity and provided close to 48 million hours of volunteer service.

Before Kelly delivered the annual report, Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore, the order's supreme chaplain, read a papal message from Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, delivered on behalf of Pope Francis.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, the Catholic Church faces the challenge right now "of restoring vibrant parish life, rebuilding the works of the apostolate and reaching out pastorally to those who, for whatever reason, have yet to return to full participation in the church's sacramental life," Parolin said.

The pope "is convinced the Knights will find creative ways to place their ingenuity, generosity and trust in God's grace at the service of this urgent task of spiritual renewal," he said.

The message also acknowledged the Knights efforts to provide relief to the people of Ukraine since the invasion of the country by Russia last February.

It was fitting the Knights gathered in Tennessee and the Diocese of Nashville, the home of Mikey Schachle, the son of Daniel and Michelle Schachle, parishioners at St. Christopher Church in Dickson.

Mikey, now 7, was cured of a deadly case of fetal hydrops while still in his mother's womb. His cure was proclaimed a miracle due to the intercession of Fr. Michael McGivney, founder of the Knights of Columbus, opening the door to his beatification in 2020. The priest now has the title "Blessed."

[Andy Telli is the managing editor of the Tennessee Register, newspaper of the Diocese of Nashville.]