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Supreme Knight Patrick E. Kelly delivers his annual report Aug. 4, 2026, at the 144th Supreme Convention of the Knights of Columbus in Denver. (OSV News/Denver Catholic/André Escaleira Jr.)



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Pope Leo XIV has tapped the head of the U.S.-based Knights of Columbus to join the Vatican office responsible for engaging with the Catholic laity and families, continuing a string of high-profile Vatican appointments from the Catholic Church in the United States.

The first U.S.-born pope tapped Knights of Columbus Supreme Knight Patrick Kelly to join the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life on Tuesday (Aug. 25). Kelly, a Michigan native, has served as the chief executive officer and chairman of the board for the Catholic fraternal service organization headquartered in New Haven, Connecticut, since 2021.

As a member of the dicastery, he will participate in the office's plenary assemblies and assist in guiding its work. Kelly also serves as a consultant to the Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth of the U.S. bishops' conference.

The Knights of Columbus, which has more than 2 million members worldwide, is a consistent financial backer for the Vatican and frequently engages in major gift projects to support the work of the Holy See. In 2024, the organization underwrote a 700,000 euro (approximately $817,072) project to restore the iconic golden baldachino that towers over the main altar of St. Peter's Basilica.

And the Knights have regularly given large sums to support the Vatican's communications apparatus, donating a broadcast van ahead of the Holy Year 2025 and underwriting the costs to broadcast several papal events in Rome.

Founded to financially support working-class and immigrant Catholics in the United States in 1882, the Knights' provide insurance policies and own a money management firm to invest its members' capital in line with Catholic social teaching.

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Kelly's appointment follows several notable Vatican appointments for U.S. Catholics — most notably, the pope's choice to tap former EWTN News president Montse Alvarado to lead the Vatican's sprawling communications department, announced in June. In March, Leo also named three U.S. Catholics to join the Vatican's social justice office, the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, and in August he selected three U.S.-based experts as advisors to that body.

Prior to leading the Knights of Columbus, Kelly was chairman of the board for the March for Life. He is also on the board of trustees for the Catholic University of America and the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, both in Washington, D.C.

Following public attacks on the pope by President Donald Trump in April, Kelly issued a statement saying that Catholics were "deeply disappointed" by the president's remarks while affirming that "nations have a right and duty to safeguard the security of their own people."

"Whether one agrees or disagrees with particular policy judgments, the Holy Father's prophetic voice deserves to be heard with respect and engaged seriously," he wrote then.

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