

Endowment Honors Knights' Legacy



When brothers John and Mike Leen first met with Kristin Smith, Executive Director of the Catholic Community Foundation, in February 2025, they knew their prayers had been answered. As members of Knights of Columbus Council #4693 in Sandusky, John and Mike knew their Knights' Hall was becoming too expensive to maintain and needed to be sold. But how could the sale continue the Knights' charitable mission?

In the end, Kristin helped them set up the new *Knights of Columbus Endowment for Vocations*. Selling the Hall was, as John says, a vehicle to help the Knights generate charity. "The money in the endowment can be used regardless of whether there's membership in Council #4693 or not," said John. Now, their initial contribution of \$125,000 is protected in perpetuity—and will carry on the ministry of Knights Council #4693 and honor their legacy. "That's nothing short of a miracle," John said.

The Leen brothers knew that selling the hall was a complex decision for Council #4693. Many of the Knights consider the Council's legacy to be personal. Growing up, the Leen brothers went to church with a tight-knit community of Knights. Their own father was a former Grand Knight and one of the Council's earliest members. John knew right away that the money should be used for something that would last.

Council #4693 wanted to give the money to the Catholic church, but they also wanted to do more than make a one-time donation. "We should put it into something that will benefit the growth of the Catholic faith for years to come," Mike said, "without us having to touch it." John began researching different ways to protect the money, keep it local, and grow the Catholic faith.

That's when John came across the Catholic Community Foundation through the Diocesan website. "It's just strange that we ended up back at the Catholic Community Foundation," said Mike, who served as a board member in 2021. "It just makes all kinds of sense to have the money directed and funneled to the Catholic Community Foundation where it will be protected forever by a board."

John and Mike decided to call Executive Director Kristin Smith to see how the money could be used. "In ten seconds, she convinced me of our idea," said John. "We told her, 'We want to grow the faith.'" Mike and John's dedication to honoring the legacy of the Knights and growing the Catholic faith fit perfectly with Kristin's suggestion to support the growth of vocations.

The Leen brothers know a bit about finding a vocation through their journey to becoming Knights. Many parishioners of St. Joseph's (now Holy Family Parish in Sandusky) were Knights when John and Mike were growing up.

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2025 Quarter-At-A-Glance

December 17, 4:00 p.m.

Advent Gathering
Center for Ministry
5802 Weiss Street
Saginaw, MI 48603

December 24

Foundation offices close

January 5

Foundation offices open

Endowment (continued)

After church one Sunday, Knight Dick LeGault told Mike that John was planning on joining the Knights at the Monday night meeting. When Mike and John got home, Mike asked John if he really planned to join. John said he hadn't made any commitments, but the next night, the brothers went to the meeting.

It wasn't until another John—a friend named John Guttowski—entered the building that the Leen brothers realized Dick LeGault misled them on purpose—or as John says jokingly, how Dick “conned us into becoming members.” Nevertheless, Mike and John decided to join. “How else are we going to do charity on our own?” asked John. “We could join and do charity as a group.”

John and Mike credit Knights like Dick LeGault for inspiring them to be part of the Council. Dick and his wife Bev are one of the reasons Council #4693 felt obligated to use the money from the sale in a way that would last. “When the money came out of the sale, it was the responsibility of the current members to do something that would mean something to the whole council—years past and current members,” said Mike.

That's why the Leen brothers and the Knights Council #4693 worked with the Catholic Community Foundation to fill a critical need with the new *Endowment for Vocations*. “There's a shortage of priests,” says John. “We need to support parish priests through promotion, attraction, and having an actual recruiter out there.”

In the future, John and Mike hope the fund grows to the point that a dedicated Vocations Director could be supported to work full-time throughout the Diocese.

“It's a lofty goal,” said Mike. “But many hands make light work. Lots of Knights of Columbus Councils in our Diocese support seminarians. Why not support vocations more?”

To make a donation to the *Knights of Columbus Endowment for Vocations*, scan the code or visit www.ccfmm.org.

To leave a legacy gift through your will, please contact Executive Director, Kristin Smith, at 989.303.9201 or kristin.smith@ccfmm.org.

