

Building the Domestic Church While Strengthening Our Parish
Frequently Asked Questions
A Guide for State Deputies

Please Note: *These questions and answers are meant to anticipate the some of what you may hear as you share this new initiative and its impact with your jurisdiction's leaders and members. It is not meant to be a comprehensive guide to the program. Support materials and guides to implement this new initiative, as well as an announcement to grand knights will be forthcoming. Additional questions should be directed to the Corporate Communications Department at charles.lindberg@kofc.org or at 203-752-4264.*

Building the Domestic Church

What is the Building the Domestic Church program? The Building the Domestic Church program refers to existing and new initiatives focused on the work of the New Evangelization, the strengthening of our parishes, and the growth of the Order. This program is designed to help our members and their families live the Catholic faith more fully so that each home is truly a domestic Church, reflecting the holiness of the Universal Church in every Knights of Columbus household. In addition, the program seeks to integrate our members and their families more fully into the sacramental and social life of the parish. The question each council needs to ask of its parish pastor is “How can we help?”

Why is the Building the Domestic Church program being required by the Supreme Council at this time? How will it change our councils? Following the lead of his two predecessors, Pope Francis has identified the family as the key to revitalizing the Church, most recently during his pastoral visit to the United States. The Knights of Columbus has always been an organization dedicated to the well-being of the family, with numerous programs designed to strengthen the faith of its members and enable them to be better husbands and fathers. Building the Domestic Church is not so much a change of direction as it is a refocusing on the core mission of the Knights of Columbus. By integrating our members and their families more fully into the sacramental and social life of their parish, we hope to strengthen our families, revitalize our parishes, and grow our Order. To the extent that our councils will change, we expect that they will become more fully committed to this essential mission.

We expect that councils will provide activities that include not just our members, but entire families coming together as a parish community. These may include faith formation programs, social events, and charitable outreach. Of course, the activities of any council must be harmonized with the priorities of the pastor. At the outset, therefore, it is important that the pastor understand our intention and the resources the Knights of Columbus can offer the parish.

Scouting Programs

What will be the Knights of Columbus relationship with the Boy Scouts of America and other international scouting programs? After careful consideration, the Board of Directors has concluded that the Knights of Columbus will no longer be the chartered organization for BSA troops. This does not mean that the Order has abandoned Catholic scouting. Rather, we wish to align our youth activities with the mission and goals of each parish. To the extent that pastors wish to provide a Catholic scouting experience for the boys in their parish, we strongly encourage councils and individual Knights to continue their volunteer leadership and financial support for scout troops, under the guidance of their pastors. This change is meant to strengthen the relationship between the parish and the troop while providing for a more robust Catholic scouting experience for all scouts.

If a council sponsors a Boy Scout Troop, what steps do they need to take? As a preliminary matter, Grand Knights should meet with their pastors to discern whether Catholic scouting fits into the parish's youth ministry. If so, the Grand Knight will need to coordinate with troop leadership and the local Scouting Council to designate the parish as the chartered organization for the troop. Once this change has been made, the council will continue to provide volunteer and financial support for the troop. If the parish is not interested in sponsoring the troop, the council leaders should contact their local Scouting council to find out how best to find either new sponsorship for the troop. All councils should conclude their sponsorship of scouting units by the end of 2016.

Columbian Squires

Some of my councils have an active Squires program. What do these changes mean for Squires Circles? If a council has an active Squires circle, the Grand Knight and Squires counselor should meet with the pastor to discuss whether and how the Squires Circle may be more fully integrated into the parish's existing youth ministry. Active Squires Circles may continue serving boys according to current practice, reporting to the council and recruiting new members. The Supreme Council will continue to provide support materials to the Circles.

How do councils begin to engage in parish youth ministry? Grand Knights should meet with their pastors to discuss the role that council members and their families can have in supporting parish-based youth ministry programs and activities. These can also incorporate Knights of Columbus youth programs such as the Free Throw Championship and the Soccer Challenge. Youth Activity chairmen should act as a liaison with the parish youth ministry team in order to determine how the council can best support the parish youth activities.

Will the Supreme Council provide any resources for youth activities or ministry? The Supreme Council will continue to provide resources through its various existing youth activities. Additionally, more materials relating to faith formation will become available as the Supreme Council continues to expand the Domestic Church program in the months ahead.

Is there a date set at which Circles are to cease operations? At this point, no. The Supreme Council will continue to monitor and evaluate the program over the course of the next year. However, councils are not encouraged to form new Circles, and inactive Circles should be disbanded.

Should existing active Circles continue to recruit new members? Yes, with the understanding that the program may evolve to meet the needs of the parish's youth ministry.

Will the Squires Advancement program still be supported or should Squires not pursue their advancements? The Supreme Council will continue to support the Squires Advancement program as well as provide other resources that are currently supplied to active Circles.

Will the Supreme Council accept applications for new Circles? If a council has met all the requirements, Supreme will authorize the formation of a new Circle. However, as stated above, new Circles are not encouraged and existing Circles may eventually be integrated into parish youth ministry.

Home Corporations

How will the Order's Domestic Church initiative affect councils that meet at facilities owned by home corporations? In response to the call of Pope Francis for a new missionary spirit among Catholics, and through the Order's new initiative "Building the Domestic Church While Strengthening Our Parish," the Knights of Columbus is making a decisive return to Fr. McGivney's original vision of parish-based councils. The sacramental and social life of Catholic Parishes are the primary place to support the evangelization of the family as domestic Church.

For more than 40 years, the Knights of Columbus has encouraged local councils to become more closely integrated into the life of the parishes with which they are associated. Consistent with this longstanding policy, the Supreme Council has discouraged individual members from forming independent corporations to acquire “permanent homes” for their councils, and instead urges all new and existing councils to focus on greater involvement in their parishes. By participating more fully in parish life, rather than concerning themselves with the operation of private social clubs and businesses, individual members may more effectively promote the Church’s New Evangelization through their council’s charitable and evangelical mission and its commitment to community service.

Aren’t home corporations part of the Knights of Columbus? No. Home corporations are not owned, operated, or controlled by the Knights of Columbus. They are separate legal entities formed under the laws of the jurisdictions in which members of local councils are situated. Home corporations are not subordinate units of the Knights of Columbus and are not subject to the laws of the Order. Home corporations are not eligible for tax-exempt status under the Order’s group ruling. These corporations, and not the Knights of Columbus, are responsible for all liabilities arising from the business activities conducted at their facilities. Accordingly, each corporation, acting through its members, must retain its own attorney and accountant to help the corporation manage its legal and financial affairs.

Why does Supreme discourage councils from meeting at home corporation facilities? Parish-based councils are better positioned to contribute to family and parish life. Because they are not preoccupied with maintaining a building and running a business, members of parish-based councils are freer to dedicate their time and resources to supporting Catholic programs and family activities within the parish.

What has changed that has caused Supreme to discourage councils from meeting at home corporation facilities? Some home corporations served important social purposes in the past, such as hosting receptions and parties, as well as degree ceremonies and business meetings. There was a time when it was relatively easy to own and operate a home corporation facility, which could be used principally for council and parish activities. However, over the course of the past 10 to 20 years, it has become increasingly expensive to maintain these facilities, due to significant tax and regulatory burdens, increasing risks of litigation, and rising costs of labor and supplies. Consequently, because of the need to generate a constant and substantial stream of revenue just to maintain their buildings, many home corporations have decided to rent their facilities to third parties for events and functions that have no connection to the parish or the Knights of Columbus.

How does a home corporation’s business affect the vitality of the council? By engaging in a revenue-generating business, many home corporations are subject to significant liability risks and government regulations, along with market competition from other banquet and rental facilities. Needless to say, this situation has diluted the mission integrity of the councils that use those buildings. Instead of dedicating their time, attention, and energy to the charitable and evangelical mission of the Knights of Columbus, members of some councils are pressed to use their limited resources for the operation of a catering and facilities rental business in order to generate sufficient revenue to support the home corporation. In these situations, having a council lodged at a home corporation facility may actually suppress the growth of the council and undermine its ability to fulfill the mission of the Order.

What should councils that meet at home corporation facilities do? The Supreme Knight has asked every council using facilities owned by a home corporation to undertake a serious assessment of how that relationship supports the council in its fulfillment of the core mission of the Knights of Columbus. Here are 5 leading indicators that State Deputies, District Deputies, Grand Knights, and councils may use to determine whether home corporation problems are substantially impacting a council’s ability to carry out this core mission and that it is time for the council to move into a parish:

1. When the majority of a council's time, resources, and focus are devoted to the home corporation's problems and concerns.
2. When a home corporation's property tax obligation, utility bills, liability insurance premium, and other expenses are so burdensome that it is forced to charge the council and its members an exorbitant rent or other fees that may exceed fair market rents of similar facilities in the area.
3. When a home corporation struggles to find suitable rentals to pay its bills because of local competitively priced modern professional banquet hall and hotel facilities.
4. When the local reputation of the Knights of Columbus is defined more by non-Knights of Columbus rentals of a home corporation's facilities than for the Order's charitable and evangelical mission.
5. When there is such strife, factionalism, and outright conflict among members concerning the home corporation's problems that the Order's principle of Unity is broken and the council is unable to effectively carry out its essential mission and attract new members.

If a council finds that it is experiencing one or more of the scenarios described above, the council should strongly consider establishing itself as a parish-based council.

If a council decides to continue meeting at a home corporation facility, what should it do?

At its August 2014 meeting, the Supreme Council adopted Resolution No. 340 "as a rule of the Order." By the adoption of this rule, the Supreme Council resolved that "Subordinate Units using premises of Home Corporations for meetings and other functions must have a signed terms of use agreement ('Terms of Use Agreement') and a charitable distribution agreement ('Charitable Distribution Agreement') in place with the Home Corporation." The Supreme Council understands that the rule set forth in Resolution No. 340 may require significant changes for councils that have historically conducted their meetings, degrees, and events at home corporation facilities. The *Handbook For Councils Using Home Corporation Facilities* was developed to provide agreements for councils that will continue to use those facilities. The Handbook for Councils Using Home Corporation Facilities also provides guidance regarding why these agreements are so important. These agreements will empower councils to identify, address, and resolve issues that may arise in connection with home corporations. In addition, it is expected that subordinate councils will become better stewards of the good name of the Knights of Columbus and better guardians of the Order's valuable trademarks. This handbook also provides some practical guidance to councils using home corporation facilities in order to allow members to focus more on the Order's fraternal, religious, and charitable programs and less on concerns associated with the operation of a private social club.

What should a council do if it decides that it can more effectively fulfill its core mission by moving to a parish? That council should make arrangements to establish itself in a parish. A new edition of the Handbook For Councils Using Home Corporation Facilities is being developed with further guidance for those councils that determine they should move into a parish.

What is the deadline for councils using Home Corporation facilities to determine whether its continued use of such facilities is supportive of the council's ability to carry out the core mission of the Knights of Columbus? Each State Deputy should make a determination, in consultation with his State Advocate and District Deputies, as to how many councils in his jurisdiction currently use home corporation facilities and then set a realistic deadline for District Deputies to work with Grand Knights of such councils and help them properly determine to either (1) continue using home corporation facilities and enter into these agreements or (2) decide to become a parish-based council. It is strongly recommended that councils that decide to continue using home corporation facilities enter into these agreements on January 1, 2017 and that those councils that determine they must move to a parish do so by January 1, 2017.