

FRATERNITY, UNITY AND BASEBALL

Blessed Michael J. McGivney's love of baseball traveled with him.

Story and Photos by **KAREN A. AVITABILE**

As a seminarian, Blessed Michael J. McGivney played baseball. As a priest, he introduced the sport to many people — and played himself — with a goal of uniting them.

A four-part online series, “Knights of Columbus Baseball: An American Story,” recounts the untold story of the Knights of Columbus connection with baseball, spanning almost a century and a half. The online exhibit, developed by the Blessed Michael McGivney Pilgrimage Center in New Haven, is centered on the intertwined history of the Knights of Columbus and baseball, a sport which was in its early stages during Blessed McGivney's life (1852-1890). The parish priest, beatified in 2020, founded the Knights of Columbus.

Father McGivney's life was dedicated to putting faith in action, and this influence has impacted the Knights of Columbus for nearly 140 years, says Andrew Fowler, who designed the exhibit. “This exhibit is to not only show how tangible his impact was on Knights and Catholics in America, but to make him tangible, more real,” he says.

“He was a real person with real interests, and it just so happens, one of those interests was baseball. So why not use baseball as a way of introducing potential visitors — whether they are Knights, Catholics or simply baseball enthusiasts — to his life and the Catholic faith, just as he used baseball to evangelize and unify communities he served as a priest?” Fowler adds.

Historically known as America's pastime, the game of baseball



This baseball bat, with the Knights of Columbus logo, has been included in past displays by the organization.

served as an early avenue of assimilation for Catholic immigrants and first-generation Americans in the Knights of Columbus. Today, the sport continues to provide a path toward spiritual bonds and friendship for the Knights and their families, says Peter Sonski, manager of education and outreach for the Blessed Michael McGivney Pilgrimage Center, formerly the Knights of Columbus Museum.

“These values stem from Father McGivney, who founded the fraternal organization on the principles of charity and unity,” he adds. “The connection between Father McGivney and the Knights of Columbus with baseball is fascinating. The histories are entwined throughout the last 150 years. Father McGivney not only played the game but saw its ability to unite people and build bonds of teamwork and fellowship.”

The narrated virtual tour, largely photographs and illustrations, is free and will be displayed in four parts by visiting michaelmcgivneycenter.org. The first segment, which can now be viewed, details Blessed McGivney's personal experiences with the game and the appeal it had among the members of his fledgling organization. Subsequent segments, to be introduced at key times during the 2022 Major League Baseball season, will explore the growth of the game as a professional sport and chronicle developments during significant events in American and world history.

“Baseball became popular in Blessed McGivney's youth,” Sonski adds. “(Baseball) grew up with the Knights of Columbus.” **CT**

▶ A baseball glove with the Knights of Columbus insignia is part of the organization's archives.



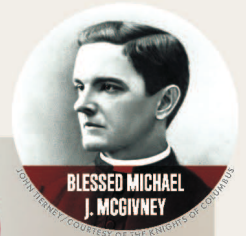
BLESSED MCGIVNEY'S LOVE OF BASEBALL

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“The first record of Father McGivney's love for the game occurred on May 20, 1872. Two teams — composed of New York and Connecticut seminarians attending Our Lady of Angels Seminary at Niagara University — squared off in a game that lasted five innings. McGivney played on the Connecticut squad — the Charter Oaks — since he was a seminarian from Waterbury, Conn. He was also the club's vice president. During the game, McGivney played left field and batted fourth, implying he had a decent arm and good hitting abilities. With his three runs that day, the Charter Oaks handily defeated the Mohawks (New York) 23-6.”

MAIN IMAGE: GETTY IMAGES/ILBUSCA/BASEBALL: GETTY IMAGES/IGOR

Celebrating Blessed Michael J. McGivney



PHOTOS BY AARON JOSEPH

ARCHBISHOP HONORED WITH MCGIVNEY AWARD

Archbishop Leonard P. Blair was awarded the Blessed Michael McGivney Award by the Connecticut Knights of Columbus State Council during the organization's 45th annual award dinner held at the Aqua Turf Club, Plantsville. Established in 1975 by the Connecticut State Council to honor the ideals of the organization's founder, Father Michael J. McGivney, this award recognizes individuals who throughout their lives have made significant humanitarian, civic and social contributions to their state, church or country. To coincide with the first anniversary of the beatification of their founder, by Pope Francis, the award was renamed the Blessed Michael McGivney Award. Auxiliary Bishop Juan Miguel Betancourt gave the invocation, Bishop Peter A. Rosazza shared some remarks and Father Jeffrey V. Romans, Knights of Columbus Connecticut State chaplain, concluded the evening with a benediction. Several priests and other representatives of the archdiocese also attended.



PHOTOS BY AARON JOSEPH

BEATIFICATION ANNIVERSARY MASS

A Mass celebrating the first anniversary of the beatification of Blessed Michael J. McGivney took place on Oct. 31, 2021, in the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Waterbury. Blessed McGivney is a native son of Waterbury and was a priest in the Archdiocese of Hartford. In the photos, Archbishop Emeritus Daniel A. Cronin gives a homily during the Mass. With a statue of Blessed McGivney from the Basilica rectory located to his right, Father James Sullivan, pastor of the Basilica, incenses a first-class relic of Blessed McGivney with Father John Lavorgna, pastor of Mary, Mother of the Church Parish in Waterbury, looking on. Veneration of the relic followed the Mass and all were invited to a reception in the Basilica's McGivney Hall.



COURTESY OF LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR

MCGIVNEY STATUE ON VIEW IN ENFIELD

Archbishop Emeritus Daniel A. Cronin leads prayer in the blessing of a new statue of Blessed Michael J. McGivney at St. Joseph's Residence in Enfield. The statue of the first Connecticut native to be beatified is located in the center of a garden in front of St. Joseph's Residence beside the chapel where residents and visitors may spend time in prayer. Little Sisters of the Poor care for the elderly in St. Joseph's Residence.



CHRISTINA GORDON/COURTESY OF THE LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR