

# Who Was This Parish Priest?

## Catholic sixth-graders from Father McGivney's hometown ask questions about his life and legacy

**T**hough Father Michael J. McGivney left his mark on the world when he founded the Knights of Columbus, his presence is still indelibly felt in Waterbury, Conn., where

he was born and raised. A bronze statue of Father McGivney adorns the park across from the railroad station, and a city street bears his name. At St. Mary's School, students and

teachers pray for Father McGivney's canonization every day and at the Mass they attend as a school community each month.

Mary LaBarbera's sixth-grade class at St. Mary's was understandably curious about Father McGivney's life and work. We asked her students to submit questions that could be answered here.



An undated photo of Michael McGivney as a young boy.



Members of Mary LaBarbera's sixth-grade class at St. Mary's School in Waterbury, Conn., hold up their Father McGivney prayer cards after reciting the prayer for his canonization. The students pray for Father McGivney's canonization each morning and at the Mass they attend as a school community each month. Also pictured is school principal Joseph M. Kenny (right).

**Did Father McGivney want to become a priest when he was young, or did he want to be something else? – Alexis**

Michael McGivney expressed an interest in the priesthood as early as age 12, though his father was opposed to the idea at first. Having grown up in a close-knit Catholic community, the most important people in Michael's life were his parents and his parish priest. This does not mean Michael didn't hold any other jobs as a young man. Before entering the seminary, he worked at a spoon factory in Waterbury.

**Who were Father McGivney's parents? – Amy S.**

**Did Father McGivney have any brothers or sisters? – Anthony**  
Michael Joseph was the first of 12

children born to Patrick and Mary McGivney, but only seven of Michael's siblings survived infancy. Two of Michael's brothers, Patrick and John, also became priests. Several of his sisters married and had children.



The McGivney priest-brothers: Michael, flanked by Patrick (left) and John. Patrick served as supreme chaplain from 1901 to 1928, and John succeeded him, serving until 1939.

**Why were people prejudiced against Catholics in Father McGivney's time? – Nicole**

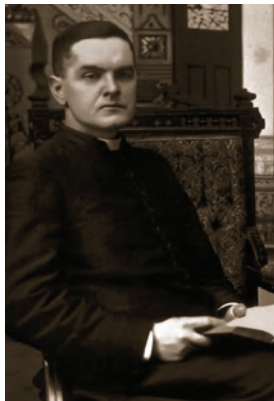
Many of the Catholics who came to the United States in the 1800s were Irish immigrants. While America offered more economic opportunity than Ireland, Catholics were still looked down upon as a lower social class. Catholics were not allowed to purchase land and were taxed by the Congregational Church — even though other religions were exempt.



*At age 16, Michael McGivney left his job in a Waterbury spoon factory to start his seminary training.*

**Was Father McGivney affected by the Civil War? – Norbert**

Michael McGivney was nine years old when the Civil War began in 1861. Waterbury was a major industrial center at the time, so young Michael likely saw the wartime industry that was taking place in the city. It is also a fair bet that some of the older boys in Michael's community left home to enlist in the military.



**How and when did Father McGivney start the Knights of Columbus? – Dominic**

**How old was Father McGivney when he started the Knights? – Zachary**  
Father McGivney started the Knights in 1882, at age 29. While serving at St. Mary's Church in New Haven, Father McGivney saw that the Catholic families of his parish

time, they were often prone to injuries or even death. Father McGivney envisioned being able to provide these families with financial assistance if this happened.

**Are any of Father McGivney's descendants still living today? – Chad, Rolangie, Viana and Camila**

Several descendants of the McGivney family are still living today, all nieces and nephews many generations removed. Among them are: John Walshe, a lawyer living in Bridgeport, Conn., Father Gerald T. Burns of Sarasota, Fla., Notre Dame Sister Louise Finn and Gerald O'Brian of Flanders, N.J. Some of Father McGivney's relatives have even carried on the family tradition and worked for the Knights of Columbus or are active members.

**What is being done in honor of Father McGivney today? – Amy T.**

**What are the miracles God worked through Father McGivney? – Rachel**

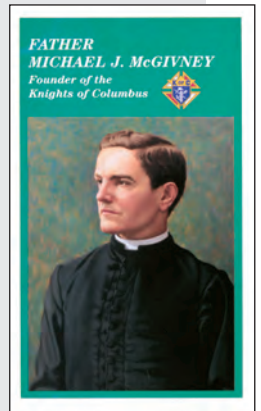
Knights of Columbus around the world have honored Father McGivney in their own way. Some have erected statues or memorials in his honor, while other have donated books or paintings of Father McGivney to local schools and libraries. There is even a Catholic high school in Ontario, Canada, named after him.



## 'Apostle to the Young'

**T**he Father McGivney Guild was founded in 1997 to gather and disseminate information on the life and legacy of this 19th-century parish priest and the founder of the

Knights of Columbus. The Guild regularly publishes a newsletter that contains informative articles about Father McGivney, his cause for canonization, and favors attributed to his intercession. Guild members can also order devotional items, like prayer cards, statues and rosaries. Visit [www.fathermcgivney.org](http://www.fathermcgivney.org) or call 203-752-4087 for more information.



through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the actions of the pope, will declare Father McGivney a saint. The account of a reported miracle that was sent to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints will not be revealed until that time.

Nonetheless, the Father McGivney Guild regularly receives letters from people who have prayed to Father McGivney for help. These favors, which are reported in each issue of the *Guild Newsletter* and at [www.fathermcgivney.org](http://www.fathermcgivney.org), range from healings to guidance. ■

## The most important people in Michael's life were his parents and his parish priest

needed both financial and spiritual support. He gathered 27 men from his parish and formed the Knights of Columbus to address these needs.

Since many Catholic Irishmen were working in factories at the

The cause for Father McGivney's canonization was opened in the Archdiocese of Hartford in 1997 and is under review by the Vatican. Until a decision is made, we must wait and pray that the Church,