

Local News

## Knights, Ladies of Peter Claver provide \$10K to area parishes



Members of the Knights of Peter Claver attend the annual St. Martin de Porres Mass Nov. 7, 2019 at the Cathedral Basilica of SS. Peter and Paul. The fraternal organization, which includes a Ladies Auxiliary and Junior Divisions for youth, recently donated \$10,000 to area parishes as part of its century-plus legacy of charitable works on behalf of the Catholic Church. (Photo by Sarah Webb)

By Gina Christian • Posted December 14, 2020

Several area parishes and ministries are receiving some much-needed financial support, thanks to the nation's largest historically African American Catholic lay organization.

The Knights of Peter Claver and Ladies Auxiliary Philadelphia Central Committee (PCC) recently awarded a total of \$10,000 to nine parishes and one senior residence. Recipients of the \$1,000 gifts were Philadelphia parishes St. Athanasius, St. Barbara, St. Cyprian, St. Francis de Sales, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Martin de Porres and Our Lady of Hope; Holy Family Home, operated by the Little Sisters of the Poor in West Philadelphia; Sacred Heart Parish in Camden, New Jersey; and St. Joseph Parish in Wilmington, Delaware.

To maximize the impact of the donation, the Knights and Ladies partnered with the [Catholic Foundation of Greater Philadelphia](#) (CGFP) and its [Parish Support Initiative](#). Launched in the spring after the COVID-related suspension of public liturgies, the initiative has helped parishes weather the downturn in weekly offertory collections by providing an additional stream of income.

CFGF president and CEO Sarah Hanley welcomed the support of the Knights of Peter Claver and Ladies Auxiliary, saying “the organizations receiving these awards will be so appreciative.”

For the Knights and Ladies, the donation was part of a long tradition of service that stretches back more than 110 years.

“This is our way of showing our love and support for our priests and our churches,” said Janice Paige, acting president of the PCC and grand lady of the organization’s court number 342. “The purpose of the Knights and Ladies is to serve the church and the community, and to provide charitable support.”

Founded in 1909, the Knights of Peter Claver and Ladies Auxiliary work to further the legacy of their patron saint, who ministered to African slaves in Cartagena, Colombia during the 17th century. The Jesuit priest routinely met docking ships to provide food, medical aid and spiritual instruction to slaves, ultimately baptizing an estimated 300,000 over four decades.

“He is a role model, and the epitome of being charitable to your fellow man,” said Paige, a member of St. Athanasius Parish in Philadelphia.

In recent years, local Knights and Ladies have given thousands of dollars to ministries throughout the Philadelphia region, including several operated by archdiocesan Catholic Social Services such as the Women of Hope shelter and the former St. Francis-St. Joseph/St. Vincent Homes for Children.

Other beneficiaries include St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Wynnewood and St. Joseph’s House in Camden, New Jersey. Numerous high school seniors have received scholarships from the group, which also supports the canonization cause of Father Augustus Tolton, the first recognized U.S. diocesan priest of African descent.

Through its Junior Knights and Junior Daughters divisions – which welcome Catholic youth aged 7-18 who have made their first holy Communion — the group actively looks to “reach younger people so we can mentor them,” said Paige.

“Every organization should be reaching down and back to help youth come forward,” she said. “There’s no future without the youth.”

In fact, mentoring is essential to the mission of the group, which also features “an emerging leaders division (that pairs) senior members ... with those in their 20s and 30s,” she said.

At present, there are approximately 300 local members the organization among the Philadelphia Archdiocese and the Camden and Wilmington Dioceses, said Paige, adding that more are always welcome.

Members are required to be baptized Catholics and registered parishioners, and although the group is “predominantly African American, we have a wonderful flavor of diversity,” said Paige.

Fellow Lady of Peter Claver Cynthia Brown agreed.

“We are open to everyone,” she said. “We reflect the universality of the church.”

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