History of the Our Lady Comforter of the Afflicted Knights of Columbus Council 14710

As we entered the twenty first century, our parish was basically void of any Catholic men’s groups. A number of parishioners were members of various Knights of Columbus councils from other areas. The original Waltham Knights of Columbus council 147 had become inactive. The men of the Sacred Heart Church on River St Waltham had just formed their own Knights of Columbus council and paid a visit to Our Lady’s to recruit membership. Several men from Our Lady’s accepted the invitation to join their council in 2006 and 2007. Among them were William Waters and the late Sherwood Vandewater.

Throughout 2008, plans were discussed for establishing a Knights of Columbus council at Our Lady Comforter of the Afflicted. In the Summer of 2008, Rev. James DiPerri was appointed pastor of Our Lady Comforter of the Afflicted Church. At the conclusion of his first Mass at Our Lady Comforter of the Afflicted Church, Father DiPerri stepped outside to meet the congregation as they left the Church. At the tail end of the line was a small contingent of Knights led by Sherwood Vandewater. After an introduction, Sherwood announced that we intended to form our own Knights of Columbus council here at Our Lady’s, of course, with the approval and help of Father DiPerri.

Membership drives were held over the next few months and we were finally able to sign up enough members to start our council. On February 9, 2009, the Our Lady Comforter of the Afflicted Council #14710 was chartered by the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus. Sherwood Vandewater was elected as the first Grand Knight and served for the next two years.

As a new council, we needed to find our way serving our parish and gaining the confidence of our new pastor. We began by assisting at Masses, greeting at the doors of our Church, and participating in usher duties. Our treasury was almost non-existent. Our first fund raising event was “What’s it Worth?” An appraiser from a well known auction company would appraise items brought by guests. One item would be verbally appraised for a small admission donation. This was a limited and small event but it started us on our way. All of the net proceeds from this event were donated to the Parish.

That fall, we held our first of many Pasta Dinners. The stove in the cafeteria kitchen was in disrepair so we had to hire a caterer. A new stove was acquired and installed permitting us to prepare the pasta dinners. We always had some type of entertainment at our dinners. Usually a small group or entertainer with a guitar or keyboard. Our first entertainment was the Singing Grandpops from the Arlington Retired Men’s Club. They were a great hit. Other entertainment included music trivia, TV Theme songs and Pig Races. We hosted dozens of dinners through March of 2020. We held our last dinner one week prior to the Covid-19 pandemic that closed everything down everywhere.

Our annual Christmas Wreath Sale began in the fall of 2009 and is still going strong today. The Wreath sale provides funding for many of our charitable works and activities.

The Parish soon provided a page on their website for our council. This gave us a platform to inform everyone of our activities and events. Our activities are frequently announced in the parish bulletin.

In 2010, we began hosting our first of many Red Cross Blood drives in the School Hall.

In 2011, the Knight of the Year award was instituted. This award is presented to a Knight who exemplifies our order’s basic principles for Charity, Unity, Fraternity, and Patriotism over the past year. A plaque is displayed in the front foyer of the Church with the names of Knights who have received this award.

 In February 2014, our council acquired devices to help those with hearing impairments listen to Mass and other services in the Church. Since then, the devices and equipment have been upgraded. Anyone with a hearing impairment may use one of these devices.

In 2015, we became aware of an issue at the handicap entrance of the Church. While this entrance had provided excellent access to the mobility impaired over the years, difficulty was often encountered trying to open the door. The Knights set about trying to rectify this problem. Proceeds from several of our fund raisers were set aside to fund this project. By June, 2016, we had raised enough money to purchase and install an automatic door opener. It remains operational today.

The Knights of Columbus Free Throw Championship is a program where school age children ages 9 through 14 may compete in Basketball free throws. Each contestant receives 15 attempts with the high scorer in each boys and girls age class moving up to a District, Regional and State level competitions. A similar program is provided for the Soccer Challenge. Our council has hosted these programs at our parish for many years but was suspended after the start of the pandemic.

Medical Needs: Our council acquired an AED Defibrillator for the Church and had it mounted in the Front foyer. We also acquired two wheel chairs that see occasional emergency use in the Church.

Parish Projects: Our Knights of Columbus is always attentive to various parish projects. In 2010, we embarked on cleaning up the railings and columns at all the entrances of the Church. Wrought iron was sanded, wire brushed, primed and painted. This was only a temporary solution but helped make our Church entrances more presentable. Several years later, the parish removed the front stairs and railings and installed new walkway to all of the entrances. We still do touch-up painting where and when we can. We have done or participated in many other parish projects including providing Christmas Wreaths in and around parish buildings through the contributions of parishioners, brush Removal around the school, parish office and rectory, repairing over two dozen defective pews and kneelers, Stations of the Cross rehabilitation (removing and reinstalling), and minor repair work and maintenance in the Church and other parish areas. Our knights are represented in most of the parish ministries.

Mothers and Fathers Day: In 2010, we started a Mothers Day Roses Program where a rose was provided to all woman at all Masses that weekend. On Fathers Day, we conduct a similar program providing each man with a small gift. We have maintained these programs almost every year as funding permitted.

Coats for Kids: A big program for the Knights of Columbus is the Coats for Kids program. We provide new, very good quality winter coats to needy school age children. We started this in 2013 and continue hosting this program annually. We partner with our St. Vincent de Paul conference, other conferences, and other organizations to distribute these coats.

 The Pandemic: The Pandemic created new challenges for the parish and the Knights of Columbus. Masses had to be held outside with spacing between individuals and families. Father DiPerri directed that an outside altar platform be created in the West parking lot adjacent to the Church. Assisting the parish staff, the knights established an outside altar using existing staging and other materials. Each Sunday, the West parking lot was closed to motor vehicles. Parishioners would bring lawn chairs and occupy a parking space per individual or family. The altar platform would be covered with a protective tarp when not in use. Each Sunday (and holy days), the Knights would uncover the altar, move chairs, a portable altar (table), candles, a large cross, and altar cloths onto the altar platform and then reverse the process after Mass. Knights aided in parking cars in the East parking lot before Mass. Numerous other tasks were completed by Knights, sacristans, and helpful parishioners. These Masses took place every Sunday without fail, during extreme heat, cold, and foul weather for three years permitting people to attend Mass during this dire period. On September 13, 2020, Cardinal Shawn O’Mally celebrated Mass on the outside altar in front of 700+ parishioners.

Today, we continue to be active in the parish rallying to the call for assistance for various activities and needs along with our regular needs.