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Knights of Divine Mercy: Calling men to be 'spiritual warriors'

By Mary C. Uhler
CATHOLIC HERALD STAFF

MADISON -- *Sound the trumpet! Rouse the warriors!*

As C. S. Lewis said, the world is "enemy-occupied territory" and God is calling on men to be "conquering warriors" in a spiritual battle.

That is why Fr. Rick Heilman has established the Knights of Divine Mercy, a new movement that is sponsoring the first Madison-area conference for Catholic men.
Masculine spirituality

The Knights are "calling all Catholic men to explore the meaning of masculine spirituality, heroic virtues, and how to become spiritual warriors," said Father Heilman. He is pastor of St. Mary Parish, Pine Bluff, and St. Ignatius Parish, Mt. Horeb.

The inaugural event on Friday, Sept. 29 (the feast of St. Michael the Archangel), will be held at the Bishop O'Connor Catholic Pastoral Center in Madison. It will feature Fr. Thomas Loya, often heard on Relevant Radio. It will begin with a Mass at 7 p.m. followed by a tailgate-style dinner and Father Loya's talk.

Father Loya is currently the pastor of Annunciation of the Mother of God Byzantine Catholic Church in Chicago, Ill., and an advisor to the Theology of the Body International Alliance. He has directed many retreats and has been a guest speaker at conventions and at World Youth Day.

'Spiritual warfare'

In explaining this new movement, Father Heilman emphasized something that Fr. John Coropi once said, that men and women are "equal in dignity" but they are not the same. He said men must accept responsibility for such evils as abortion, sexually transmitted disease, contraception, and pornography.

"The enemy (the devil) has taken so much ground, a little here, a little there. A foothold becomes a stronghold," said the priest. "God said, 'I want warriors to take it back, to take back the surrendered ground.'"

Father Heilman knows first-hand the power of spiritual warfare.

In the community of Pine Bluff, Father Heilman and other citizens were shocked when a "gentleman's club" was opened in 2005. "We had a strip club in our wholesome town," he said. "So we prayed. We planted 14 crosses and called it a Prayer Mile. We called on people to walk that mile and pray. We invoked God's power."

At the end of the Prayer Mile, Father Heilman invited people to tie white ribbons on a kneeler in front of the cross in the parish cemetery. Almost 700 ribbons were tied.

"Six months later, that strip club was gone," he said. "We reclaimed this surrendered ground for God."

Power of God

He encourages men to take that "warrior spirit" into other battles in society. He compares it to Joshua's battle against the Malachites as recorded in Scripture. In that battle, Moses held up a staff on the hill over the battle with the help of others. As long as he held up the staff, the Israelites won.

That battle ironically occurred at the foothills of Mt. Horeb, the place for which the city of Mt. Horeb is named.

Like the Israelites, noted Father Heilman, "We can do nothing on our own. We need the power of God. We must invoke the power of God."

In this battle, we do not need a sword, he said. "We can use such things as the Rosary and the miraculous medal. I invite all men to consecrate themselves to Our Lord through Our Lady and to be empowered. Step up as spiritual leaders. Draw upon the great power of the Eucharist through Mass and Eucharistic Adoration."

Father Heilman said if men become strong spiritual leaders, they will bring family and friends back to the faith.