

About two weeks ago I was in Regina for the Regina Chapter Midterm Meeting and during the meeting there was a short discussion about only recruiting “quality gentlemen” and I feel that I need to address this comment as well as a few other potentially problematic choices of words.

A few months ago, my State Deputy Message addressed the issue surrounding the phrase “all Supreme wants is numbers” where I pointed out that this is a myth. In this message I want to show this “quality” question to be not only a myth but also a phrase that is leading us away from our duty as Knights. I also want to make sure that the members who were at that meeting in Regina, understand that I was not finding fault with anyone at that meeting. I was just trying to put aside that myth and avoid the possibility that someone else at that meeting might have misunderstood the intent of the speaker. I know both the speaker and another gentleman that was vocal in supporting that idea, and I know that they are good Knights and that the intent of the comment was not meant to promote any inappropriate ideas. However, my fear when I heard those words, and why I felt it was necessary to speak up on the issue, was that I was afraid that other Knights; younger Knights, might have misunderstood the intent of the comment.

I fully agree that we must not simply recruit for numbers. Supreme does not give us goals to simply gain numbers. Our Council and State Goals are to give us something to aim at because without something to aim for, nothing would happen. Supreme is concerned about the future of Councils and even our Parishes here in Saskatchewan and that is why they give us something at which to aim. The Knights of Columbus of Saskatchewan have, for the most part, been on a 21 year decrease in membership and that is of great concern to the Supreme Office and to me.

The “quality gentlemen” question comes down to being careful about what we say and the possibility that such a comment can be misconstrued. As much as I know that no Brother Knight is suggesting that we should be elitist or be judging our brothers in the Church, the simple fact is such comments can be read in that way. Years ago someone started talking about “Supreme and their numbers” and it was repeated and repeated until it became a mantra to discourage recruitment. Now I am hearing that we should only recruit “quality gentlemen” and I fear that, if misunderstood and not addressed, such a comment will also spread, becoming more and more misunderstood along the way. I fear; that this comment, misunderstood, can lead to the spread of a very destructive belief within the Order. It could lead to the belief that the Knights are an elitist and very judgemental group, and that is not the intent of the Order or the Church.

When assessing the Catholicity of a potential Candidate, we are to get the input of the Parish Priest or Council Chaplain, and if necessary, keep an eye out at Church to confirm if he is a regular attendee. We also should be asking about how he views his Catholicity, when we sit down and talk to him about the Order. Confirming a potential candidate’s Catholicity is our duty, but we must also be careful how we use that responsibility.

In the end, it is not a question of us recruiting quality gentlemen. We are to recruit Catholic men and help them become “quality gentlemen.” We are called to recruit brother Catholics and help them grow in their Faith and become better members of society. We can do this by the examples of our lives, but also by the hosting of spiritual events in the Parish and inclusion of a spiritual element in every Council meeting. Ten to fifteen minutes of every meeting should be allotted to the faith and spiritual development of the membership. A spiritual discussion should be held, either using the Formation Program found on the State Web Page, or preferably by your Council Chaplain leading the discussion.

We also should be using the Mentorship program, found on Page 17 of the Leadership Guide to Membership Recruitment, where we assign an active member who will help the new Knight understand what the Knights of Columbus are about, get him active in a few events and let him know that the essence of the Order is our Faith. The new member should quickly learn that our aim is the development of his faith and the growth of his attitude of service. If we are finding that our Council has many members who could be deemed “less than quality” then we have to look in the mirror and find out what we have not done correctly to help that gentleman grow in his faith and in his desire to serve society. The Mentorship program can help with these less active members as well. There is nothing wrong with going back to them and saying that we did not show them the ropes of the Order as well as we should have and to ask them for a second chance, this time assigning a Mentor and explaining the assets of active membership in the Order. Doing this is helping a brother become a “quality gentleman.” It has nothing to do with numbers. It has to do with serving, and a most important way of serving has to do with helping a brother Knight and his family grow in the Faith.

This is just another example of how innocuous words can send the wrong message. In the year and a half I have been State Deputy I have come across similar situations on several occasions, whether it is “Supreme only wants numbers,” or in this case “recruit quality gentlemen.” However, there is another problematic statement that goes “there is nobody to recruit.” I know that in some communities, recruiting can be difficult, but if we say that there is **NOBODY** to recruit, than no one in the Council will even try. There may be only one or two gentlemen coming to Church who are not members, but if you are saying that there is nobody out there to ask, than no one will even consider talking to them. It becomes a self fulfilling prophesy, because, without intending to, you are telling the membership to not bother recruiting. I suggest that instead, we should be recognizing which gentlemen in the Parish are not Knights and consider asking them again. In this way we encourage a member to talk to the gentlemen and he may have success in the attempt. It is always better to promote an attempt than to discourage trying.

We also should be taking into account young people in our communities who were Baptized Catholic but are not regular attendees in Church. What are we doing to encourage them to come to Church more often than Christmas and Easter? Instead of saying that there is nobody to ask, maybe we have to work to bring a man and his family back into the Church, and help him grow in his Faith, so that eventually he may also decide to be a Knight.

The fact is that we are called to serve, we are called to strengthen our Parishes, and we are called to help our Brothers grow in the Faith, and if we fall back on problematic and often misinterpreted phrases such as “there is nobody to ask,” or “Supreme only wants numbers,” or “only recruit quality gentlemen,” will we be doing our duty?

If you have not already done so, please remember to submit the following forms.

- Your Council’s Fraternal Survey
- Your Council’s Partnership Profile with Special Olympics (remember that every Council donates \$1 per member to Special Olympics, through the Charity Appeal Draw).

Last year, because the Councils submitted these 2 forms, we as the Jurisdiction of Saskatchewan submitted 100% of our Fraternal Surveys and Special Olympics Saskatchewan received extra funds from the Supreme Council.

Have a Good Month

Edward Gibney SD
Saskatchewan