

Knights of Columbus earn an assist for Flying Fathers hockey team

The Flying Fathers' goal of playing and praying for a better world is getting a much-needed boost from the Knights of Columbus.

The Ontario State Council of the fraternal order is pushing its almost 600 local councils to lend financial support to the resurrected Flying Fathers charity hockey team as it travels the province – and beyond this fall when the latest edition of the team goes international for the first time – raising funds for local charities.

Rev. Kris Schmidt, the pastor of Our Lady of the Angels parish in Fort Saskatchewan, is a part of the resurrected Flying Fathers team, and the only player from Western Canada.

Rev. John Perdue has been leading the Flying Fathers since they were relaunched in 2018 and understands the resources needed to take on such an endeavour.

“It takes some resources to build a hockey team,” said Perdue, who is director of vocations for the Diocese of Peterborough, Ont.

A Knight himself (with Peterborough's St. Alphonsus Parish), Perdue was in conversation with Sean Dunlop, a member of his council as well as the state executive, who in turn brought up the idea of the Knights lending a hand to the Flying Fathers at the state level. Ontario State Deputy David Peters welcomed the idea and immediately drummed up support for the program among local councils.

“Anything to do with supporting our clergy, we always stand behind it,” said Peters.

For a start, it's a pretty modest goal the Flying Fathers have set, said Perdue in an interview on the way to playing in Kirkland Lake Feb. 21 before wrapping up the short five-game tour of northern Ontario in Timmins the following night. They are hoping to raise \$10,000 from the Knights and were more than a third of the way there by late February.

More money will “ensure our viability,” said Perdue, which will mean longer tours.

“The hope is to make sure our expenses are covered on tour,” he said.

So far, those costs are covered by the gate from each stop on the tour.

There's also the goal of bringing the Flying Fathers and its hockey ministry into the modern age.

"We hope to have a better online presence, social media presence," said Perdue. "There's some hope that maybe, you know, people ask if they can buy a Flying Fathers' jersey. We just don't have the resources to build as an organization just yet. This would give us some room to really be a positive force for the Church."

The team is carrying on the tradition built by Rev. Brian McKee and former NHLer Rev. Les Costello, who won a Stanley Cup with the Toronto Maple Leafs in 1948. The duo founded the Flying Fathers in 1963 to raise funds for a family in need. They spent the next several decades using their hockey skill and outrageous antics to raise millions of dollars for charities across Canada and beyond. The team had been on hiatus for a decade when former general manager Frank Quinn in 2017 convinced Perdue to revive the team which hit the ice again the next year.

Perdue is seeing the benefits of the Flying Fathers' renewal.

"It's a beautiful thing for the Church, for the image of the priesthood, the joy of our faith, for the charities that we benefit," said Perdue.

"I see layers of value in what we're doing, it's really wonderful. The positive impact, especially on young men, to see that priests can play hockey, too."

There's also been the added bonus of developing some priestly fraternity on the road.

"Young people seeing these priests having so much fun playing hockey, this will go a very long way in breaking many barriers," said Peters.

With the winter tour now wrapped up, the Flying Fathers are now anticipating the fall tour which will take the team to various towns in the Diocese of London, Ont. and then into the upper peninsula of Michigan.

The team is also looking for a new general manager, with Quinn set to retire from his duties. That will allow the priests to concentrate on their priestly duties in parishes and ministry.