

**Cardinal James Gibbons' 1917 Letter to
Members of the U.S. Hierarchy
Requesting their Assent to the
National Catholic War Council**

Cardinal's Residence,
Baltimore, Maryland.
November 21st., 1917.

After the meeting of the Catholic University Trustees last week, the Archbishops and Bishops present informally discussed the needs of our Catholic soldiers and sailors during the war. It was our unanimous opinion that the Hierarchy should act in concert; that the responsibility of taking the lead and organizing rested upon the Board of Archbishops, as our only constituted body; that, accordingly, the Board of Archbishops should organize without delay as a Catholic War Council; and, that if it be deemed best it should associate with itself a number of the Bishops for the active direction and carrying on of Catholic work in the war.

It was also agreed that we ought to consider the best means of utilizing the services of the gentlemen, clerical and lay, who as our representatives, had formed the National Catholic War Council.

There are several questions demanding immediate consideration, as, for instance:

1. The organization of our war council.
2. The whole question of chaplains, their recruitment, their special training, their supervision here and abroad, etc.
3. Legislation in the Congress about to convene, which will affect the number of chaplains or other religious interests, - a very urgent and vital matter.
4. A budget of probable expenditures for Catholic needs, so far as can be estimated at present.
5. The raising of funds.
6. The Knights of Columbus: their status and sphere of work; their campaign for funds, etc.
7. The erection of halls for divine service and as social centres in the great majority of camps; these were never included in the K. of C. programme.

8. The founding and maintaining of a school to give to K. of C. camp secretaries the necessary training; without it many or most of them would be unequal to their task.
9. Means of combating immorality near camps; the safe-guarding of Catholic young men and girls.
10. The preparation and distribution of religious literature to our soldiers and sailors.
11. The organizing of local war councils, which can, if properly managed, do most valuable work, and foster a fine spirit of zeal in our Dioceses.
12. Catholic War Records, which should be begun at once, under responsible authority.
13. The mental and moral preparation of our people for the war.

There are many other anxious problems and more will arise. This war offers us, indeed, the grandest opportunity in all history of inspiring our men with religion; but it also puts to the severest test, not only our spirit of zeal, but our ability to organize and to cope with new difficulties. We all realize that the situation demands the best thought and the best effort of us all. We can hardly exaggerate the dangers to our young men and to the future of religion.

I ask, therefore, whether you would agree to the formation of a war council by the Board of Archbishops. I shall be grateful for an early reply: kindly give me your observations and suggestions.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

J. Card. Gibbons,