

MESSAGE FROM THE SUPREME KNIGHT

Dear Brother Knights and Friends:

Devotion to Our Lady of Charity dates to the early 1600s, when a statue of the Blessed Mother holding the Christ Child was found in Cuban waters by three young men.

As the story has been passed down, the three were rowing in search of salt to preserve meat for the copper miners of El Cobre. Halfway across the bay, the young men sought shelter from a storm and encamped for the night. In the morning, they saw a white bundle floating toward them. It was a statue attached to a board that was inscribed with the words: "I am the Virgin of Charity" ("Yo soy la Virgen de la Caridad"). A shrine was erected in her honor and devotion to Our Lady of Charity spread throughout Cuba.

Our Lady of Charity now comes to Knights of Columbus everywhere as we turn to her maternal intercession in our new Marian Prayer Program. Although the Virgin of Charity has her origins in Cuba, devotion to her is altogether appropriate for the Knights of Columbus due to our first principle of charity.

Our prayer program also gives us an opportunity to pray in solidarity with Pope Benedict XVI, whose first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, was dedicated to the theme of charity. During each prayer service we will remember in a special way the pope and his worldwide ministry as the Vicar of Christ and shepherd of the Universal Church. At the conclusion of the yearlong prayer program, a "spiritual bouquet" will be presented to the pope, including a report on the total number of prayer services that were held and the approximate number of participants.

Our Lady of Charity also had a special place in the ministry of Pope Benedict's predecessor, Pope John Paul II of happy memory, who preached the Gospel with courage during his historic pastoral trip to Cuba in January 1998. In a solemn ceremony attended by thousands of Cuban Catholics, he crowned the statue of Our Lady of Charity, which was carried in procession through the streets.

This Marian Prayer Program with an image of Our Lady of Charity is a graced opportunity to reflect on the virtue of charity and to make more widely known the beautiful teaching of *Deus Caritas Est*, in which Pope Benedict XVI explores the true nature of charity, based on love of God and love of neighbor.

Following the pope's teaching, all of our charitable works for parishes, vocations, communities, schools and individuals must flow from Christian love supported by regular prayer and attendance at Mass, and be informed by the self-giving love of Jesus and the maternal heart of Mary. Charity, or love, is the virtue that must distinguish every Christian. Jesus said to his disciples during the Last Supper: "As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

May this Marian Prayer Program bring us all to a greater understanding of the virtue of charity and inspire us to carry Christ's love to the world around us.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carl A. Anderson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Carl A. Anderson
Supreme Knight