



To Supreme Knight Virgil C. Dechant  
and the Knights of Columbus

Once again this year, I am pleased to extend cordial greetings and prayerful good wishes on the occasion of the 112th Annual Meeting of the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus.

It is most appropriate, during this International Year of the Family, that your assembly will consider the dignity and mission of the family and the particular challenges facing families today. The Knights of Columbus can trace their history to the lively concern of Father McGivney and the founding members for the support of families in need. It is my hope that the present Meeting will confirm your Order in this commitment and will provide inspiration and direction for renewed efforts to defend and promote the family at this critical moment.

As I wrote in my recent Letter to Families, "the Church considers serving the family to be one of her essential duties" (No. 2), for it is in the family, the first and most basic human community, that individuals discover their own deepest identity and learn the fundamental art of life and love. The Church's defense of the family as a community based on marriage, open to God's gift of life and possessing certain inalienable rights, is an essential part of her service to civil society. Who can deny that society today is experiencing a profound crisis precisely in

relation to the family and to the values of self-sacrificing love, lasting fidelity, respect for life and concern for the weak and less fortunate? The very future of society depends on safeguarding these fundamental moral values which, in God's plan, the family is called to embody and to pass on.

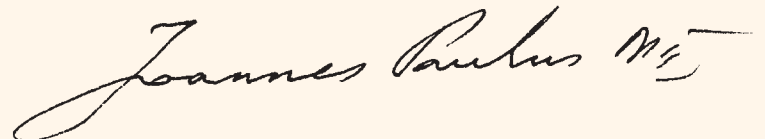
Experience testifies that "whole civilizations and the cohesiveness of peoples depend above all on the human quality of their families" (Christifideles Laici, 40). No one concerned for the future of society can fail to perceive the extent of the present crisis: the signs are all too evident in the tragic breakdown of so many families through divorce, in aggressive attempts to propagate a contraceptive and anti-life mentality in the name of a freedom which ignores the objective norms of the moral law, in the shameful holocaust of innocent lives resulting from the legalization of abortion, and in the violence and manipulation to which innocent and defenseless children are being increasingly subjected.

Today more than ever, the Church's apostolate to families needs to be supported by each of her members and, above all, by families themselves. I am deeply grateful for the outstanding support which over the years the Knights of Columbus have given to the Church's mission of promoting Catholic family life. During this Year of the Family, I encourage you to renew your efforts to confirm Christian families in their witness of faith

and love, and thus enable them to play their part in the building of a just and morally sound social order. I urge you to continue to give voice to the Gospel of Christian married love in requiring "from all, beginning with public authorities, respect for those rights which, in saving the family, will save society itself" (ibid.).

With these sentiments, I assure you of my prayers that your deliberations will help the family to live more fully its sublime vocation as "the center and heart of the civilization of love" (Letter to Families, 13). Invoking upon all the Knights of Columbus and your families the loving protection of the Holy Family of Nazareth, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and peace in Jesus Christ our Savior.

From the Vatican, 1 June 1994

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Johannes Paulus II". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.