

Knights of Columbus give thanks on Mother's Day with "MaryGold" outreach

The Knights of Columbus celebrate one of God's greatest gifts on Mother's Day, with their "MaryGold" program.

The outreach started in 1992, in Council 1393 at St. John Parish in Westminster, the brainstorm of Ray Kelly. John McCuen inherited it with 12 parishes; as program chairman he has helped expand it to 85 parishes, some outside the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

The program recognizes motherhood and Mary, the ultimate mother. It distributes marigold flowers on Mother's Day with the message, "Happy Mother's Day from the Knights of Columbus. Thank you for choosing LIFE." The marigold is usually given to the youngest child of the family, for him or her to present it to the mom. "The kids are ecstatic," McCuen said. "When you are a child, unless your father gives you the money to get something for your mother, you are not able to really get something yourself. In this case, you are able to give your mother a material gift, that someone gave you to present to her."

The beauty of the program is the surprise to the mother, grandmother, godmother and expectant mother.

"Imagine a young mom with three children, getting breakfast, dressing them, trying to get them to church on time, rushing," McCuen said. "When she comes out of church, she is already thinking about the next thing she has to do, but all of a sudden there is a refreshing pause, of a young child giving her a marigold saying 'Thanks, Mom.' "

The MaryGold program is a pro-life program with a lovely message: Thanks for choosing life.

"This program strengthens our Catholic faith," McCuen said. "You have choices, and

we celebrate when the choice is life, that is what we are all about.”

The program has had incredible growth, mostly through word of mouth, spreading to Pennsylvania, Virginia and Florida. Some councils have variations distribute carnations or roses instead of marigolds, but the message remains the same.

The MaryGold program does not solicit donations.

“I’ve never heard of a downside to this program,” McCuen said. “It is only 20 cents per flower; it takes an hour or two to replant the flowers in little cups and put a flag with the message in it.

It is usually a religious education or a parish group who volunteer to do it, and then it probably takes us 10 minutes after Mass to distribute it for free, but each parish does it differently. The priest might bless the flowers during Mass, too.”

After seeing the success of this program, many ask John McCuen, “What do you have for Father’s Day?” but his response is, “I am absolutely clueless. We have yet to come up with a program that creates as much goodwill and puts a smile on everyone’s face as this one. “