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Knights' praised in papal message

by Cindy Wooden by Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY -- The Knights of Columbus "have worked tirelessly" to help U.S. Catholics recognize and oppose efforts to "redefine and restrict the exercise of the right to religious freedom," said a message signed by Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Vatican secretary of state.

The theme chosen for the Knights' Aug. 7-9 convention in Anaheim, Calif., "Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land," is a reminder not only of "the great biblical ideals of freedom and justice which shaped the founding of the United States of America, but also the responsibility of each new generation to preserve, defend and advance those great ideals in its own day," the cardinal wrote.

The message, conveying Pope Benedict XVI's prayers for the Knights' annual gathering and his thanks to the fraternal organization, was published at the Vatican Aug. 2.

Writing on behalf of the pope, Cardinal Bertone thanked the Knights for helping Catholics "recognize and respond to the unprecedented gravity of these new threats to the church's liberty and public moral witness."

The Knights of Columbus, which include about 1.8 million members in the United States and elsewhere, has actively supported the U.S. bishops' campaigns to strengthen traditional marriage, defend the traditional definition of marriage and defend religious freedom. The Knights also have publicly opposed the Obama Administration efforts to force most Catholic employers to include contraception in the health insurance plans they offer employees.

"By defending the right of all religious believers, as individual citizens and in their institutions, to work responsibly in shaping a democratic society inspired by their deepest beliefs, values and aspirations, your order has proudly lived up to the high religious and patriotic principles which inspired its founding," said the message dated July 19 and sent to Supreme Knight Carl A. Anderson.

"The challenges of the present moment are, in fact, yet another reminder of the decisive importance of the Catholic laity for the advancement of the church's mission in today's rapidly changing social context," the message said.

It praised the Knights' efforts to educate their members in the faith and to help them give witness to their beliefs in their daily lives and community involvement.

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