

42nd Marianist World Day of Prayer
October 11, 2026

DIOCESAN SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHARITY OF EL COBRE.

PINAR DEL RÍO (CUBA)

HISTORY OF THE SANCTUARY



In the 20s of the last century the city of Pinar del Río, at the western end of the island, like so many other cities, grew and spread over the hill called Cuarteles.

A group of believing neighbors who settled in the area went to the bishop of that time requesting a small church in the area since the Cathedral was too far away. The bishop thinks it is very good idea but he does not have funds for construction.

This group of neighbors, with the support of the bishop, starts working and organizes activities to raise funds. He hired an architect and they launched the construction of a Hermitage dedicated to Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre,

patron saint of Cuba.

A family commissioned an image of the Virgin from Spain, a worthy replica of the original. On September 7, 1923 it was consecrated and on the 8th (feast of Our Lady of Charity) it was opened for worship.

An enthusiastic community was forged around the Hermitage that was proud of its Hermitage dedicated to the Virgin. In 1979 the Hermitage was declared a Parish and its first parish priest was appointed the legendary Fr. Cayetano (he celebrated his first mass in 1923 inaugurating the Hermitage) He remained as parish priest until 1986.

On the occasion of the centenary, September 8, 1923 - 2023, the Bishop requested from Rome the declaration of the Hermitage as a Diocesan Shrine of Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre, a request that was granted and that fills Pinar del Río Christians with pride.

THE VIRGIN OF CHARITY, PATRON SAINT OF CUBA

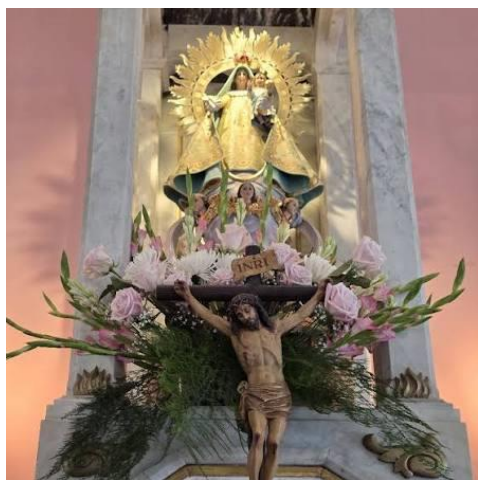
In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was difficult to find a wooden image floating in the sea, when there were so many shipwrecks on these coasts hit by hurricanes and pirates. It was very common in America as a result of the discovery of the cult of the Virgin Mary and her images from Spain, and, as a consequence explainable in those times, the miraculous intervention of the Mother of God.

Around 1613 an image appeared in the bay of Nipe, the largest in Cuba, located on the north coast of the eastern region of the island. Three slaves, a 10-year-old black boy (Juan Moreno) and two brothers of indigenous people (Juan and Rodrigo de Hoyos) who worked in the copper mines of the region, spotted the image.

The trio, "the three Juans", as they are popularly called, had gone in search of salt and spotted the image of the Virgin with the Child Jesus in her arms - the same one that today is the object of veneration by Cubans - which was floating on a board. The following words were inscribed on the statue: "I am the Virgin of Charity". It was probably an image from Illescas in Toledo (Spain) where Mary was venerated under that title.

The discovery produced devotion and enthusiasm. The immediate construction of a simple hermitage with very poor materials gave way over time to what is today the great Sanctuary in El Cobre, in the east of the island.

The Virgin of Charity has become for all Cubans, of all origins, tendencies and religious experiences, - Afro-Cubans, indigenous, Catholics... - the most accepted, respected and beloved identity symbol of Cubans.



History of the interior image

It is a precious wood carving made in Spain commissioned by a family from Pinar del Rio. Brought for the inauguration of the hermitage in 1923. The piece consists of two parts: the image itself of the size of the original that is preserved in El Cobre. The lower part was added to adapt it to the marble canopy. This part represents the boat in a rough sea with the "three Juans" who saw it floating in the sea. The gold and enamel cross was given by the second bishop of the diocese who was the one who consecrated the hermitage. It has been recently restored on the occasion of the centenary in 2023

Description

The Virgin Mary crowned with a dress and golden mantle lined with blue. With Jesus in her left arm, blessing with a globe in his hand. Mary carries a cross in her other hand.

At her feet the moon, the angels and the boat in which "the three Juans" are depicted.

The image of the outside

It was an initiative of the Parish Council in 1986 to install an image in the small outdoor garden that could be seen by many Pinar del Rio residents as they pass by on the street where the church is located.

The Franciscan fathers of the parish of San Antonio de La Habana had this image in the sacristy and donated it to the Sanctuary. Sculpted in Italy in Carrara marble. It was installed on September 8, 1988. Since that day, hundreds of people have stopped every day, crossed themselves, looked at the Virgin and there was never a lack of flowers at her feet.

NOTES ON THE PRESENCE OF THE MARIANIST FAMILY IN CUBA

The first Marianist religious from Spain arrived in Cuba (Camagüey) in January 2003. A second community was later opened in Mariel (diocese of Pinar del Río). The Marianist religious arrived in this diocese in September 2010 at the invitation of Monsignor Jorge Serpa, a friend of the Marianists, whom he had met and worked with in his years spent in Colombia.

Since 2014 there has only been one Marianist religious community, which was entrusted with the pastoral care of the Shrine-Parish of La Caridad. Currently the community is made up of three Spanish religious.

It is in this Shrine-Parish where the first Marianist lay communities emerged. At present there are five Marianist lay communities: two in El Calero around the parish of San Francisco de Asís and three fraternities in La Caridad with about 45 members.



PRAYER INTENTIONS

Now we join in prayer to thank Mary for her constant presence and to rekindle in us the hope of new vocations in the Marianist Family, in the world, and that her spiritual motherhood may be prolonged everywhere.

1. That in this time of uncertainty and difficulty, the Church and each and every Christian may be an important and constant witness to God's love for all men. Let us pray:
2. For our Holy Father, Pope Leo, may the Lord sustain him in his mission, so that he may truly be the Good Shepherd who leads the people, with wisdom, humility and truth. Let us pray:
3. For all the men and women of our world, especially for those who have any kind of need. For all those who are alone and have no one to pray for them. Let us pray:
4. For the Marianist Family, for each of its branches, for each of its members, so that we may live according to the vocation to which we have been called and may be missionaries where we live, wherever we are. Let us pray:

5. For young people, so that they can find models of life that help them to grow as human and spiritual persons, as good men and women in the construction of a new humanity. Let us pray:
6. For vocations to the Christian life and vocations to the Marianist Family in each of its branches: vocations to Marianist Lay Communities, vocations to the Marianist consecrated life. So that together we may bear witness to a people of saints just as our founder desired. Let us pray:

Other free intentions can be added.

Our Father; Hail Mary; Glory be

PRAYER TO THE VIRGIN OF CHARITY

Saint Mary of Charity who came
as a messenger of peace,
floating on the sea.
You are the Mother of all Cubans.
To Thee we come, Holy Mother of God,
to honor you with our love as children.
In your Mother's heart
we put our anxieties and hopes,
Our efforts and our supplications:
For the torn Homeland,
so that we can all build together
well-being, peace and harmony.
For families, so that they may live in fidelity and love.
For children, so that they grow up healthy, physically and
spiritually.
For young people to affirm their faith
and their responsibility in life and in what gives meaning to life.
For the sick and marginalized, for those who suffer in solitude,
for those who are far from their Homeland
and for all who suffer in their hearts.
For the Cuban Church and its evangelizing mission,
by priests and deacons, religious and laity.
For the victory of justice and love in our people.
Mother of Charity, we take refuge under your protection!
Blessed are you among all women
and blessed Jesus, the fruit of your womb!
To Him be glory and power, forever and ever. AMEN

