



Multicultural altars

At D.C. basilica, statues honor Virgin Mother

BY KRIS CORONADO

Since its cornerstone was laid in 1920, the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception (400 Michigan Ave. NE, 202-526-8300, www.nationalshrine.com) has served as a multicultural pilgrimage site representing Marian shrines throughout the world. "We really are unique," says Geraldine M. Rohling, archivist and curator at

the basilica.

More than 70 chapels in the 77,500-square-foot building honor the Virgin Mother from countries such as the Czech Republic and Portugal. Various ethnic communities raise money to fund their own chapels. Our Lady of Lebanon was added in September; Our Lady of Hungary is underway.

Here, a look at a few of the basilica's Mary statues.



The bronze **Our Mother of Africa**, given by the National Black Catholic Congress in 1997, and a nearby bronze relief tell the story of African Americans from slavery to modern day.

Our Lady of Vailankanni,

from the Indian American Catholic Association of Washington, is also called Our Lady of Good Health. A glass panel is removed during worshipers' annual pilgrimage so she can "breathe" health into them, Rohling says.



Our Lady of Altotting,

dedicated in 2005 from the Shrine of Altotting and the people of Bavaria, Germany, is one of five copies of the original 14th-century statue in Germany, Rohling says.



At more than two feet tall, she is **carved from linden wood**; her Bavarian garments were sewn by Cistercian nuns.

Our Lady of Lourdes, dedicated in 1931, was the first chapel constructed outside the Crypt Church. The altar features a stone said to be from the dungeon that held Joan of Arc, Rohling says.



A **rosary** next to the statue represents a German tradition in which a bride receives a rosary on her wedding day, Rohling says.