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At the 168th Commencement

The May Exercises on

Sisters and Father,

Unless we learn how what love sees is true, we cannot keep company with God. You all learned this long ago, took it to heart, stood by it, and made it your ministry.

That ministry began half a century ago, in the Archdiocese of Chicago when Father James McCarthy’s love saw that the Church, the Sacraments, and the presence of God are undeserved gifts proffered for each and every one of us, that Our Lord invites each and every human being into his Church to live its liturgy, to experience its inmost life, and to recognize Him in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread.

Eager to ensure that this divine invitation would be heard and accepted by people with developmental disabilities as well as by those of us with disabilities less conspicuous if no less real, Father McCarthy began to work with parents, special educators and catechists in several Chicago parishes to make Catholic liturgies and catechesis more accessible. Sister Mary Therese Harrington, a member of the Society of Helpers, soon came to help in this work, and they were later joined by Sister Susanne Gallagher, a member of the Sisters of Providence. Thus was born the Special Religious Education Development Network, known by its acronym, SPRED.

And SPRED has spread indeed, long since expanding far beyond Chicago and today administering faith formation and sacramental initiation programs for people with special needs in 28 Catholic dioceses and 200 parishes nationwide, including Notre Dame’s own Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, and in more than 200 small parish faith groups in England, Ireland, Scotland, Australia, South Africa, Malta, and Mexico.

SPRED’s ministry exemplifies the New Evangelization which our Church has called for in this Year of Faith. Your ministry evangelizes by again and again proclaiming that what love sees is true; by more deeply engaging the faithful among us with developmental disabilities who need no less than the rest of us to be renewed, refreshed, and by celebrating the indispensable truth that we all, regardless of our seen and unseen disabilities, are one wholly human body in which God dwells.

For your having summoned our Church to a crucial and too often overlooked ministry, for your insistence that a developmental disability neither tempers Christ’s invitation nor restricts one’s right to respond, for your having ushered countless hungering people to their rightful place at the Eucharistic Table, for your teaching us what “One Bread, One Body” means, the University of Notre Dame rejoices to confer on you its highest honor, the Laetare Medal,

On

Sister Susanne Gallagher, Sister Mary Therese Harrington and Father James H. McCarthy

Chicago, Illinois

June 19, 2013



RESOLUTION

Sponsored by

THE HONORABLE JOHN P. DALEY, PRESIDENT TONI PRECKWINKLE, JERRY BUTLER,

EALEAN COLLINS, JOHN A. FITCHEY, BRIDGET GAINER, JESUS G. GARCIA,

ELIZABETH “LIZ” DOODY GORMAN, GREGG GOSLIN, STANLET MOORE,

JOAN PATRICIA MURPHY, EDWIN REYES, TIMOTHY O. SCHNEIDER, PETER N. SILVESTRI,

DEBORAH SIMS, ROBERT B. STEELE, LARRY SUFFREDIN AND JEFFREY R. TOBOLSKI

COUNTRY COMMISIONERS

WHEREAS The Laetare Medal is an annual award given by the University of Notre Dame in recognition of outstanding service to the Roman Catholic church and society, and

WHEREAS this prestigious award is given to one or more notable American Catholic leaders, whose genius has ennobled the arts and sciences, illustrated the ideals of the church and enreiched the heritage of humanity, and

WHEREAS the medal presented to recipients at the University of Notre Dame’s annual commencement ceremonies has the Latin inscription “Magna est veritas et prevalebit,” meaning “Truth is mighty, and it shall prevail” and

WHEREAS first awarded in 1883, it is the oldest and most prestigious award for American Catholics, and former honorees include President John F. Kennedy, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Thomas “Tip” O’Neill, Dorothy Day, Dave Brubeck, and Robert Sargent Shriver, and

WHEREAS at the 168th Commencement of the University of Notre Dame, the 2013 Laetare Medal was presented to Father James McCarthy, Sister Susanne Gallagher, and Sister Mary Therese Harrington of Chicago, and

WHEREAS Father McCarthy, Sister Gallagher, and Sister Harrington are the three co-founders of the Special Religious Education Development Network, known as SPRED, established more than half a century ago to bring the Sacraments of the Church to those with disabilities, and

WHEREAS from its small origins in Chicago, SPRED has grown to become an integral part of faith formation and sacramental initiation programs for Catholics with special needs in 28 dioceses and over 200 parishes nationwide, as well as faith groups in England, Ireland, Scotland, Australia, South Africa, Malta, and Mexico

WHEREAS Father McCarthy, Sister Gallagher, and Sister Harrington were honored University President Rev. John I. Jenkins for “insisting that a developmental disability neither tempers Christ’s invitation nor restricts one’s right to respond, and they have ushered countless people to their rightful place at the Eucharistic table,” and

WHEREAS Father McCarthy, Sister Gallagher, and Sister Harrington have dedicated their lives to the service of others, and have served as an inspiration to countless parishioners all over the world, who have joined in their ministry of accessibility and inclusiveness, now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Commissioners of Cook County, that the Board does hereby offer its highest tribute and message of congratulations to Sister Susanne Gallagher, S.P., Sister Mary Therese Harrington, S.H., and Rev. James H. McCarthy for their outstanding contributions to the Catholic Church, for their exceptional leadership and devotion, and for removing the barriers to accessibility that once stood between many Catholics and the practice of their faith, and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that this text be spread upon the official proceedings of the Honorable Body, and a ceremonial copy of the same be presented to Father McCarthy, Sister Gallagher, and Sister Harrington, as a symbol of gratitude on behalf of the many lives they have touched through the wonderful ministry of SPRED.

Approved and adopted this 19th day of June, 2013

