For Immediate release!

February 14, 2020

Sister Joan Magnani, SSJ of Jericho Holyoke to receive the 2020 Hibernian Christian Charity Award at March 15th Communion Breakfast

The Ancient Order of Hibernians James A. Curran Division One and the Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians Division Two of Hampden/Hampshire Counties will present the 2020 Christian Charity Award to Sister Joan Magnani, SSJ the Executive Director of the Bureau for Exceptional Children and Adults at Jericho in Holyoke at the Annual Communion Breakfast at the Wherehouse? Holyoke on Sunday March 15, 2020. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass will be held at St Patrick’s Chapel of St Jerome’s Parish Holyoke at 8:00 AM. The Breakfast will take place after Mass. The Christian Charity Award is an outgrowth of the organizations mission to recognize those in the community who “truly seek to improve the quality of life for the people of Hampden/Hampshire Counties.” The past recipients of the award are: Barbara Bernard, (2014), Monsignor David Joyce, (2015), Reverend Mark Mengel, 2016), Karen Blanchard, (2017), Sister Margaret Mc Cleary, SP, (2018), and Sister Kathleen Keating, SSJ (2019).

The Master of Ceremonies will be Nora Mc Mahon. The featured speaker will be former Boston Police Commissioner William B. Evans. While serving the Boston Police Department for 38 years, Commissioner Evans had major roles in Boston’s most notable situations such as the peaceful decampment of the 70 day occupation of Dewey Square by Occupy Boston, the capture of the Boston Marathon bombing suspect, as well as oversight of the planning and security of all major events including parades, sporting events, and demonstrations. He is presently the Director of Public Safety and Chief of Police at Boston College.

Sister Joan stated upon announcement of her award: “I am honored and humbled to be receiving the Ancient Order of Hibernians Christian Charity Award for 2020. To be honored with the past recipients, who have done such remarkable work, is truly special, and a great honor…. I am receiving this in the name of my community and in the name of the many people with different abilities and their families and for the Bureau for Exceptional Children and Adults, Jericho, where all are welcomed.”

Sister Joan has been a member of the Sisters of St Joseph for 59 years. She was born and raised in Springfield, graduated from Cathedral High School in Springfield, Mass. ; entered the Sisters of St Joseph in 1961. She is a graduate of Our Lady of Elms; trained in Special Education Religious at Institute for Special Ministry Loyola University Chicago Illinois and an Education Graduate of St Joseph College West Hartford, Ct. She taught First Grade at Our Lady of Hope School in Springfield, Mass.; and Immaculate Conception in Easthampton, Mass.; began volunteering for the Bureau in 1967; Director of Religious 1972; Associate Director 1988; and Executive Director in 2003 until the present.

Although she loved teaching, she felt called to work with people with different abilities, to promote their dignity and their value. “Walking along side of them came natural to me, as my youngest brother was born with challenges….In the early fifties there was very little available for these special children especially for reception of the Sacraments and religious education training.”

In the late sixties, Sister met Fr. Robert Wagner who was a newly ordained priest in charge of Religious Education in his parish. He was approached by a parent who wanted her son to make his First Communion- this began his life’s work for in 1972 he began the Bureau for Exceptional Children and Adults. With his support, Sr. Joan embarked on a journey to study a specialized method of teaching Religious education to people with different abilities, called SPRED which was affiliated with Loyola University in Chicago. The Bureau has been providing spiritual, educational and social support for the past fifty years. She feels her legacy is “one of love, full inclusion, understanding, treating each person with different abilities with respect, dignity, and value.”

After working in Holyoke for many years, she has come to love the spirit of the Irish, the parade, and all the Irish Cultural events throughout the year.

Sr. Joan’s grandmother was born and brought up in County Claire Ireland and immigrated to the United States as a young lady to find work and become a citizen. She married and had four children and Sister’s mom was one of them. “Nana would recount of her love for the old country, telling of the green fields and a more simple way of life.” Sister has been to Ireland three times and is proud of her Irish roots.

The Annual Communion Breakfast is part of the festivities surrounding the 2020 Holyoke St Patrick’s Parade. For tickets to the Breakfast contact Atty. John J. Driscoll @ 413-534-0445 by March 13.th The tickets for the Breakfast are $25.00 per person.