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Father Jack Wall, president of Catholic Extension, poses with Dominican Sister Jane Meyer Feb. 15, 2024, after he presented her with Extension's seventh annual Houston Spirit of Francis Award for her decades of commitment to Catholic education and promotion of social justice. Meyer was head of school at St. Agnes Academy, an all-girls Dominican college prep high school in Houston, from 1997 until her retirement in June 2022. (OSV News/Rich Kalonick, courtesy Catholic Extension)

by OSV News

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Catholic Extension Society recently honored Dominican Sister Jane Meyer, former head of school at St. Agnes Academy, with its seventh annual Houston Spirit of Francis Award for her decades of commitment to Catholic education and promotion of social justice.

In presenting the award, Father Jack Wall, Extension's president, said Meyer embodied the life and ministry of the award's three namesakes: St. Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis and Father Francis Clement Kelley, the founder of Catholic Extension, all of whom are known for embracing and helping the poor.

He called the Dominican "a great model" of the spirit of Father Kelley, "who said to go to the margins and awaken the mission spirit. She lives the word of St. Francis and brings forth for everyone a great sense of their sacredness and dignity in the world."

The award recognizes an individual or group who has made a significant impact on the mission of the Catholic Church in America through service or philanthropy. It was presented during a Feb. 15 benefit dinner, whose attendees included Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston and retired Bishop Curtis J. Guillory of Beaumont, Texas.

"As a Dominican sister, I truly believe in the spirit of St. Francis, and I'm grateful to Catholic Extension's mission of serving the most vulnerable populations and building up transformative, Catholic faith communities," Meyer said in accepting the award.

Meyer was a teacher and principal at Monsignor Kelly High School in Beaumont from 1971 to 1981. She then transferred to St. Agnes Academy, an all-girls Dominican college prep high school in Houston. She was head of school there from 1997 until her retirement in 2022.

Under Meyer's leadership, St. Agnes' enrollment increased by 50% to 900 students. Her vision consisted "of building a school of excellence, developing women of faith,

and helping each student recognize and live out their talents," said an Extension news release about the award. "She also led major initiatives to construct a state-of-the-art science center, student life center and performing arts center."

Following the 2010 earthquakes that devastated Haiti, St. Agnes students challenged Meyer to jump out of a plane if they raised $25,000 for disaster relief. The campaign far exceeded the original goal, raising more than $82,000. Meyer kept her promise to the students and was dubbed "The Flying Nun."

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In 2012, she founded a sister school partnership with Our Lady Grace in Kisumu, Kenya, establishing annual computer, calculator and book donations.

Meyer received numerous local and national awards, including the National Catholic Educational Association's Catholic Secondary Education Award; Leader of Excellence Award from South Africa's Free Market Foundation; and the St. Anne's Distinguished Alumna Award.

"Sister Jane prepared young ladies to go out into the world with life-giving values and an excellent education, with a sensitivity to reaching out to those on the margin," Guillory said in remarks at the dinner.

"Empathy and compassion is who she is. Those values have transformed her and therefore, transformed others," he added. "She personifies the spirit, the generosity, and the ministry of St. Francis."

Catholic Extension, a Chicago-based nonprofit was founded in 1905 to build up Catholic faith communities in underserved regions. In Texas, the nonprofit has built and repaired over 1,400 church structures in all 15 dioceses in Texas. It currently provides support to the Texas dioceses of Amarillo, Beaumont, Brownsville, El Paso, Laredo, Lubbock, San Angelo and Tyler.