

Center for Religion and Diplomacy honors Cardinal McCarrick for peacemaking

BY SHERRI A. WATKINS

Special to the Standard

In recognition of his ongoing work promoting global religious understanding in the interests of peace and diplomacy, the International Center for Religion & Diplomacy presented its 2008 Faith in Action Award to Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, the archbishop emeritus of Washington.

Staged at Georgetown's Evermay Estate, the June 5 event celebrated the third annual Faith in Action Award for the 10-year-old organization. The center works with religious and political leaders to resolve differences in Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Middle East, and other trouble spots around the world. Through the award, the center seeks to honor those whose work "enables others to see the 'spark of the Divine' in their fellow

human beings."

Introducing the cardinal was John Hamre, president and CEO of the think tank, the Center for International and Strategic Studies. The event, he said, reminded him of the Genesis story in which Abraham spoke to God who was rather dissatisfied with the sinful behavior of the residents of Sodom. All it would take for Him to spare the citizens from destruction would be to find just 10 righteous people in Sodom. The work that the Center for Religion & Diplomacy carries out, said Hamre, is to find those righteous people wherever they are. That work, he said, seeking out the peacemakers and forging alliances, is "proof that God is not asking for perfection, but improvement."

MAN OF PEACE

"Tonight we honor a genuine peacemaker,"

announced Hamre. Cardinal McCarrick began his remarks with, "We know an awful lot of people who deserve such a prize; I accept on behalf of them." The cardinal was recognized as a "formidable champion of human rights and religious reconciliation."

The evening's program noted, "In 2007, Cardinal McCarrick was one of the conveners of the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Holy Land which brought together 35 of the leading Muslim, Jewish, and Christian leaders in encouraging the United States government to exert all possible influence in working for peace in the Holy Land."

Picking up on Hamre's theme, Cardinal McCarrick joked, "This gang here is probably saving the rest of us from the wrath of God." The center's work demonstrates that there are "more of us who believe religion does have a role in diplomacy," he said.

Years ago in Kosovo, recounted the cardinal, when the head of the Muslim community met with the Orthodox patriarch there, "he came up with a mantra: 'The greatest crime against religion is to use religion to hurt other people.'"



PHOTOS BY MARSHA VANDER MEY OF HARPER POINT PHOTOGRAPHY/ COURTESY OF THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR RELIGION & DIPLOMACY

In the top photo, Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, the archbishop emeritus of Washington, receives the Faith in Action Award from Douglas Johnston, the president of the International Center for Religion & Diplomacy. In the lower photo, the cardinal poses with Dr. and Mrs. Johnston.

The cardinal then asked, "If religion is so often part of the excuse, can it not be part of the solution?"

Cardinal McCarrick said that the "genius of people like Douglas Johnston," the founder and president of the International Center for Religion & Diplomacy, "is that they see there is a role for God and ideals and caring for those who become trapped and become foils for others."

The greatest threat right now, believes Cardinal McCarrick, "is the marriage of religious extremism with weapons of mass destruction." There are those who have hijacked Islam, he said, "taking over a beautiful religion for their own purposes... History is filled with religious groups who raise the battle cry of hate and intolerance for their own political purposes."

The Center for Religion & Diplomacy's mission, he said, is "to see common ground to bring about reconciliation - love, compassion, forgiveness, generosity... four great values."



Catholic relief and development agency.

Over the years, Cardinal McCarrick has traveled around the world, including trips to areas affected by major natural disasters, such as to Central America after an earthquake, to South Asia after the tsunami, and to Louisiana and Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina, to ensure people in need would receive prayer and financial support. He has visited many nations as a human rights advocate and to survey humanitarian needs, including China, Cuba, Iran, Vietnam, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Rwanda and Burundi. He also has traveled extensively in Eastern Europe and Central America. In November 1996, then-Archbishop McCarrick was invited to serve on the U.S. Secretary of State's Advisory

Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad, and from 1999-2001, he was a member of the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom.

In January 2000, the president of Lebanon named him an Officer of the Order of the Cedars of Lebanon, and in December 2000, President Clinton presented him with the Eleanor Roosevelt Award for Human Rights.

For the Vatican, he serves on the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, the Pontifical Commission for Latin America and the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See.

Cardinal McCarrick will celebrate his 78th birthday on July 7.

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