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**Catholic Extension Honors and Remembers Father Antonio “T.J.” Martinez**

*Father Martinez celebrated for his work and passion for education*

HOUSTON – Father Antonio “T.J.” Martinez, S.J. was honored posthumously with Catholic Extension’s 2020 Spirit of Francis Award for his leadership and commitment to education for disadvantaged children. The fourth annual award dinner took place at the River Oaks Country Club on Thursday, February 20th with more than 200 people in attendance to celebrate Father Martinez in his memory.

The Catholic Extension Spirit of Francis Award recognizes an individual who has made a significant impact on the Catholic Church’s mission in America through their service or philanthropy. Catholic Extension will accompany Father Martinez’s award with a grant to go towards Texas education.

Raised in Brownsville, Texas, Father T.J. Martinez entered the Jesuit seminary after receiving a bachelor’s degree in political science with honors from Boston College. During his studies for the priesthood, he earned five graduate degrees including a University of Texas law degree and a school leadership degree from Harvard University.

Father Martinez returned to Texas to establish the newest Jesuit high school in the country – Cristo Rey Jesuit College Prep – an innovative high school that combines a rigorous college prep program that exclusively serves economically challenged children. Father Martinez rapidly grew the student population and partnered with 150 blue-ribbon corporations to provide student employment. Under Father Martinez’s leadership, 100% of his first graduating class was accepted into college and earned millions of dollars in scholarships.

Father T.J. Martinez passed away in November 2014 after a seven-month battle with stomach cancer. Father Martinez is remembered across Houston for his energetic compassion for his students and his love of learning.

“A man of faith, hope, vision, great compassion and love who had the power to transform lives,” said Father Wall. “He was a leader who impacted everyone he knew in such a genuine, compassionate, life-giving, beautiful way, and we are honored to celebrate him tonight.”

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**About Catholic Extension:**Founded in 1905, Catholic Extension works in solidarity with people in America’s poorest regions to build up vibrant and transformative Catholic faith communities. For more information visit [www.catholicextension.org](http://www.catholicextension.org/); follow us on Facebook at [facebook.com/catholicextension](http://www.facebook.com/catholicextension) or on twitter at [@CathExtension](http://www.twitter.com/cathextension).