

June 2019



SAINT CATHERINE CENTER FOR *Special Needs*

"Looking Beyond Ourselves": 20th Anniversary Celebration

It was an extraordinary evening on June 9th, as more than 320 friends, family, and supporters of Saint Catherine Center gathered at Fairfield University to celebrate 20 years of providing a faith-based education for children with special needs.

After an invocation from Msgr. Robert Weiss, Pastor of St. Rose of Lima Church, Board Chairman Charles Chiusano introduced the evening's honorees: the late **Jim O'Brien**, whose family accepted his award for Volunteer Service; **Marie & Sal Gilbertie**, for Community Partnership; and **Dian Jennings Mayo**, for Leadership. ([Read more about the honorees on our website.](#))

Following dinner, Helen Burland, Executive Director, spoke of how the Center has evolved since its founding in 1999 at a former retreat center on the grounds of the Catholic Center, and has grown to a "vibrant, joyful mission" now serving more than 40 children and young adults with disabilities.

"Saint Catherine's is not as much a place as it is an experience where children and young adults learn responsibility—alongside math and reading; respect—while they learn how to empty a dishwasher; and trust—while they navigate a grocery store or try a new skill at a job site... It is a place where joy and gratitude go hand and hand with perseverance and hard work," Helen said.

Most Reverend Bishop Frank Caggiano expressed his personal gratitude to Helen for her "faith, tenacity, and leadership" in the growth of the Center, and thanked the staff for their work, calling it a "ministry." Then a [short video](#) was shown, which chronicled the passing of 20 years through the story of one of the first students,



Francesca, who is now a participant in the Adult Day Program.

“The work is very challenging—sometimes exasperatingly so,” said Helen, “but when we get it right, it is so profoundly moving that we keep going... Most importantly, these young people teach us how to look beyond ourselves.”

The event was also financially successful—a \$100,000 challenge gift in the Call to Charity was matched by contributions from 90 generous donors. Funds raised from the dinner will be used to establish a Capital Fund to meet future programming needs.

View photos from the event

[Gallery 1](#)

[Gallery 2](#)



Graduation 2019: Our Different Gifts

June 5th was a big day for Donte, Jack, and Jennifer, who graduated from Saint Catherine Academy during a special Mass celebrated by Msgr. Robert Weiss.

“God gave each of us a different gift,” he said in his homily, “but the same God lives in us all.” He then acknowledged the special gifts each of the graduates had shared with their classmates, praising Jennifer as “the best spreader of peanut butter and a good friend to everyone”; Donte for “a smile that never stops and keeps us happy”; and Jack for “the best bow tie in the room—and when he hugs you, you know you’re loved.” Donte and Jennifer have both at the Academy for 11 years; Jack has been with us for the past year.

Msgr. Weiss also thanked the graduates’ parents for the “love with which you’ve accepted this special responsibility.”

“We all have a responsibility to bring happiness to this world, even when people are mean,” encouraged Msgr. Weiss. “We have to try to keep loving, knowing how much we are loved by God.”

Anna, Jaheim, and Ron gave the readings and intercessions, which were chosen by



the graduates. Along with classmates and staff, members of the three families watched proudly as Dr. Steve Cheeseman, Superintendent of the Diocesan Schools, presented the Certificates of Completion. At the end of Mass, Jennifer led the group in singing her signature song, "This Little Light of Mine."



A lunch and individual cakes for each graduate followed the Mass. Donte and Jack will continue in the Center's Adult Day Program.

[View the photos](#)



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