

March 14, 2009

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CCSE'S FOURTH ANNUAL SPRING BENEFIT

If You Believe in Me. . . I'll Believe in Me! A Year of Unprecedented Growth and Dedication

Washington, D.C.: The Embassy of Italy today welcomed the Catholic Coalition for Special Education (CCSE) to celebrate their year of high growth, both financial and spiritual. This past year, CCSE increased its programming for Catholic schools that provide opportunities for students with special learning needs. CCSE also saw a surge in the number of individuals willing to dedicate themselves to celebrate the uniqueness of all children through CCSE's programs.

Veteran reporter and Maryland Bureau Chief for ABC7/WJLA-TV, Greta Kreuz, served as the Master of Ceremonies for CCSE's 2009 spring benefit. Kreuz launched the religion beat in 1998, becoming the first full-time religion reporter for a Washington network affiliate, and earning much acclaim for her work.

Patricia McGann, principal of Our Lady of Lourdes School in Bethesda, MD, spoke about the tremendous difference CCSE is making. "We are very grateful for the funding CCSE provides and promise to be good stewards of those funds."

During 2008, CCSE experienced an increase in financial contributions. The *Believe in Me* Grant-Making Program initially awarded \$65,000. In its second year, the program increased its funding to \$83,000. And, this year, CCSE awarded \$102,000 in funds targeted to helping Catholic schools develop programs for children with special needs.

"Too frequently children with disabilities experience isolation, rejection and loneliness," said Francesca Pellegrino, founder and president of CCSE. "What they and their families long to hear is 'Yes, you are welcome. We believe in you.' And, that's why CCSE was born – to help Catholic schools educate and nurture all members of their community in the warmth and excellence of a Catholic education."

Key CCSE programs designed to help Catholic schools welcome students with disabilities include:

CCSE's Believe in Me! Grant-Making Program supports the implementation of special education instruction and programs in Catholic Schools by awarding grants to hire special educational teachers and para-educators and to purchase specialized classroom equipment and supplies;

CCSE's Technical Assistance Outreach Services to Schools supports the implementation of special education services;

CCSE's Tuition Assistance Grants for Studies in Special Education encourages teachers and other professionals to pursue advanced degrees in Special Education thereby helping to offset the chronic and pervasive shortage of special education teachers which exists both regionally and nationally;

CCSE's *Share the Word Campaign – Opening Hearts, Opening Minds, Opening Doors* raises disability awareness among administrators, department chairs, faculty, members of the board of trustees, parents, student council and student body through specifically targeted school and parish programs to include renowned speakers and special guests from the special education and Catholic community, as well as presentations by CCSE representatives. Educating the entire community is essential to removing barriers created by fears, biases and myths. This ensures that everyone understands the importance of welcoming students with disabilities and is a key factor in the success of programs serving our brothers and sisters with special needs.

“CCSE is all about embracing each and every member of our community. It’s a celebration of the unique gifts in all of us,” said Tricia Koch, member of CCSE’s Spring Benefit 2009 honorary committee. “And, from the bottom of our hearts, we are grateful for the acceptance and love extended by the schools – their teachers and staff – to open their arms to God’s special children and their families. We look forward to next year, to more growth and more dedication from CCSE.”

Founding CCSE benefactor and member of the Spring Benefit’s honorary committee, Alan Cassidy, whose granddaughter has Down Syndrome and has benefited from a Catholic education, congratulated CCSE on its 2008 growth rate. “It is magnificent to see the growth in breadth and depth of CCSE as an organization that provides grants to make special needs inclusion possible in our Catholic schools. We are all blessed by the work of the teachers, administrators, students and their families in the schools where *all* children gain from a Catholic education.”

The mission of the Catholic Coalition for Special Education is to ensure that children with special needs are able to attend, and receive, an appropriate education in their local Catholic elementary schools and high schools. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI “no child should be denied his or her right to an education in faith, which in turn nurtures the soul of a nation.”

For more information, please visit www.ccse-maryland.org or contact CCSE at info@ccse-maryland.org, or (301)933-8844.

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