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McAULEY MINISTRIES PRESENTS GOOD NEIGHBOR AWARD TO ANN ADAMS SIMMS

PITTSBURGH (July 26, 2021) – McAuley Ministries, Pittsburgh Mercy's grant-making foundation, presented the 2021 Sister Susan Welsh Good Neighbor Award to Ms. Ann Adams Simms of the Hill District during an outdoor ceremony last week. Ms. Simms' family joined her for the presentation and celebration held on Carlow University's campus in West Oakland, where McAuley Ministries' office is located.

The Good Neighbor Award was created to honor the legacy of Sister Susan Welsh, RSM, retired president and CEO of Pittsburgh Mercy, and founding and current board member of the McAuley Ministries Foundation. Sister Susan has been a compassionate, friendly, helpful, and willing volunteer, beyond the scope of her leadership responsibilities. In honor of Sister Susan's service to Pittsburgh Mercy and her continued works of mercy, the Sister Susan Welsh Good Neighbor Award was created.

The award recognizes a resident of the Hill District, Uptown, or West Oakland, the three neighborhoods served by McAuley Ministries, who exemplifies the ideals of a "good neighbor": willing to devote time, talents, and resources to make their neighborhood a better place to live. The award celebrates an individual resident who is working at the grassroots level to make a positive difference for his or her neighbors and community, beyond their day-to-day work responsibilities. Ms. Simms was nominated by Emma Lucas-Darby, PhD, LSW, chairperson of the McAuley Ministries Board of Directors and a long-time resident of the Hill District, and the Rev. Victor J. Grigsby, senior pastor of Central Baptist Church in the Hill District.

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“Ms. Simms is approachable, willingly gives her time to community activities, shares her legal knowledge with local residents, and is committed to freeing the Middle Hill community of a rampant drug problem,” said Ms. Lucas-Darby, explaining how Ms. Simms exemplifies the characteristics of a concerned and caring neighbor.

Rev. Grigsby echoed Ms. Lucas-Darby’s characterization of Ms. Simms. “Ms. Simms’ activities have focused on neighborhood improvement from representation of Hill District residents and employment opportunities during construction of [PPG Paints Arena] arena to her current efforts addressing the tragedies of drug addiction that plague our neighborhood.”

Ms. Simms has been active in the Hill District community, especially addressing issues of public safety. Ms. Simms has witnessed the devastating impact of the drug sales, overdoses, injections of overdose reversal medication, and deaths on the street. And, in response, she has been consistent in her efforts to address drug problems, and to clean up the drug-infested areas around Wylie and Webster avenues and Perry and Elmore streets.

Ms. Simms organized multiple community meetings with residents and elected officials trying to gather support in the fight against the drug activity in her neighborhood. Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, the activity worsened as a party atmosphere was created with food trucks, street parties, and vendors. The mornings following the parties, the streets were covered in litter, food remains, clothing, beer cans and bottles, and other lost items. Things escalated to a point of someone being killed one weekend and shots fired the following weekend.

In July 2020, a community meeting was organized that included elected officials, representatives from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the magistrate, the Station #2 commander, and several concerned residents. Ms. Simms was very vocal about community members and elected officials being more proactive to change these situations. Her efforts resulted in “walk the blocks,” an organized community group interested in taking back their streets.

Ms. Simms is a criminal defense attorney and a member of the Allegheny County Bar Association for over 35 years.

Rev. Grigsby shares how Ms. Simms applies her professional experience to help those who are vulnerable.

"Attorney Simms has stated often that while the addicts must take responsibility for their actions, they are also victims of the system that has not fully addressed the underground drug industry," he said, "She has provided legal representation to some of the people who are addicted to drugs and given food to several of them who are extremely frail from the years of drug abuse. This shows her concern for human life."

Ms. Simms views providing legal representation and assistance to persons who struggle with addiction and substance abuse as another effort for them to address their legal situation and hopefully recover from their addiction.

In addition to her law practice, Ms. Simms volunteers with the NAACP and the Hill District Branch of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

During the award presentation, Ms. Simms paraphrased Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize winner: "Indifference is worse than hate." Ms. Simms uses that quote as her mission to eradicate the drug activity in her neighborhood.

Marisol Valentin, executive director of McAuley Ministries, shared, "I grew up in a community where neighbors were really the fabric that knit the community together. It has been an honor to meet Ms. Simms and learn of her work, love, and dedication for her community which has helped to knit and shape Wylie and Webster avenues and Perry and Elmore streets. As best said by Henri J. Nouwen, the discipline of community makes us persons: that is, people who are *sounding through* to each other. We should through to each other a truth, a beauty, and a love that is greater, fuller, and richer than we ourselves can grasp."

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

Photo 1: Ms. Ann Adams Simms explaining her community invovlement to eradicate drug activity in her neighborhood.

Photo 2: Ms. Ann Adams Simms (third from left) accepting the 2021 Sister Susan Welsh Good Neighbor Award from (far left) Marisol Valentin, executive director of McAuley Ministries; as (second from left) Sister Susan Welsh, retired CEO of Pittsburgh Mercy and founding member of McAuley Ministries; and (far right) Emma Lucas-Darby, chairperson of McAuley Ministries look on.

Photo 3: Ms. Ann Adams Simms and her family: Kumar Simms, grandson; Martin Simms, son; Tamara Simms, daughter-in-law; Alyiah and Essence Simms, granddaughters.

About McAuley Ministries

Named in honor of Catherine McAuley, founder of the Sisters of Mercy, McAuley Ministries is the grant-making foundation of Pittsburgh Mercy. McAuley Ministries serves as a catalyst for change, committing resources and working collaboratively to promote healthy, safe, and vibrant communities. Grant-making priorities include health and wellness, community and economic development, education, and capacity-building initiatives for nonprofit organizations which focus on the Hill District, Uptown, and West Oakland, communities historically served by the Sisters of Mercy. McAuley Ministries also provides support to organizations that are sponsored by and/or affiliated with the Sisters. Since its founding by the Sisters of Mercy in 2008, McAuley Ministries has awarded 832 grants and community support totaling more than $37.3 million. It awards approximately $3.5 million in grants annually, making it one of the largest philanthropic foundations in Southwestern Pennsylvania. To learn more about McAuley Ministries and the initiatives it supports, visit www.mcauleyministries.org.

About Pittsburgh Mercy

Pittsburgh Mercy, a member of Trinity Health, serving in the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy, is a person-centered, population-based, trauma-informed community health and wellness provider. Pittsburgh Mercy, home to the region's only Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) and Integrated Community Wellness Center (ICWC), is also one of the largest nonprofit organizations and employers in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Pittsburgh Mercy includes Bethlehem Haven, McAuley Ministries, Pittsburgh Mercy Behavioral Health, Pittsburgh Mercy Community Health, Pittsburgh Mercy Intellectual Disabilities Services, the Pittsburgh Mercy Parish Nurse & Health Ministry Program, Pittsburgh Mercy's Operation Safety Net®, and Pittsburgh Mercy Family Health Center. Together, these Pittsburgh Mercy programs and their 1,200 colleagues serve more than 33,000 individuals annually at 60+ locations in Southwestern Pennsylvania. To learn more about Pittsburgh Mercy, or to make a donation in support of its important work in the community, visit www.pittsburghmercy.org.

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