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Catholic Charities CEO receives Spirit of Francis Award benefiting women's leadership and ministry in the Church

Catholic Extension Society honored Kerry Alys Robinson at tenth annual New York Award dinner

Chicago, IL — [Catholic Extension Society](https://www.catholicextension.org) honored Kerry Alys Robinson, president and chief executive of Catholic Charities USA, with the 2024 Spirit of Francis Award, which recognizes an individual or group who has made a significant impact on the mission of the Catholic Church in America through service or philanthropy, at their tenth annual New York City Spirit of Francis Award dinner. Proceeds from the dinner benefit a cause that is close to Robinson's heart, and one that she has been supporting throughout her career: women's leadership and ministry in the Church.

Proceeds will support ministries led by Catholic women, lay and religious, in regions served by Catholic Extension Society. The funds raised will also support the formation of new parish and diocesan women leaders in the Church.

Father Jack Wall, president of Catholic Extension Society awarded Robinson, along with Sister Carol Keehan, D.C., saying, "Kerry, tonight we are here to recognize you as a great mentor of faith, hope, love and leadership. You are one of the most articulate and inspirational voices in the Church today, and you are giving continual witness to the transformative power of the risen Christ at work right here, right now. You are a great woman of faith."

Fr. Wall continued by describing Catholic Extension Society and Catholic Charities' missions as "linked together," saying, "Catholic Charities dedicates itself so beautifully and impactfully with the gospel call to eradicate material poverty. At Catholic Extension, we are about the corporal works of mercy. Catholic Extension Society is dedicated to the eradication of spiritual poverty."

Upon receiving the award, Robinson said, "Thank you, Catholic Extension, and all who work to advance the life-giving mission of Catholic Extension, for this exquisite evening and honor. My

work on behalf of the Church, for which I am profoundly grateful, has always included work to promote the role of women in meaningful positions of leadership in the Church and at the tables of decision-making. It has always been a matter of managerial and moral urgency, not for women's sake, for the Church's sake. For without the leadership, expertise, judgment, participation, generosity, and talents of women, along with men, the whole Church is impoverished."

In Robinson's closing remarks, she said, "As Father Jack mentioned, Catholic Charities has a special affinity and affection for Catholic Extension Society. You are truly our partner in serving the poor in Mission Dioceses, and I want to acknowledge and thank the extraordinary women who are with us tonight from across the country who work tirelessly to serve the poor."

Robinson has devoted her entire professional career to serving the Church. One of the best ways to strengthen it now, she says, is to give more women opportunities to grow as leaders.

Catholic Extension Society supports the ministries, education and formation of women in the Church through strategic initiatives and partnerships such as: university scholarships to young adult women; ministerial development programs for women in marginalized communities; degree programs for religious sisters from the Global South who come to the U.S. as missionaries; and support for women-led parish ministries and pastoral outreach.

Robinson believes that enthusiastic and generous support of organizations like Catholic Extension Society will transform the world for the better.

She is the author of the book "Imagining Abundance: Fundraising, Philanthropy, and a Spiritual Call to Service" in which she describes how fundraising is transformative ministry that challenges all people to realize their own gifts and how they can be used for the benefit of the Church.

In 2023, Robinson became president and CEO of Catholic Charities USA, which represents the wide-ranging interests of its 167 member organizations located across the country. She is the second woman and second layperson to lead the domestic humanitarian arm of the Catholic Church in the United States. She is a lifelong member of the Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities, which is her family's foundation supporting the good works of the Catholic Church since 1945. She is also the executive director of the Opus Prize Foundation, which awards grants to ministries that alleviate human suffering.

She also served as the director of development for Saint Thomas More Catholic Chapel and Center at Yale University and led a successful \$75 million fundraising drive to expand and endow the Chapel's ministry and to construct a Catholic student center on Yale's campus.

She served as the founding executive director of Leadership Roundtable, an organization of laity, religious and clergy working together to promote best professional practices of the Catholic Church in the United States.

The Spirit of Francis Award is inspired by its three namesakes: St. Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis and Father Francis Clement Kelley, the founder of Catholic Extension—all of whom are known for embracing and helping the poor.

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About Catholic Extension: Founded in 1905, Catholic Extension Society works in solidarity with people to build up vibrant and transformative Catholic faith communities among the poor in the poorest regions of America. For more information visit www.catholicextension.org; follow us on Facebook at facebook.com/catholicextension or on X (Formerly Twitter) at [@CathExtension](https://twitter.com/CathExtension).