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Honorary Degree Citation: Monsignor Ignatius D. McDermott

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Granted 1998

MONSIGNOR IGNATIUS D. McDERMOTT

For four decades, you have been known as "the Apostle of the Alcoholics," but when you were ordained in 1936, you could not have anticipated that would be your calling.

A native of Chicago's South Side, you were educated at Quigley Preparatory Seminary and Mundelein's St. Mary of the Lake Seminary.

In 1941, you were assigned to Maryville Academy in DesPlaines, a home for dependent children. You found Skid Row as your regular beat as you sought the parents of the children in your charge. Those experiences caused you to suspect that alcoholism was an illness with a tendency to be inherited. As assistant pastor of Our Lady of Peace from 1941 to 1946, you found alcoholism present in the affluent South Shore neighborhood as well, fortifying your theory that alcoholism was a disease and not a social problem of the poor.

You were named assistant director of the Chicago Archdiocese's Catholic Charities in 1946, which caused you to wear many hats. As director of Holy Cross Mission, you returned to Skid Row to administer to the needs of its inhabitants. As executive director of the Catholic Dependent Child Commission, you often saw children taken from their homes because of their parents' alcoholism.

In 1975, you, then president of the Chicago Clergy Association for the Homeless Person, co-founded Haymarket House, the first free-standing, social-setting detoxification center in Illinois. In 1979, you founded Intervention Instruction, Inc. as a substance abuse education/prevention agency, one of the largest providers of rehabilitation education for Illinois DUI offenders.

The McDermott Center was founded in 1983 to support and further the many programs you operate. Since your retirement from Catholic Charities in the early 1990s, your focus has been on the McDermott Center and its programs. Among its services are detoxification programs, a pre-natal program, outpatient or residential treatment, long term care, and special services for mothers of pre-school-age children.

You have been recognized on the floor of Congress for pioneering programs and your tireless effort in the rehabilitation and care of alcoholics. Governors State University is honored indeed to share this commencement with a man whose life has been a model of compassion, understanding and service and confer upon you an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree.

Passed Away 2004