

# The Catholic Journalist

CATHOLIC MEDIA ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 83 | NUMBER 10 | MAY 2022

## He dreams of holiness in every nook of the cosmos

Keynote speaker for CMC will urge communicators to pursue truth wherever it leads

By Ed Langlois



To help retain and bring people to the church, Catholic communicators ought to present the truth and avoid propaganda. That's the view of Timothy O'Malley, a professor at the University of Notre Dame and an expert in disaffiliation — people leaving or staying away from the church.

O'Malley, director of education at the McGrath Institute for Church Life and academic director of the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy, will give the keynote address for July 6 at the Catholic Media Conference in Portland.

Mass attendance has dropped over the years and plummeted during the pandemic. It has yet to return to pre-2020 levels and people often ask O'Malley what is happening.

"The temptation is to think about disaffiliation as reducible to a problem of communication," he says. "If we only more clearly articulated all the doctrines or restored the integrity of the church in the public

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Timothy P. O'Malley, director of education at the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame and academic director of the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy, is seen in front of the South Bend, Indiana, campus last year. O'Malley is keynote speaker for July 6 at the Catholic Media Conference in Portland, Oregon. CNS PHOTO/CHAZ MUTH

## Seven new members elected to CMA board

Catholic Media Association

The Catholic Media Association announced April 25, the election of seven members to its Board of Directors, the governing body of the association.

Board members serve various categories of membership that represent

the diversity of Catholic media professionals throughout North America.

"The association has always been blessed with vibrant, talented Catholic communicators who serve the board," Amy Kawula, president of the Catholic Media Association, said.



Jennifer Brinker

"This legacy continues as we welcome new members. They join us in sharing their gifts and talents to encourage, support and provide educational opportunities for members, as well as



Paula Gwynn Grant

continue to strengthen our association."

Of the seven members elected this year, three are incumbents, two have served on the board in previous years, and two



Matthew Schiller

are new to the Board of Directors. There are 15 board members.

The new board members will serve three-year terms officially beginning July 7, the date of the



Michael B. Stechschulte

annual member meeting at the Catholic Media Conference in Portland, Oregon. Directors may serve up to three consecutive terms.

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# Father John Catoir, CMA past president, dies at age 90



John Catoir with his parents at Immaculate Conception Seminary, 1957.

**By Patricia Martin**  
ST. JUDE MEDIA  
MINISTRY

Father John Catoir, JCD, a retired priest of the Diocese of Paterson, New Jersey, passed away April 7, at age 90. He was a priest for 62 years.

Since March 22, he had been in hospice care and

in overall declining health, according to Patricia Martin, executive director of St. Jude Media Ministry. A funeral Mass for Father Catoir was celebrated April 11 at St. Michael the Archangel Church in Cary, North Carolina, followed by burial at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church Cemetery in Newton Grove. He lived in North

Carolina — with longtime friend Ashley Rose Olbrich serving as caregiver and president of his ministry.

“He spent his entire life in service to God and others, but his greatest legacy is being a ‘messenger of joy’ to a world so in need,” Martin said. “He would invite us all to now carry that light forward — to be joyful in the knowledge of God’s love.”

He would often recall a 1980 meeting with St. John Paul II, who he said asked him to become “a messenger of joy.” He worked his entire remaining life to fulfill that mission.

Father Catoir served as president of three organizations: National Association of Church

Personnel Administrators, 1975-77; Association of Catholic TV and Radio Syndicators, 1983-85; and what was then called the Catholic Press Association, 1988-90.

In 1993, he received the CPA’s St. Francis de Sales Award for outstanding contributions to Catholic journalism. Named for the patron saint of writers and journalists, the award recognizes “outstanding contributions to Catholic journalism” and is the highest honor given by the association, now called the Catholic Media Association.

In an April 8 statement, Rob DeFrancesco, CMA’s executive director, said: “I am grateful to God for Father John Catoir, who

dedicated his life to inviting people to come to know and love Jesus Christ through Catholic media. His joy and enthusiasm for sharing the good news is an inspiration for members of the Catholic Media Association.”

Among its annual journalism awards, the CMA presents the Father John Catoir Social Media Evangelization Award named for the late priest.

Father Catoir was awarded the Daniel J. Kane Award for Religious Communication by the University of Dayton, Ohio, in 1993 and the Catholic Actors Guild gave him their St. Genesius Award for his outstanding spiritual service to the entertainment industry in 1990.

He was a prolific author — writing more than 25 books including the bestsellers “Joy,” “A Simple Guide to Happiness,” “Enjoy The Lord,” “Enjoy Your Precious Life,” and “God Delights in You: An Introduction to Gospel Spirituality,” and his final book, written at age 90 with the help of longtime assistant, Marie Hantak, “The Best Articles of Fr. John T. Catoir, JCD.”

For 50 years he wrote a weekly nationally-syndicated column for Catholic News Service which was utilized by numerous Catholic publications and diocesan newspapers. His final article was published in The Beacon, Paterson, New Jersey, on Nov. 14, 2019.

Born and raised in New York City, the son of John Thomas “Jack” Catoir and Catherine Mary “Kitty” Caslin, he was preceded

in death by both parents, and his sister, Catherine Mary Catoir Benjamin. He is survived by his niece, Dionne Benjamin-Smith and her husband Jolyon Smith, and a nephew, John Benjamin, and spouse, Archie Symonette, and many extended family.

In his youth he was very athletic — participating in track and field and holding the high jump record at Jesuit High School. He loved boating and other outdoor activities with his father and at the age of 16 received the rank of Eagle Scout from the Boy Scouts of America.

Catoir attended Fordham University School of Business, graduating in 1953. While there, he worked at the campus radio station and as a page for NBC-TV in New York for The Tonight Show (Steve Allen), Show of Shows (Sid Caesar), and the Milton Berle Show. He later invited them to be guests on his own TV show.

During the Korean War, Catoir served two years in the U.S. Army as an MP, and later served as an assistant to the chaplain, Major George Phillips, where his vocation was realized. “I loved being close to the altar and soon began thinking seriously about becoming a priest. By 1955 I knew I wanted to be a priest for the rest of my life. Long after I was ordained, my Aunt Letitia told me that my grandmother, Anna Horan, had prayed all her life for one of her children to be born on Sept. 8 (Mary’s Birthday) and to become a priest,” Father Catoir. (From his Golden Jubilee Book, 2010)

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## The Catholic Journalist

**Executive Director**.....Rob DeFrancesco  
rdefrancesco@catholicmediaassociation.org

**Editor**.....Dianne Towalski  
diannetowalski@gmail.com

**Production**.....Donna Mleziva  
donnamleziva@gmail.com

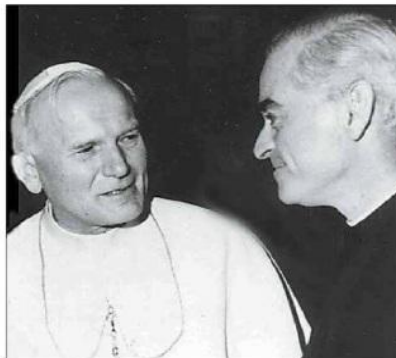
### Subscriptions

US: \$18 | Canada: US \$24  
Foreign: US \$24 | Foreign Air: US \$24

The Catholic Journalist (USPS# 014-088, ISSN# 0008-8129) is published monthly except the month of August, by the Catholic Media Association, 205 West Monroe Street, Suite 470, Chicago, IL 60606. Nonprofit periodical postage paid at Chicago, IL 60606 and additional mailing offices.

**Postmaster, send changes to:**  
Catholic Media Association  
205 West Monroe St., Ste. 470, Chicago, IL 60606  
Phone: 312-380-6789 | Fax: 312-361-0256

journalist@catholicmediaassociation.org  
www.CatholicMediaAssociation.org



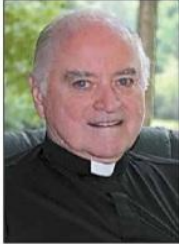
Father Catoir with St. John Paul II, 1980.



John Catoir at US Army Fort Sam, Houston, Texas, 1953.

## Father Catoir

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Father John Catoir

He entered Immaculate Conception Seminary in Darlington, New Jersey, at age 25, studying for the Diocese of Paterson. During this second year of seminary, his mother passed away after a seven-year illness. Catoir persevered in his studies with the spiritual direction of Father James McCoy. He was ordained on May 28, 1960. He was then sent to Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., where he earned his doctorate in Canon Law in 1964. He was later awarded doctorates from four universities.

Father Catoir served his diocese in several capacities – Director of the Marriage Tribunal, president of the Interracial Council, and later as pastor of Our Lady of Victories Church in Paterson. He was a great advocate for social justice and drove a group of fellow priests to Selma, Alabama – marching with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in support of voting rights.

He led the Paterson Diocesan Synod in 1970 under Bishop Lawrence Casey and, then served as Judicial Vicar, Director of Communications, and Director of the Clergy. He became nationally known for his work in marriage legislation and church personnel administration. As President of the National Association of Church Personnel Administration, he was an advocate of pastors utilizing separate Business Managers to handle the daily business role, allowing pastor more dedicated time for the spiritual needs of the people.

In 1973, Father Catoir took

a trip with his father to Russia, where he secretly offered Mass on the lawn next to the Kremlin Wall – offering it for world peace.

The Christophers invited him in 1978 to serve as Executive Director and Chairman of the Board (1978-1995). They are a New York-based organization that uses print and broadcast media to further the Judeo-Christian concept of service to God and humanity. In that capacity, he hosted the nationally syndicated television series “Christopher Close-Up,” for more than 17 years following Father James Keller’s initiative to “light one candle in the darkness.” The weekly program was seen on 60 commercial stations and 400 cable systems worldwide. He interviewed countless celebrities and religious leaders – from James Cagney, Tony Bennett, Fred Rogers and Bob Newhart to Cardinal John O’Connor and Father Henri Nouwen.

“Mother Teresa asked me to give a nine-day retreat for her novices (Sisters of Charity in New York). She said to me, “Joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls... a joyful heart is the inevitable result of a heart burning with love,” Father John Catoir. (Golden Jubilee Book)

In 1995, he left The Christophers due to a health diagnosis that required him to keep a slower pace. He became Director of Communications for the Diocese of Paterson and was later asked to become Executive Director of Eva’s Village – one of New Jersey’s largest comprehensive poverty programs and one of the largest emergency shelters in the nation. They specialized in drug and alcohol rehabilitation as well as other programs. He was impressed by the work of Abraham Low, designing self-help programs for people suffering from mental illness and addiction.

Yearning to work as a “Messenger of Joy” he founded St. Jude’s Media Ministry in 1995. It began as a small radio ministry producing 30-second radio “spots” which aired late at night. Longtime friend, Josephine Esenbergh, helped purchase airtime on stations all over the country. Many spots are still aired to this day. “He received hundreds of letters from people in prison or hospitals, truckers, and many who were in crisis during those dark hours. These messages provided hope,” Martin said.

In 2010, the Ministry expanded to include the MessengerofJoy.com website and daily blog

was created with the help of Marc de Vinck, whose family knew Father Catoir as an “uncle” as he spent Sundays, holidays and vacations at the home of Marc’s parents, Catherine and Jose de Vinck.

In 2012, He invited Patricia Martin, of Martin Media in Richardson, to produce a video documentary on his message and life story. “During four days of intense videotaping at Avila Retreat Center in New Jersey, we captured hours of his testimony and vision,” Martin said. “The entire film crew – many non-Catholic – were enthralled by this dynamic and charismatic priest and his simple way of explaining complicated Church teachings.”

After the completion of the documentary, Martin worked with Father Catoir to continue expanding the Ministry and in 2012 they designed a new website – [www.johncatoir.com](http://www.johncatoir.com) – to act as a library of his inspirational content. Martin encouraged him to try utilizing social media and to give Twitter a try.

“In only one year he had tweeted 17,000 messages to followers!” Martin said.

*Please visit his website [www.johncatoir.com](http://www.johncatoir.com) for additional information and an entire library of uplifting messages available in all forms of media. Or view over 130 videos on his YouTube Channel. Patricia Martin is President of Martin Media in Richardson, Texas, and Executive Director of St. Jude Media Ministry.*



John Catoir’s mother pins on his Eagle Scout pin, 1947.

“We then added Facebook and began utilizing small video clips, his audio spots, articles and prayer marathons to spread his messages of joy. The results were amazing. So very many lives were touched and changed. He then added a YouTube Channel to reach an even broader audience worldwide.”

“We are living in difficult times. Mental health, positive thinking and faith are more critical than ever,” Father Catoir said in an interview in 2020, the year he celebrated 60 years as a priest. “To seek quiet time with joy-centered content is one way of overcoming

our daily stresses. I would invite everyone to become messengers of joy!”

“His legacy is really that message of joy,” Martin said. “Father Catoir, in his 2012 documentary mentioned to me that he had a heart condition, knee replacements, had fought cancer, and had all the aches and pains of aging – yet he was still joyful knowing that God loved him and he knew God still had a job for him to do,” Martin said. “He passed away peacefully at age 90 after the recitation of the Holy Rosary at his bedside surrounded by loved ones – a life well-spent, a job well-done.”



Father John Catoir celebrating TV Mass, 1990.