News



Alexia Kelley, president and CEO of FADICA, poses with B.J. Cassin, co-founder of the Drexel Fund, and Maria Robinson, FADICA board chair. On Feb. 8, 2019, Cassin was honored for his Catholic philanthropy benefiting U.S. Catholic education with the St. Katharine Drexel Award from FADICA, Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities. (CNS/David Michael/ FADICA)

by Catholic News Service

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Business leader B.J. Cassin, a key early supporter of the nationwide Cristo Rey network of Catholic high schools for students from low-income families, is the 2019 recipient of the St. Katharine Drexel Award from Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities.

He received the award during FADICA's annual meeting Feb. 8 in Santa Monica. Cassin is the second recipient of the award, which was created in 2017.

Cassin established and chaired the Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation in 2000 to help support private college preparatory middle and high schools in low-income communities throughout the United States.

The foundation was a prime provider of startup funds for 18 Cristo Rey high schools and 37 Nativity Miguel middle schools.

In addition, Cassin recently co-founded The Drexel Fund to contribute startup funding and advisory support for financially sustainable faith-based and private schools.

"B.J. carries St. Katharine Drexel's philanthropic spirit and legacy forward in our time," Alexia Kelley, FADICA's president and CEO, said in a statement. "B.J. invited multiple partners, including corporate employers, to participate in Cristo Rey's innovative model, all to help students reach their potential. He invested in the network early and brought the model to scale across the country, spreading its effectiveness and impact."

FADICA reported that Cassin's support helped establish 35 Cristo Rey schools. Jesuit Father John Foley, chairman emeritus and chief mission officer of the network in Chicago, said in a statement that the Cassin foundation "altered history and projection" of the network.

B.J. along with his wife, Bebe, have always been in favor of 'leveling the playing field' in education," Foley said. "They have a passion for providing educational opportunities to young people who often get denied the chance to use and maximize their gifts in the world. B.J. does not hesitate when there is an opportunity to provide

young people a chance."

The Cristo Rey schools provide rigorous academics and a corporate work study program to prepare students for college and eventual employment. Under the models, students help fund their education through their employment.

Studies have shown that Cristo Rey graduates are three times more likely to complete a college degree by the age of 24 than their peers in the same socioeconomic setting.

Cassin said while accepting the award that investing in the Cristo Rey schools was one of the most satisfying endeavors of his career.

"Ninety percent of the 12,000 students who have graduated have gone to college," he said. "We are keeping St. Katharine Drexel's hope alive by providing children in need an education. And in my experience every child given the right school environment and dedicated faculty can succeed."

Cassin is a longtime FADICA member and was a past member of the organization's board. He also served on the board of the National Leadership Roundtable for Church Management and is a member of the California Jesuit Province Investment Committee.

The award is named for St. Katharine Drexel, a Philadelphian who founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. She is the patron saint of philanthropy; she spent a lifetime giving away her inherited wealth and using it to build schools and support equal access to education for African-Americans and Native Americans.

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