



CATHOLIC CHARITIES

Diocese of Wilmington

For 180 years - A legacy of caring service

MONSIGNOR THOMAS J. REESE

A native of Wilmington, Msgr. Thomas J. Reese attended St. Ann Elementary School and graduated from Salesianum in 1939. As class valedictorian, Msgr. Reese was once quoted, “I talked myself into seminary when I gave the valedictory address. I talked about building bridges between God and man and that these were more important than bridges of steel.”

He was forever extolling the virtues of “people power”, individuals joined together and working for common goals. And through his liberal struggles to build bridges and unite people, Msgr. Reese carved a niche for himself in Delaware’s political, social and humanitarian circles.

During his 40 years of priesthood and 67 years of life, Msgr. Reese was always there for people in need. He was a champion of human rights, a friend to the oppressed, a comfort to those in distress, and a man who felt the pain of those for whom he cared. People, who he strove to help, deeply loved the man who once knelt and prayed with Martin Luther King, Jr. during a civil rights march in Selma, Alabama.

Msgr. Thomas J. Reese received numerous honors and citations. He was praised for spearheading the Wilmington United Neighborhoods and the founding of the Wilmington Catholic Interracial Council.

From 1956-1977, Msgr. Reese was director of Catholic Social Services. Under his watch CSS, now Catholic Charities, grew from an agency that handled foster care, adoption and some financial assistance, to include family, individual, marital and pregnancy counseling, large scale emergency financial assistance, aid to refugees, group home care, and adoption services.

In 1978, Msgr. Reese was honored by the National Conference of Christians and Jews who lauded his pioneering efforts for social justice; his courageous leadership and persistence to obtain, secure and protect the civil rights of all people; the strength he provided to the weak, the ill, the elderly, the unwanted, and the homeless and his ability to touch public and governmental consciences with quiet efficiency.

Msgr. Reese died December 21, 1988.

In 1989, Catholic Charities created the Msgr. Thomas J. Reese Award, recognizing exemplary individuals who have demonstrated a deep commitment to addressing human suffering and promoting and restoring the well-being of people – its own mission.