

EWTN officials Mother Angelica, Deacon Steltemeier get papal honors

IRONDALE, Ala. - Pope Benedict XVI has awarded the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice Cross to Mother Mary Angelica, founder of the Eternal Word Television Network, and Deacon Bill Steltemeier, chairman of EWTN's board of governors, for distinguished service to the church.

The cross, whose name is Latin for "for the church and the pope," is the highest papal honor that can be conferred on religious and laypeople.

Bishop Robert J. Baker of Birmingham presented the awards Oct. 4 in a brief ceremony following Benediction at the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Hanceville.

"By giving awards, the church is not saying people or institutions are perfect, but we are saying that Mother Angelica, through this network, has made a significant contribution to the new evangelization heralded and promoted by recent popes," Bishop Baker said in his homily. "Mother Angelica's effort has been at the vanguard of the new evangelization and has had a great impact on our world."

The bishop said Deacon Steltemeier had "perpetuated this global Catholic apostolate as chairman of the board, and until recently, as chief executive officer."

"He is still helping EWTN carry out its mission to join with the Holy Father and the magisterium in sharing the light of the faith in every possible part of the world," he added.

Michael P. Warsaw, EWTN president and CEO, said the honor "acknowledges the tremendous faith, hard work and incredible sacrifices that each of them has made throughout the years in founding and building up the network."

It also is "a clear sign of the importance of the network's mission for the church and

the pope,” Warsaw added in a statement.

Mother Angelica, an 86-year-old member of the Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration, founded Our Lady of the Angels Monastery in Irondale in 1961 and began EWTN in 1981 in a garage on the monastery property. The network now is available in more than 150 million television households in more than 140 countries and territories.

Deacon Steltemeier, 80, was an attorney in Nashville, Tenn., who left his law practice to join Mother Angelica with her fledgling television network. He served as EWTN’s president for many years.

Because of ill health, Mother Angelica received the award in her private quarters rather than at the public ceremony.