

2015 Woman of Faith

She heals souls wounded by violence

Mary Kay Balchunas has grieved the loss of a loved one to the kind of violence that besieges Milwaukee and our nation. Her son, Jay Balchunas was gunned down in Milwaukee while serving as a Department of Justice special agent in 2004. Since then, Mary Kay has channeled her grief by reaching out to survivors of violence, trauma response teams, and law enforcement personnel.

Mary Kay speaks from her heart about the need to address violence from a faith perspective. Her message couldn't be more poignant, as communities desperately seek answers to what many call an epidemic. Mary Kay will share her healing message of hope and forgiveness when the Sisters of the Divine Savior honor her with our 2015 Woman of Faith Award in September.

The Woman of Faith Award program began in 2001 to shine a light on local women whose lives exemplify Gospel-inspired service to people in need. Eric Szatkowski nominated Mary Kay for this year's award. He worked with her son

"Chaplaincy is a calling from God. What Jay's death has done has given me a deeper knowledge of what some of the families I work with go through. It has deepened my sense of compassion and empathy."

— Mary Kay Balchunas



at the Department of Justice, and his nomination captures the strength and courage he witnessed in Mary Kay at Jay's funeral Mass. "Even in the face of such unfathomable grief, she honored her son's memory with a deeply moving eulogy based on Christian values of service, love and even forgiveness."

As Eric points out in his nomination, Mary Kay had already been living an exemplary Christian life as a certified Catholic chaplain. She retired from her full-time ministry at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin in December 2014, but continues speaking across the country

about death in the line of duty, violent crime and forgiveness, and spirituality as a means to cope with loss.

Two years ago, Mary Kay addressed the Midwest Conference of Mayors Against Illegal Guns. A *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reporter who covered the conference wrote, "With a soft but steady voice, Balchunas made it clear she wasn't there to advocate for specific laws and measures... She was there to talk about her son, Jay. To put a human face on gun violence." Afterwards in an interview, Mary Kay told the reporter that she and her husband Don are at peace with their son's death, saying, "We try to be better than we were before in Jay's honor."

Their tragic personal loss also prompted Mary Kay and Don to establish two scholarships in Jay's name. Scholarship funds at Marquette University and Waukesha County Technical College benefit students aspiring to public service in law enforcement and firefighting, respectively.

Until she learned she was chosen for our 2015 Woman of Faith Award, Mary Kay never knew how her eulogy 11 years ago changed Eric Szatkowski's life path. His nomination of Mary Kay concludes, "Her actions that day helped inspire me to pursue a career as a chaplain upon my retirement from law enforcement." ☪



WOMAN OF Faith AWARD

Please join us to honor

Mary Kay Balchunas

Healing souls wounded by violence
with her ministry of hope and forgiveness

Thursday, September 17, 2015 • 7:00 p.m.

SDS Community House • 4311 N. 100th Street, Milwaukee

Please register for this free event by September 11.

Go online: www.sistersofthedivinesavior.org/2015wof Or call: 414-466-7414