SPEECH FOR ANNUAL CELEBRATION

BREAKFAST

FOR

DEBRA STERLING-WEATHERSPOON

Hello everyone!! It is such a privilege to be here with all of you today as we join together in celebration of this wonderful group. I want to offer a special thanks to all of my biological family and so many of my friends here today-who I actually consider my extended family…. and in reality includes almost all of you…Isn’t THAT a great feeling-to know that there are so many people there for us and for each other!! I want to acknowledge a couple of people in particular: To the officers and members of the HNS, I am truly honored to have received the gracious invitation to speak at this event. I would also like to say it’s a particular blessing to follow in the footsteps of those who have spoken so well before me like Mary B, Howard, Yvonne, my husband, and my dear classmate to name a few. It is a particularly heart warming honor to be sharing this experience with my father, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. He knows what this church has meant to me throughout my life and each one of you is the living embodiment of God’s most cherished gifts-life, love, inner strength, and faith.

It’s especially inspirational to be here to feed our souls and our selves and to enjoy a delicious breakfast together. It was St Augustine who said, “As our body cannot live without nourishment, our soul cannot spiritually be kept alive without prayer.” (**If you want to make a joke you can say**) And speaking of prayer, I’m sure this morning some of you reached out to God and said, “Why?? Why are we meeting at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ a.m.?” (**Also, if you know of someone who might be a little bit of a late riser, you can look at them and say**), \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, No need to feel guilty-I’m really trying not to look at **YOU!**! **Wait for the laugh and say**) All I can say is that life and faith work in mysterious ways…. and so does the planning committee for the HNS!! It may feel early here, but somewhere in the world, it’s just the right time to have a celebration!! So I better make this good!! This wonderful meal feeds us and reminds us of our abundant blessings. Through your devotion to the Lord and through your faith and dedication to the Holy Name Society, each one of you has a blessed opportunity for nourishment on every level, and that is a beautiful thing to acknowledge and experience together.

I’m here today to share this event with my father, who is, of course, one of the most important people and influential forces in my life. He is obviously MY FAMILY. But you know what? He’s found a warm, welcoming extended family right here at BS/SJA Church. This church has held a strong and continuous presence in our family’s lives. I literally grew up in this church. I remember as a little girl that although I attended public school, every Tuesday and Thursday, that school bus would be there, waiting to take me to catechism or religious instruction. I made my first communion from this church, and these walls have witnessed family weddings, my mother’s funeral, my father’s devotion to his faith and to the HNS, our elation, our gratitude, and our tears. The church has been there for us as much as we have accepted its message and guidance, support and love. My father, who, as most of you know, turned ninety one a few months ago (God bless him!!), had the distinction and honor of being awarded the Congressional Medal as a Montford Point Marine, and you know what? As all good and true family would do, so many of his friends and fellow Holy Name Society members attended and witnessed that honor and shared his joy. If that’s not family, what is?

Today really is about “Faith, Family, and Friends,” and as our busy lives evolve with the times, some of us find the necessity to be separated from our loved ones by physical distance. Life is moving very quickly, separation and isolation have come to be expected by many as the norm, values seem to be lost somewhere in the passing of time between “texting and debating” on Facebook or other social media, but I have to say that I am standing here today as witness and proof to the simple truth that good, strong, influences on the lives of young people inspire them-and us, to be good strong, respectful, caring and faithful adults. Although I have chosen different paths to express my faith throughout my life (**I don’t know if you want to mention that you are no longer a practicing Catholic**), there is no doubt of the positive impact this church and my early religious upbringing has had on my life and of the continuing inspiration I feel when I see all the good you do and the relationships to each other and to God that come alive in the name of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (**What term do you prefer? Please use what you feel most comfortable with-the Lord? Jesus? God?-Not sure**) Through our participation in and relationship to, our respective churches, we remain connected and in touch with the power of spirit and guidance that grounds us and lights the way.

Being involved with the church and the HNS gives a sense of fulfillment…. one might even say, there’s a **warm feeling** in the **heart** like when Grady told Fred Sanford he thought he was in love. (**This is a Fred Sanford quote if you wan to use it**). Do you all remember “Sanford and Son, the TV show?” If not, ask my father!! (**Wait for the laugh**) Of course, to someone like Fred Sanford, it also meant that Grady probably had a bad case of “**indigestion**,” (**Fred said, “Gas” but I don’t know if you** **want to say that**) but that’s an example of friends being as close as family, as Fred and Grady were, knowing each other, standing by each other, and having a common bond, as all of you do here at BS/SJA .

Ladies and gentlemen, now that I’m just about done with what I have to say today, I have a small confession to make (**If you want to make a joke you can** **say**)…. uh-there’s something about being here that works to bring a confession out of me!! (**And wait for the laugh**)… but in all honesty, I hope you’ve enjoyed what I’ve shared. I am not typically the kind of person that gets up to speak at any sort of function before large groups, however, I was so honored to have been chosen to speak, I couldn’t have imagined turning down the chance to share a message and some encouragement on this very special annual occasion. It is my faith in God and my belief that this is exactly where I needed to be that inspired me to stand before all of you. I know that my life is in God’s hands and he would give me the best message to share with you. For those of you that know me… and once again, that would most probably be almost ALL of you, you know that I am usually the person in the background working to support the belief that justice and fair treatment be given to all. In my “usual” support positions, I’ve initiated a homeowners association in the neighborhood where I lived, I’ve worked as a union officer (**note not clear**) and as a retired senior auditor for the Department of Defense, and as a credentialed mediator and arbitrator, and it has been my calling to observe, examine, and foster understanding and a sense of community wherever I go. I know I could not have been as effective in my career had it not been for the lessons I learned and the relationships that supported me that grew from my family’s involvement and passion for this Church.

I hope you agree that I… and we… have learned our lessons well, and that we live our lives practicing and sharing “faith.” But let’s ask, “What is faith?” In Hebrews 1:1, we learn that “Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. Over the years, our faith has been tested, but through the goodness of God and the strength we find in each other, the message of Faith, Family and Friends is one that resonates and inspires and fuels us to go on. Let’s take our mutual inspiration and preserve our relationships with each other and to our faith and work to inspire the next generation. Life is getting more and more challenging, but with our hearts open and our hands ready to support one another, we can really demonstrate what it means to be part of a family united under God and there for each other.

Thank you all!