



J. J. YOUNG AWARD – 2004 RECIPIENT

MARY ANN LEARD



Being separated and divorced very quickly in the mid 1980's, after a 20-year marriage and with a son in college, **Mary Ann Leard** found herself floundering. She was searching for something but not sure what, as her entire identity was tied to a married life; it was a true crisis for her. She stumbled upon Friends of Mercy, an organization that accepted, encouraged and helped her develop the leadership skills that she uses today. She took part in the activities of this group and found that other people also needed support—surprisingly, some more than she! Initially, she was asked to help with registration for a conference, and seeing first hand what need there was for people to reach out to others, SHE WAS HOOKED! Having been helped herself, she now wanted to provide that support to others.

Being an accountant, she volunteered as the treasurer of Friends of Mercy for a few years. After that, she coordinated conferences for the separated and divorced that were sponsored by the Archdiocese of Baltimore's Office of Family Life. Having taken several all day leadership workshops from Dottie Levesque, she became involved with a small support group program, Together We Can Make It, which meets with two trained facilitators once a week for eight weeks. Knowing that facilitators also needed support, she provided the opportunity for facilitators to come together to discuss situations and difficulties, and to learn from each other.

Since 1998, she has served as President of the Catholic Single Again Council, which is affiliated with the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Realizing the importance of communicating with the separated and divorced, she became the editor of an established newsletter. The one page semiannual paper, now reaching thousands, has grown to eight pages with guest columnists and listed resources. Also to provide current information, a web site and email are available for quick information.

For the last five years, she has co-chaired the annual Spring Conference in Columbia, MD with outreaches to the Virginia, Washington DC, Delaware, and Pennsylvania areas; she also presents workshops at these conferences. She continues to encourage and help parishes form their own groups. Through her leadership training, she guides the formation and continual development of local support groups, provides educational programs, resources, etc., so that all who seek may find something to assist themselves during the traumatic experience of separation and divorce.

*The J. J. Young Award is presented annually in tribute to and in memory of **Fr. James J. Young, CSP**, whose pioneering ministry to reconcile separated and divorced Catholics led to the foundation of the North American Conference of Separated and Divorced Catholics in 1974. The award serves as a recognition and affirmation of another's service that directly affected the beginning, development, or expansion of pastoral care to separated, divorced, and remarried Catholic families. It also recognizes that service can be expressed in a variety of ways such as: support group ministry; program development; transformational leadership; research; teaching; outreach at the parish, (arch)diocesan, regional, national, and international levels; movements; organizations; writing; and others. The award strives to identify some critical contribution that directly benefitted the community of separated, divorced, and remarried Catholics and ministry to these families. While the original contribution may have been intended for a specific community, the award acknowledges that such service has impact for the larger community as well.*