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Pope gives top honors to Mother Angelica

Greg Garrison Religion News Service | Oct. 14, 2009

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. -- Mother Angelica, 86, the nun who founded the world's largest religious network, rarely leaves her bed these days and didn't make it to an Oct. 4 ceremony awarding her a papal honor.

Pope Benedict XVI awarded the Cross of Honor for distinguished service to both Mother Angelica and Deacon Bill Steltemeier, 80, chairman of the board for EWTN, the network Mother Angelica founded in 1981 in a garage at the Our Lady of Angels Monastery in Irondale.

Bishop Robert Baker of Birmingham presented the medals and certificates to Mother Angelica and to Steltemeier.

Sr. Margaret Mary, the mother vicar of the monastery, received the framed document and medal on Mother Angelica's behalf in the public part of the ceremony at the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Hanceville.

Mother Angelica's frail health restricts her activities, said EWTN spokeswoman Michelle Johnson. ?She doesn't really do ceremonies,? Johnson said. ?She doesn't make public appearances right now.?

Mother Angelica came to Alabama in 1961 to found the monastery in Irondale. After she started the network, Steltemeier left his Nashville law practice to help run what has become one of the largest religious media networks in the world. EWTN can be seen in 150 million households in more than 140 countries and territories.

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