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For Immediate Release

Edwin David Aponte and Joan F. Neal to Receive Honorary Doctorates from Chicago's Catholic Theological Union

May 9, 2023 (Chicago) – Catholic Theological Union's 55th annual commencement ceremony will take place at St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church in Hyde Park on Thursday, May 25, 2022 at 5:00 pm Central Time, and will celebrate the accomplishments of graduates representing fifteen countries. Sixty graduates will receive certificates or Master level degrees in the areas of Hispanic Theology and Ministry; Intercultural Studies and Ministry; Justice Ministry; Liturgical Ministry; Pastoral Studies; Ministry; and Theology. Twenty-seven will receive a Master of Divinity degree and seven will receive a Doctor of Ministry degree. A reception at Catholic Theological Union will follow the ceremony.

Catholic Theological Union will present honorary doctorates to Edwin David Aponte and Joan F. Neal. Aponte will receive a Doctorate in Theology, *honoris causa*; Neal will receive a Doctorate in Ministry, *honoris causa*. Honorary degrees are conferred annually by the CTU faculty and Board of Trustees upon individuals whose contributions to the fields of scholarship and service reflect the values to which CTU is committed.

The Reverend Edwin David Aponte is Dean of the Theological School and Professor of Religion and Culture at Drew University. Prior to his current appointment, Aponte most recently served as Executive Director of the Louisville Institute, a granting agency funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. After serving on the faculty of Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University, Aponte served as academic dean at two institutions: Lancaster Theological Seminary and Christian Theological Seminary. He currently serves on the board of The Wesley Works Editorial Project and the editorial advisory board of "The Global Story of Christianity: History, Context, and Communities" series published by Wipf and Stock. He is an honorary member of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States.

Aponte received a BA in Biblical and Theological Studies from Gordon College and an MATS from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He earned his MA and PhD in Religion from Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His research focuses on United States religious and cultural history, with an emphasis on Latin@ religions and cultures and African American and African diasporic traditions.

Aponte's publications include *¡Santo! Varieties of Latino/a Spirituality* (Orbis Books, 2012), and *Introducing Latinx Theologies*, co-authored with Miguel A. De La Torre (Orbis Books, 2020). He has authored numerous articles and contributed to countless volumes, most recently “Hope, Theological Education, and the Boardwalk,” in *Borderlands of Theological Education* (2022). He has given numerous keynote lectures and panel presentations on topics pertaining to Latinx theology, “Post-Christian” culture, religious diversity, and “Spanglish spirituality.”

Neal is Deputy Executive Director & Chief Equity Officer at NETWORK in Washington DC, a national Catholic advocacy organization working to achieve equity and justice for all. Grounded in Gospel values and the Catholic social justice tradition, NETWORK shapes federal policies that achieve racial, economic, and social justice; serve the common good; and honor the dignity of every person. Before accepting the position as Executive Director, Neal was a senior fellow at NETWORK in the area of government relations and strategy.

Neal’s other roles have included serving as Vice President for Institutional Planning and Effectiveness at Cabrini College (now Cabrini University), Executive Vice President of US Operations at Catholic Relief Services, and Vice President and Director of the Office of Public Affairs at BMO Harris Bank. She is the Founder and Lead Consultant of her own consulting firm, JF Neal Leading Edge Consulting, and has served clients including FADICA, Catholic Volunteer Network, The Archdiocese of New York, and many more.

Neal received her BA in English from Loyola University Chicago in 1969 and received a MAPS degree from Catholic Theological Union in 2002. She holds multiple certificates in the areas of biblical spirituality, leadership, and conflict resolution. She serves on numerous boards including those of the Sr. Thea Bowman Foundation, Mexican American Catholic College, the National Black Sisters Conference, and the Board of the Center for Migration Studies of New York, among many others.

About Catholic Theological Union

Catholic Theological Union is a Roman Catholic graduate school of theology and ministry. Its mission is to prepare effective leaders for the Church, ready to witness to Christ’s good news of justice, love, and peace. CTU’s 4,500 vowed religious women and men and lay graduates are serving in 60 countries worldwide.

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