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October 1, 2013

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EMBARGOED UNTIL 8 P.M. TUES, OCT 1

To: All Media

From: Renée Underwood, runderwood@catholiclubbock.org 806-928-0463

Re: **Judge Mark J. Hocker Presented Sowder Award for Advancement of Justice and Peace**

For only the fourth time in the history of the event, Red Mass organizers bestowed the Madison Sowder Saint Thomas More Justice in Action Award to a local judge – The Honorable Mark J. Hocker. The announcement was made by Lubbock County Commissioner Mark Heinrich at the Thirteenth Annual Judicial Red Mass, held this evening at Christ the King Cathedral and attended by members of the legal community from throughout the 25 counties in the Diocese of Lubbock.

In presenting the award, Most Rev. Plácido Rodríguez, CMF, bishop of Lubbock, said that Hocker was being recognized for his “contributions to improving the quality of life and upholding moral standards by personal involvement in and dedication to the advancement and fulfillment of justice and peace in our society and human endeavors.”

Hocker is presiding judge of Lubbock County Court at Law No. 1. A native of Pflugerville, Hocker served in the United States Army Reserve from 1988 through 2005 and attended Sam Houston State University and graduated cum laude from Texas A&M University with a Bachelor of Environmental Design in 1995. He graduated from Texas Tech University School of Law in 1998.

During his career as a lawyer Hocker was an assistant criminal district attorney for Lubbock County, in private practice, a first assistant district attorney for Hale and Swisher Counties and as a civil litigation attorney prior to being appointed to his present position by a unanimous vote of the Lubbock County Commissioners in December 2011. Hocker presides over criminal misdemeanors, family law and civil cases up to \$250,000.

He is a member in good standing of the State Bar of Texas and the United States District Court, Northern District of Texas.

Married to Heather for 17 years and the father of Mary Elizabeth, 7, Hocker is active in the community as a board member for Lubbock Bar Association and Literacy Lubbock, chapter advisor to Gamma Chi Chapter of Kappa Alpha Order at Texas Tech, competition judge for Texas Tech University School of Law Board of Barristers, and in a variety of roles for First United Methodist Church, Lubbock Lions Club, Lubbock Area Republican Women, Texas Bicycle Coalition, Young Life Sporting Clays Committee, South Plains Child Fatality Review Team, City of Lubbock Redistricting Committee, Texas Municipal Court Education Center and

Lubbock High School Mock Trial Team.

The Madison Sowder Saint Thomas More Justice in Action Award was established in 2007 and presented posthumously in memory of Judge Madison Sowder to honor a member of the legal profession that best exemplifies the ethics of Thomas More, patron saint of attorneys, civil servants, court clerks, lawyers, politicians and public servants.

Sowder served as the long-time attorney for the Diocese of Lubbock. His law career spanned more than a half-century and included service as a State District Court judge. He was a former Lubbock County Chairman of the Democrat party and generously donated his time and talents to many worthy organizations in the community. Sowder's widow, Frances, and their son, Judge Bill Sowder, were in attendance at tonight's event.

Never intended to be an annual award, the Madison Sowder Saint Thomas More Award is bestowed at the Judicial Red Mass only when organizers believe there is a member of the legal community who merits the honor. In addition to Sowder and Hocker, it was presented to Elroy D. Simmacher in 2008 and to the Honorable Gary M. Bellair in 2011.

A crowd of more than 200 was in attendance at the Red Mass, including judges, including justices of the State of Texas Criminal Court of Appeals, lawyers, public officials, law faculty members, their administrative staffs and people with a concern for justice from all faith traditions. The Red Mass, a judicial tradition that dates back to 13th century England, during the reign of King Edward I, was celebrated at Westminster Abbey and served as the official opening of the Judicial Year. It received its name from the fact that the celebrants wore red vestments, and the Lord High Justices were robed in brilliant scarlet.

The Red Mass was first celebrated in the United States in 1928 has been held annually in Lubbock since 2000. The Mass promotes the unity of the judiciary and the legal profession.