

Sister Kevin John Shields, OP

“Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works,
and in your teaching show integrity, dignity.”

- Titus 2:7

Our dear Sister Kevin John Shields was welcomed into the peace of God’s eternal light and life on the feast of St. Thomas Aquinas, January 28, 2023. Sr. Kevin John was 89 years old and had been a Sister of St. Dominic of Amityville for 71 years.



Agnes was the first born of the “Shields Girls”, born to Henry and Catherine (Trehy) Shields in Brooklyn, New York on July 23, 1933. Her sisters Kathleen, Helen and Veronica completed this tightly knit Irish family.

Agnes attended Bishop McDonnell High School in Brooklyn for a short time after the family moved to Lindenhurst, Long Island. She then transferred to the Dominican Juniorate in Water Mill from which she graduated. She was one of almost 100 young women who entered the Sisters of St. Dominic of Amityville, New York (NY) on September 8, 1951. As a member of the “Daisy” set, Agnes received the Dominican habit and the religious name Sister Kevin John on August 4, 1952. She professed her First Vows on August 7, 1953, and her Final Vows on August 7, 1956.

Sr. Kevin John received a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from St. John’s University in Jamaica, NY and a Master of Education degree in Religious Education from Boston College, Boston, Massachusetts.

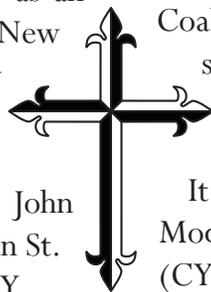
Sr. Kevin John began her lifelong ministry as an educator in 1953 at Notre Dame School in New Hyde Park, NY. She continued in elementary education in St. Leonard’s School in Brooklyn and Incarnation School in Queens Village, NY. From 1968 to 1971 she taught English at St. John the Baptist High School in West Islip, NY and in St. Joseph’s Mountain School, Sullivan County, NY.

Upon completion of her degree in Religious Education, Sister assumed the role of Parish Minister at St. John the Evangelist Parish in Riverhead, NY from 1971-1977.

As a young sister there was never a “summer off”. Providentially Sr. Kevin’s summer assignments year after year brought her to St. Joseph’s Camp in Sullivan County, NY, a large rural area about 120 miles northwest of New York City. She quickly had a special place in her heart, not only for the campers, but also for the people of the neighboring towns. In 1977 it was a delight for her to accept to an invitation from the Archdiocese of New York to become the Director of Religious Education in the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Education Center (BKT) in Liberty, NY. This center served the eleven parishes in the county, and Sr. Kevin became responsible for the religious formation of all the Catholic youth in those parishes.

Sr. Kevin, in the true spirit of the itinerant preacher St. Dominic, gave her time, presence, and care to the people as she travelled from town to town. Conversations led her to see the growing problem of drugs in these rural areas, and by 1980 she and volunteers founded the Sullivan County Cares Coalition to combat drug abuse through education and the power of positive alternatives. Undeterred, she gave her full time to the Religious Education of both youth and adults, as well as to the Coalition which worked with the same youth on a second front. She created programs for youth leadership training, a youth Speak Out Day, and campaigns against drinking and driving.

It is noted that Sr. Kevin was also the County Moderator for the Catholic Youth Organizations (CYO) that existed!



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Covering almost 1,000 square miles of Catskill country and with regular trips to “the City” for meetings with other educators, Sr. Kevin and her longtime and dear friend Sr. Mary Elizabeth Kelleher, OP (Sr. Talbot) became strong advocates for the people of Sullivan County. They were formidable women who had vision and the energy and commitment to make things happen, and they did.

Sr. Kevin was an equal opportunity minister, preaching the Gospel wherever she saw the need regardless of age or status or religion. In 1990 she was awarded the Humanitarian/Brotherhood Award by the B'nai B'rith/B'nai B'rith Women of New York State. In the presentation she was described as “one who personifies in her whole being and in her every action, compassion and love for her fellow beings.” Whenever she was honored, Sr. Kevin accepted it for the “unsung heroes of Sullivan County” whose devotion and hard work were the “wind beneath her wings.”

In 1992 the Archdiocese of NY awarded Sr. Kevin the Medal of Honor for her outstanding work as Regional Director of Religious Education in Sullivan County. After a shifting of directors in Sullivan, Orange and Putnam Counties in 1998, Sr. Kevin became responsible for the programs in the 32 parishes of Orange County as well as her own 11 in Sullivan County. In her wry sense of humor, she noted that she would begin to work on her bi-location skills!

Recognized by Catholic and Jewish communities, Sr. Kevin was also awarded the DeWitt Clinton Award by the Grand Lodge of Free Masons of New York State for “touching lives deeply since 1977 as an exceptional teacher with sincere concern for the vulnerable. Her impact on Sullivan County is endless.”

Sr. Kevin never stopped working, and she never stopped being herself. She was a valiant woman who gave herself every day to the men, women, and youth in this rural county. Her work will go on because her catechists and assistants are now second generation – the sons and daughters of the men and women

who came to her more than 50 years ago and whose families are now engaged in her good work. They love her and see in her the “life of the Church.” Truly, she has made a difference in the lives of countless children and adults in her education and pastoral ministry both on Long Island and in Sullivan and Orange Counties.

Not only did Sr. Kevin live in the town of Liberty, but also she had a personal freedom that endeared her to everyone. She was the soul of hospitality and was a first responder to any need. She could be depended upon to have things well-organized and ready to add her ideas to any meeting. To any role to which she might be called, she would be well dressed and ready to perform it excellently – from a friendly dinner in her own home to an important meeting with a Cardinal, or to humorous fun with family and friends.

Sr. Kevin John had a great love for her Amityville Dominican congregation. Three hours of travel did not deter her from attending Saturday meetings, Community Assembly and Chapter meetings, and certainly Jubilee celebrations with members of her set and her friends.

Sr. Kevin John is now among the saints in the halls of heaven, welcomed by her parents, her sister Kathleen Heslin and her dear friend Sr. Mary Elizabeth Kelleher, OP. She is survived by her sisters Helen Shortall and Veronica Travers, by eleven nieces and nephews and many grandnieces and grandnephews. She will be missed by her Dominican Sisters and the dear people of Sullivan County.

The wake and funeral for our Sister Kevin John Shields will take place in St. Albert Chapel on Tuesday, January 31, 2023. Visitation will be at 9:45 AM with a Prayer Service at 10:15 AM followed by the Mass of Christian Burial and Interment in the Sisters Cemetery. All are welcome to join her family and loved ones to celebrate the life of this remarkable and beloved Sister.

A special Mass of Remembrance to celebrate the life of Sister Kevin John Shields will be held Upstate at a date and time in the near future.
