



Joan Kirby, RSCJ

Birth: May 24, 1926

Profession: Feb. 10, 1956

Death: Sept. 9, 2015

Religious of the Sacred Heart Joan Kirby died Wednesday, September 9, 2015 in her community in New York City. Remembered for her inclusivity and generosity of spirit, her life will be celebrated in a Mass of Christian Burial on Thursday, September 17th at 11:00 a.m. at Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, 457 West 51st St. (between 9th & 10th Aves.) in New York City. Burial will be at the Society of the Sacred Heart cemetery at Kenwood at a later date.

Joan Carol Kirby was born in New York City May 24, 1926, the second of four daughters born to Daniel B. and Cecilia K. Kirby. In addition to her parents, she was predeceased by her sisters Betty Wooters and Janet Clark. She is survived by her sister Cecilia (Billie) Mullen, Bronxville, New York, numerous nieces and nephews and her sisters in the Society of the Sacred Heart.

A graduate of the Convent of the Sacred Heart, Maplehurst and Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart, she entered the Society of the Sacred Heart at Kenwood in Albany, December 8, 1947. She made her first vows at Kenwood in 1950 and her final profession in Rome on February 10, 1956.

Sister Kirby's first assignment after making her first vows was as head of the lower school at the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Overbrook, Pennsylvania, 1950-55. Following final profession, she studied at the University of Louvain in Belgium, where she earned a licentiate in philosophy. In 1959, she was assigned to Stone Ridge Academy of the Sacred Heart in Washington, D.C., where she taught history and also served as head of the boarding school. In 1963, she became the first headmistress at Stuart Country Day School of the Sacred Heart in Princeton, New Jersey, where she spent four happy years. She was director of students at Newton College of the Sacred Heart, Newton, Massachusetts from 1967-69. In 1969 she became headmistress of the Convent of the Sacred Heart (91st Street) in New York, a position she held until 1981.

While still working at 91st Street, Sister Kirby joined the newly-formed community on West 49th Street, in the "Hell's Kitchen" neighborhood. In 1981, Sister Kirby began exploring new areas of ministry in this neighborhood. From 1981 to 1984, she served as a housing counselor and director of home ownership for Housing Conservation Coordinators. Broadening her vision, she also served as executive director and president of Homes for the Homeless in New York, 1986-88, and as a member of the Community Planning Board.

In 1994, Sister Kirby found her true passion when she became the director of the Temple of Understanding (TOU) in New York, an interfaith organization affiliated with the United Nations. The TOU works to educate adults and young people across cultures and religion to create understanding and peaceful co-existence. Sister Kirby remained with the Temple of Understanding, first as director, then as its representative to the United Nations, until 2014, when her illness made it necessary for her to retire.

In 2010, the Temple of Understanding presented Sister Kirby with the Interfaith Visionary Lifetime Achievement Award, *"for promoting interreligious values at the United Nations, her lifelong commitment to addressing human rights and ecological issues, and her passionate devotion to the development of young leaders."* UN Secretary General BAN Ki-Moon wrote at the time, *"We are especially mindful of the special role you have played in advancing the Millennium Development Goals and interfaith and intercultural dialogue, as well as confronting climate change. I am also thankful that you have taken the time to nurture young global citizens from all parts of the world. Your leadership has been exemplary. Your influence profound. I thank you."*



The TOU experience brought Sister Kirby into contact with the world of Buddhism, which had a profound effect on her spirituality for the last twenty years of her life.

Sister Kirby recently wrote, "People ask me why I practice Zen Buddhism. I do so because Buddhism has taught me to stop looking for Jesus 'out there.' For decades I sought to regenerate an inner awareness. I imitated the affections, feelings, attitudes of Jesus, but always as someone, something beyond me – outside – other than me. Buddhism has taught me to stop reaching, looking outside of my inner self ... I am Christ. I receive Christ as my food; I have been permeated by the living Jesus. ... This prompts me to live in the present moment because this is where God is."

Memorial contributions may be made to the Society of the Sacred Heart, 4120 Forest Park Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63108 or to Encore Community Services, 239 West 49th St., New York, NY 10019.

Comments

In praise and memory of Joan Kirby

Submitted by **Sandy Theunick** on Wed, 2015-09-09 21:07

I first met Joan as a freshman in high school at Stone Ridge. "Mother Kirby" was our debate coach, and although my gifts were limited in that area, she encouraged all of us to work hard to represent our school well at tournaments. She was then our Third Academic Class Mistress. We loved her and she loved us. She was a brilliant teacher and confidante of many of us. She continued to be a personal support and friend particularly during my time in New York. Always an example of openness to new ideas, new ways of being, new understandings of the world community. Many of us owe a lot to Joan for making us strong and better women. There is not a doubt in my mind that the Lord will bless and keep her for her goodness and example. My sincere condolences to her RSCJ sisters and family. Joan, you did good. Love and aloha.

Mother Kirby certainly

Submitted by Ruth Wade on Wed, 2015-09-09 22:43

Mother Kirby certainly accomplished what she prayed for and with such style and grace! What a steady and loving hand she extended to each of us through our Junior year. I will always carry a piece of her in my heart. Mahalo and Aloha

Mother Kirby

Submitted by Kay DeFranceaux... on Wed, 2015-09-09 22:59

Mother Kirby was a great woman, a great teacher, and a great nun. A true role model for us crazy high school girls and as Sandy mentioned, staying "with" many after we flew away from the next. My recollections had to do with the SR boarding school and the time we "short sheeted" her bed. She made everything happy. Rest in Peace dear lady. Mahalo and aloha!

Very fond memories of Mother

Submitted by ANA M AZCARATE on Thu, 2015-09-10 07:26

Very fond memories of Mother Kirby. She got us up in the morning, had her all day in Third Academics and put us in bed at night. Kay, funny you should mentioned the "short sheeted". We all missed when she left to open the new school in New Jersey. Great role model. May she rest in peace. Pray for all your "girls". Love you.

"Mother" Kirby, you taught me

Submitted by Patty Myler on Thu, 2015-09-10 10:32

"Mother" Kirby, you taught me so many life-learning lessons as a 3rd Academic student at Stone Ridge, I remember them well. A few years ago I had a wonderful opportunity to re-connect with you when you came to speak at Stone Ridge, while I was working there. During our visit I reminded you of the "lessons" that you had taught me, you gasped in horror as you said they seemed so strict. They weren't and they were lessons well learned that have guided me for the rest of my life. Rest in peace grand lady, you touched so many of us with your wisdom and grace, I know you are in a better place!

You were such an inspiring

Submitted by Gussie Conway on Thu, 2015-09-10 16:09

You were such an inspiring role model for me while I interned for you at the Temple of Understanding. Your smile brought such warmth to the room, and your determination and passion encouraged every intern to work to their best potential. When I would meet with you, you always made me feel accomplished and special, but also that I always had more to give. I hope to one day be as generous, thoughtful, and hardworking as you were. I will miss you and will think of you often!

Sr. Joan Kirby

Submitted by Victoria Allen on Thu, 2015-09-10 16:10

It was my privilege to have been hired to teach Upper School English at 91st Street. Over the years, Sr. Kirby and I kept in touch, as recently as this summer. She was a truly exemplary woman: intelligent, modest, a worker on behalf of others, a woman whose soft and gentle voice reflected her peaceful, kindly nature, as well as her intellect and thoughtfulness. 91st Street was magic, and Sr. Kirby was a big part in making it so. God rest her soul and comfort her family and all whose lives she touched. I will never forget her.