

Archdiocesan leader in human resources dies at 75

Sheila Kelly, one of the first women to lead an executive department of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, died July 23. She was 75.

Hired by Archbishop William D. Borders in 1979 as director of personnel services for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Kelly worked for 24 years at the Catholic Center in the field of human resources. She retired from the archdiocese in 2003 as executive director of the Department of Human Resources.

A former member of the Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart, Kelly was a driving force behind moving the compensation for religious brothers and sisters from a standard stipend system to a percentage of a comparable lay salary in the early 1980s. The Buffalo, N.Y., native also helped develop a retirement benefits plan for religious in the archdiocese.

Monsignor Richard Bozzelli, pastor of St. Bernardine in Baltimore and a former pastor of Corpus Christi in Bolton Hill, where Kelly was an active parishioner, said Kelly brought a strong sense of justice to her work in human resources and in her ministry at Corpus Christi.

"In 1989, the archdiocese had to restructure and do some downsizing," Monsignor Bozzelli said. "Archbishop Borders relied on Sheila very heavily during a time that was very difficult to navigate."

Calling Kelly one of the "pillars of the community" at Corpus Christi, Monsignor Bozzelli noted that Kelly worked closely in supporting the work of Sister Jane Coyle, a Medical Missionary Sister who served as pastoral life director of Corpus Christi prior to Monsignor Bozzelli's appointment as pastor there in 2000.

Sister Jane was the first non-ordained person to lead a parish in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Kelly also worked closely with Sister of Notre Dame de Namur Rosalie Murphy, appointed in 1977 as the director of collegial services – the first woman to lead an executive department in the archdiocese.

“Sheila was a great advocate for women in the church, but not in an obnoxious way,” Monsignor Bozzelli said. “She was not an angry person. She had a firm sense of what was just and right.”

At Corpus Christi, Kelly aided Monsignor Bozzelli on personnel matters. She was active in a long-running prayer group at the parish, the pastor said, and she continued to pray with the group even after moving to Wilmington in the later years of her life.

“She never had airs about her,” Monsignor Bozzelli said. “She was very down-to-earth, very considerate and a good listener. She knew how to ask questions that would elicit open responses. She was always attentive to the people around her.”

Kelly entered the Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart in 1965, serving as a teacher and high school principal in the Philadelphia area and a teacher in Washington, D.C. She left religious life in 1987.

In a 2003 interview with the Catholic Review, Kelly said she was “passionate” about treating employees justly.

“It really is about the development of people and increasing their contribution to the mission of the church and the particular mission in which they are working,” she said.

Kelly added that everyone has gifts that can “change the world” locally, regionally or nationally.

“If our gifts are developed and we have the opportunity,” she said, “there is great potential.”

Kelly held a bachelor’s degree in history from D’Youville College, a master’s degree in educational administration from Temple University and a second master’s degree in applied behavioral sciences from The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. She was awarded the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice honor by St. John Paul II in recognition of her decades of service to the church.

After leaving Baltimore, Kelly worked as the U.S. bishops’ deputy director of the

Office of Child and Youth Protection. In her retirement, Kelly assisted dioceses across the country as a consultant on human resources.

A funeral Mass was offered Aug. 6 at St. John Vianney in Orchard Park, N.Y. A memorial service will be offered Nov. 3 at 11 a.m. at Corpus Christi in Baltimore.

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