

# Brother Kevin Strong, ‘one of the giants’ of the Christian Brothers, dies at 85

Brother Kevin Strong, a groundbreaking leader at Calvert Hall College High School in Towson and Cardinal Gibbons School in Baltimore who served as the first president of both all-boys institutions, died Jan. 3 in New Jersey after years of declining health.

The 85-year-old Western Maryland native had served more than six decades as a member of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, joining the religious community only five days after he graduated from La Salle High School in Cumberland in 1949.

“He was truly one of the giants of our religious community,” said Christian Brother John Kane, current president of Calvert Hall. “He touched thousands of hearts and he changed lives. People loved him everywhere he went.”

Leading Calvert Hall from 1990 to 2000, Brother Kevin was known as a prodigious fundraiser with a long-term vision for the school. He oversaw fundraising for \$6 million in campus improvements and spearheaded a \$3 million capital campaign in 1995 to increase the school’s endowment. He also was moderator of the school’s cross country, track and field, and wrestling teams.

“His biggest accomplishment was how he treated people,” said Brother John, who first met his mentor at La Salle College High School in Wyndmoor, Pa., where Brother John was a student and Brother Kevin was a faculty member. Brother John later assisted Brother Kevin in administration at Archbishop Carroll School in Radnor, Pa., where Brother Kevin was principal.

“He was a gentle, caring soul,” Brother John said. “He made you feel that everything was fine. Even in the most tense times, he’d make you laugh.”

After leaving Calvert Hall in 2000, Brother Kevin was serving as director of his religious order’s aspirancy program in Philadelphia when Cardinal William H. Keeler

asked him to return to Baltimore to become Cardinal Gibbons' first president in 2004.

"No one would have faulted him for saying no," said Brother John, noting that Brother Kevin was then in his early 70s. "He said 'yes.' That's the kind of person he was."

In a 2005 interview with the Catholic Review, Brother Kevin said he couldn't refuse the opportunity to return to Catholic education. He described relying on the Holy Spirit to make his job easier – benefiting from unsolicited donations to give Gibbons' teachers Christmas bonuses and helping secure significant donations for tuition assistance and the refurbishment of the fine arts building.

Brother Kevin was president of Cardinal Gibbons until 2008. The school closed in 2010.

Although Brother Kevin underwent dialysis for the last decade of his life and suffered serious health issues, Brother John noted that his friend still worked as a guidance counselor for freshmen at Calvert Hall before moving to a retirement home for his religious community in New Jersey.

For more than 30 years, Brother Kevin maintained the practice of writing a personal religious journal, cataloguing his blessings and reflecting on God's goodness.

"I'm amazed by how many signs of God's presence there really are," he told the Catholic Review in a 1999 interview, adding that he worked hard to help young people recognize their own blessings from God.

"I like being able to draw out from students their insights and affirm them in their gifts," he said. "I try to convince them about how good they are and how talented they are and how much they have going for them."

Brother Kevin's own drive for helping others was inspired by the religious brothers and sisters in his native Cumberland.

A parishioner of Ss. Peter and Paul, he was taught by the Ursuline sisters at his parish elementary school. He encountered the Christian Brothers at La Salle High

School. It was they, Brother Kevin told the Review, who turned a teenager who saw “nothing outstanding or special” in himself into a young man burning with a desire to serve God.

Brother Kevin earned a bachelor’s and a master’s degree in theology from La Salle University, a master’s degree in Spanish from the University of Pittsburgh and a master’s degree in guidance and counseling from The Catholic University of America.

He spent several years teaching and working with Cuban refugees at La Salle High School in Miami after Fidel Castro came to power.

Other assignments included various roles as a teacher, guidance counselor, vice-principal, principal and president of Catholic schools outside Maryland.

Proud of his Irish heritage, Brother Kevin recorded a CD, “Sing Claddagh,” of his favorite Irish songs, and was the honorary grand marshal of the 2014 St. Patrick Parade in Baltimore. “Walking in God’s Presence,” a collection of his poetry, was published in 1996.

“When I think of God’s presence here on earth,” said Charles Stembler, Calvert Hall principal, “I always think of Brother Kevin.”

*A viewing will be held at The Noppinger Commons at Calvert Hall on Jan. 13 from 9 to 11 a.m. A funeral Mass will be offered at the school’s Knott Center at 11 a.m.*

*Email George Matysek at [gmatysek@CatholicReview.org](mailto:gmatysek@CatholicReview.org).*