

# Msgr. Kelly, beloved friend and priest, dies at 77

CHARLESTON — Msgr. Robert J. Kelly, a priest who touched thousands of lives through his charismatic pastoral and educational ministry, died Sept. 6 after an extended illness. He was 77.

“Msgr. Kelly was an extraordinary priest,” Bishop Robert J. Baker said. “His loss will be felt not only by the Catholic community of the Diocese of Charleston, but also by the wider community of the state of South Carolina.”

Msgr. Kelly was born Robert Justin Kelly on Feb. 8, 1927, in Hartford, Conn., a son of the late Eugene F. and Anna Dunn Kelly. He attended Stephen Mix Mitchell Grammar School in Wethersfield, Conn., and St. Thomas Seminary High School in Bloomfield, Conn. He was a graduate of St. Bonaventure University in Olean, N.Y.; St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield, Conn.; and Christ the King Seminary in Olean, N.Y.

He was ordained May 14, 1953, in St. Joseph’s Cathedral in Hartford.

From his ordination until 1958, Msgr. Kelly served as an associate at churches in Bridgeport and Westport, Conn. He was incardinated into the Diocese of Charleston on Aug. 7, 1959.

Msgr. Kelly’s career as an educator spanned from 1959 to 1990. He was a faculty member of Bishop England High School from 1959 to 1974 and also was vice rector for several years. He became rector of Bishop England in 1964, a position he held until 1990. Msgr. Kelly was acting superintendent of schools for the diocese from 1974 to 1976 and was superintendent from 1978 to 1990. He also served as director of religious education for several years in the late 1980s.

While working in education, Msgr. Kelly was pastor of several parishes: Christ Our King in Mount Pleasant, St. Mary in Georgetown, Church of the Nativity on James Island, Blessed Sacrament in Charleston, St. Andrew in Myrtle Beach, and St. Mary in Greenville. He was pastor of Our Lady of Good Counsel on Folly Beach at the time of his death.

He was named a Prelate of Honor to His Holiness, receiving the title of reverend monsignor from Pope John Paul II in 1991.

“Our church on earth has been diminished by Msgr. Kelly’s death, but the church in heaven has been increased by his entrance therein,” Bishop David B. Thompson said. “The Little Flower stated that she will spend her heaven by doing good on earth. No one in our times and in our diocese could do more good than Msgr. Kelly did. May he spend his heaven reaping the rewards of his work on earth.”

Msgr. Kelly is survived by a sister, Betty Ann Keane of Massachusetts.

The Mass of Christian Burial will be at 10 a.m. Sept. 10 at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist. The burial will be at Holy Cross Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to either the Father Robert Kelly Scholarship Endowment Fund c/o Bishop England High School, 363 Seven Farms Road, Charleston, SC 29492, or to the Father Robert Kelly Endowment for Retired Priests c/o Coastal Community Foundation, 90 Mary St., Charleston, SC 29403.