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Mercy Sr. Theresa Kane, who died Aug. 22 at age 87, delivered the keynote address at the Conference of Catholic Lesbians' first meeting in November 1982. (Courtesy of WATER)



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The Sisters of Mercy, friends, family and loved ones said goodbye to Sr. Theresa Kane Tuesday, Sept. 3.

Mourners filled the Church of the Transfiguration in Tarrytown, New York, for the Mass of Christian Burial for Kane, who died Aug. 22. Kane fought for decades for the equality of women in the Catholic Church, and famously publicly challenged Pope St. John Paul II on the issue when he visited the United States in 1979. She was 87.



Mercy Sr. Theresa Kane, seen in a photo as provincial administrator of the congregation's New York Province (1970 to 1977) died Aug. 22. Her funeral was Sept. 3. (Courtesy of Sisters of Mercy of the Americas)

In addition to those at the church, another 350 people watched a livestream of the service.

She was born Margaret Kane on Sept. 24, 1936, in the Bronx, New York, to immigrant Irish parents — one of seven children. She entered the Sisters of Mercy in Tarrytown, New York, in 1955, making her first profession in 1957 and professing perpetual vows in 1960.

Theologian and professor Fr. Charles E. Curran, who celebrated the Mass, noted that it was nearly 20 years ago that many of the same people gathered there to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Kane's vows. He said the attendees should give thanks for her life, mourn her death, celebrate her hope and commit to carrying on "the magnificent work that she did."



Mercy Sr. Theresa Kane, center, is seen outside the office of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in Silver Spring, Md., in 2004. Also pictured are Sr. Suzanne Delaney (Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary), Sr. Carole Shinnick (School Sister of Notre Dame), Sr. Annmarie Sanders (Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary), and Mercy Sr. Della Mae Quinn. (Courtesy of LCWR)

Curran pointed out that Kane never gave up on pushing for reform of the church, even though it did not often lead to change.

"She did not leave the church; she did not give into anger. Her deep spirituality gave her the strength to carry on her mission for reform in the church despite all the problems, difficulties and sufferings it had caused her," Curran said in his homily. "Theresa Kane remains an exemplar and model for all who work for reform in our pilgrim church."

He also noted that despite her work in leadership and church reform and teaching, she never lost her commitment to those in need.

"Theresa lived out what it means to be a Sister of Mercy," he said.

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Kane was known for her sense of humor, and Curran said that when he attended the LCWR assembly in 2004 at her invitation, as she was presented the group's Outstanding Leadership Award, he appeared to be the only man among thousands of women religious. Kane told him, "Blessed are you among women," Curran recalled. Despite being first in a wheelchair and then in a nursing home in her final years, he said, "She never lost her smile."

Related: Mercy Sr. Theresa Kane, prominent advocate for women's rights, dies at 87