

Molly Kelly Obituary (1938 - 2025) - Legacy Remembers

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Molly Kelly, Beloved Mother, Pro-Life Pioneer, and Champion of Chastity

Molly Kelly, 87, a lifelong resident of the Philadelphia area, went home to God on August 14, 2025, at Vitas Hospice in South Philadelphia.

Born Mary Angelus Scanlan to Anthony "Ank" and Lauralys Scanlan on March 25, 1938, Molly led an extraordinary life that began with a Catholic upbringing in the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia. Molly attended Fontbonne Academy in Chestnut Hill, Mount Saint Joseph's Academy in Flourtown, and Trinity College in Washington, DC.

In Washington, Molly met the love of her life, Jim Kelly, a medical student at Georgetown University. Molly and Jim married on April 8, 1961, and they lived in the Mt. Airy neighborhood of Philadelphia, bringing eight children into the world over 14 years. Molly enjoyed playing bridge with the neighborhood housewives, and Jim, then a radiologist, began advocating for the unborn in the pro-life movement.

In February 1975, God called Jim home after a tragic accident. The loss devastated Molly, then a widow with eight children aged 15 months to 12 years. Molly soon embraced the pro-life movement. She passionately believed in the sanctity of life, and the work gave her direction in life and served as an homage to her late husband.

Molly demonstrated her commitment to these ideals by opening her home to pregnant teenagers and welcoming them as family. Her motherly compassion honed her pro-life ministry to a special focus on the promotion of the gift and virtue of chastity.

Molly became known as "The Chastity Lady" and embarked on a speaking career that reached tens of thousands of teenagers each year. Her message of life-affirming respect for sexuality resonated with young people as an alternative to modern culture. Her teaching was so important that she was invited to meet with Pope John Paul II and Mother Theresa of Calcutta, and spoke before 6,000 priests in Rome. She is the recipient of the Papal Cross and honorary doctorates from Allentown College of St. Francis DeSales, Chestnut Hill College, and St. Charles Borromeo Seminary.

In January 2001, Molly suffered a brain aneurysm. After spending more than a week in a coma and then months in rehabilitation, Molly returned home, but the damage brought her mission to an end. Molly's work was then continued by the next generation of Catholic advocates for chastity and the unborn.

For the next 24 years, Molly enjoyed a quiet life of doing ordinary things in an extraordinary way, including her roles as mother, grandmother, prayer warrior, daily communicant, friend, and diehard Phillies fan.

Molly was predeceased by her husband, Dr. James D. Kelly, her son, James P. Kelly, and her granddaughter, Maggie McDonnell. She is survived by her children Michael and Jacqueline Kelly of River Edge, NJ, Patrick and Mary Frances Kelly of Maple Glen, PA, Brendan and Angela Kelly of New York, NY, Molly and Jeff McDonnell of Chalfont, PA, Mary Kate and Juan Guerra of Paoli, PA, Kevin and Theanna Kelly of Conshohocken, PA, Daniel and Beatrice Kelly of Philadelphia, PA, and 18 grandchildren. She is also survived by her brother Edmund Scanlan and wife Ann Scanlan of Norristown, PA, brother-in-law Michael Doyle of Warrington, PA, sister-in-law Tina Scanlan of East Norriton, PA, and many nephews and nieces.

Visitation for Molly Kelly will be held at St. Alphonsus Church, 1567 Temple Drive, Maple Glen, PA, on Thursday, August 21st, from 5:30-7:00 PM and Friday, August 22nd, from 10:00-11:30 AM. A Mass of Christian Burial will follow immediately after the Friday visitation.

In lieu of flowers, please consider donating to The Sisters of Life.