



## Jim Byrnes

October 13, 1934 - January 18, 2019

James M. Byrnes, 84, of Topeka, Kansas, passed away peacefully in his sleep on Friday, January 18, 2019.

Jim was born on October 13, 1934, in Des Moines, Iowa, the fourth of 12 children of John and Marguerite Jansen Byrnes. He grew up in Urbandale, Iowa, and attended Holy Trinity Grade School, Class of 1948, and Dowling High School, Class of 1952. Jim earned his Bachelor's Degree from Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa. He went on to attend Mount Saint Bernard seminary, and was ordained a Catholic Priest in 1957. While at Seminary, Jim met lifelong friends, Paul Koch and Jim Stessman. He would later coach football with Father Stessman back at Dowling.

Jim took a different life path in 1967, leaving the Priesthood and moving to Topeka, where he was a Research Psychologist at the Kansas Neurological Institute. He married his wife of 49 years, Shirley Rae Cleland in September of 1969. Jim became the director of the Foster Grandparent Program for the State of Kansas, as a federal civil servant in 1968 and in 1972 moved on to be the regional director of the ACTION Senior Volunteer Program for Kansas and Missouri. He retired from federal service in 2001 after 29 years. Working with older American volunteers in the community became Jim's life work.

Jim and Shirley loved Topeka, where they raised their children Terry, Randy

and Kathleen O'Boyle. Shirley was a traveler and as a result, Jim had no choice but to see the world. They loved their neighborhood friends and community. He especially loves Most Pure Heart of Mary Parish. Jim taught at Washburn University in the Psychology Department from 1968 to 1982, where Jim and Shirley made many friends.

Jim loved his family, especially his brothers and sisters, loved being a "Byrnes" and being Irish and Catholic. He also had a love for sports, especially Notre Dame Football games with Jim DeCoursey. Jim played hockey, while he was a priest, for the Urbandale Comets of the Hawkeye Amateur league in 1961. He later became a fan of the local Oak Leafs Professional Team. He enjoyed golf, riding motorcycles and going to retreats at the monastery in Snowmass, Colorado, with Jim Stessman and Paul Koch. With Dowling friend, Kermit Marsh, they bought Honda 1965 motorcycles, rode to Colorado and taught some of their sisters to ride. He loved reunions with classmates, family and colleagues. Jim loved Shirley's Westies – they quickly became his. He had a smile to fill a room. But most of all Jim loved to serve. At his retirement they said he was a servant of the common man. Even in retirement, Jim continued to serve, whether it was mowing the nuns' yard (where he lost half his foot) or bringing the Eucharist to those in need. He even became a greeter at Walmart and volunteered in the kitchen at McCrites Senior Living Facility.

Jim is survived by his wife Shirley; children, Randy O'Boyle and Kathleen Hershner; grandson, Conor O'Boyle; brothers, Jack, Ed, Tom, Paul and Bill; sisters, Mary, Helen, Gert, Caroline, Frances, and Angela; 27 nieces and nephews; 56 great-nieces and nephews; and 30 great-great-nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents and child, Terry O'Boyle.

Parish rosary will be prayed at 5 p.m. Friday, January 25, 2019, at Kevin Brennan Family Funeral Home, 2801 SW Urish Road, Topeka KS 66614, with

visitation until 7 p.m.

Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at 9:30 a.m. on Saturday, January 26, 2019, at Most Pure Heart of Mary Catholic Church, 3601 SW 17th Street, Topeka KS 66604. Burial to follow in Mount Calvary Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Catholic Relief Services, sent in care of the funeral home.

# Cemetery Details

## Mount Calvary Cemetery

801 SW Westchester Rd  
Topeka, KS 66606

# Previous Events

## Rosary

JAN 25. 5:00 PM - 5:30 PM (CT)

Kevin Brennan Family Funeral Home  
2801 SW Urish Road  
Topeka, KS 66614  
(785) 272-7888  
[info@kevinbrennanfamily.com](mailto:info@kevinbrennanfamily.com)

## Visitation

JAN 25. 5:30 PM - 7:00 PM (CT)

Kevin Brennan Family Funeral Home  
2801 SW Urish Road  
Topeka, KS 66614  
(785) 272-7888  
[info@kevinbrennanfamily.com](mailto:info@kevinbrennanfamily.com)

## Mass of Christian Burial

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JAN **26**. 9:30 AM (CT)

Most Pure Heart of Mary Church  
3601 SW 17th Street  
Topeka, KS 66604

# Tribute Wall



“ *Kevin Brennan Family Funeral Home created a Tribute Video in memory of Jim Byrnes*



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**Kevin Brennan Family Funeral Home** - January 22, 2019 at 05:11 PM



“ *Jim Byrnes*

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January 28, 2023 at 12:08 PM

BG

“ To Jim's family and friends. I'm sorry for your loss. Please accept my condolence.

*The best way for me to pay tribute to Jim Byrnes is to tell a story.*

*I once offered advice to a 29-year-old woman who confided in me, she was in love with her banker. Why she talked to me, the only one with whom she shared her secret at the time, I'll never know.*

*I advised her to follow her heart, that she never would regret such a choice. My moral compass in these matters has always included to a major extent Jim Byrnes.*

*I have no idea if my words were beneficial to her or what she did with them. Knowing that answer, getting that feedback would have been for my satisfaction. My satisfaction didn't seem as important as letting her know I was on her side.*

*Once you learn the lesson of following your heart as taught through example by Jim Byrnes, unselfishly sharing such advice falls into place automatically.*

*You may not agree that being gay is normal. You may not agree that human sexuality is a gift from our creator. You may not agree that following our heart in these matters is a virtuous form of spirituality. I am a straight man, but I do.*

*Before you go running off thinking I'm saying Jim Byrnes was gay or he advocated for some sort of immorality, that's not the case. For me, Jim taught that it is important to follow your heart. Thank you for this advice, Jim.*

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**Ben Guise** - January 25, 2019 at 12:42 AM

JD

“ Congratulations on creating a wonderful tribute to Jim's life, The obituary captured him. The picture was perfect. Jim left a big footprint and you covered it so well.

*May you be consoled with lovely memories and the gift of a peaceful death for Jim.*

*With many fond memories. Th DeCoursey Family.*

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**joyce DeCoursey** - January 23, 2019 at 12:14 PM

KM

“ *I have many good memories of time spent with Jim over the years. My sympathy to Shirley and the Byrnes Family.*

*Kermit Marsh*

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**Kermit Marsh** - January 23, 2019 at 11:06 AM

TB

“ *I am so very sorry to learn of your loss. You don't know me, but I am from Des Moines, Iowa..and I believe Jim may have worked for my Dad (Cliff Keller) occasionally when I was a child. It may have been through a mutual friend (Fr. Thomas Pfeffer) that that happened. For years I kept the invitation to Jim's ordination to the priesthood in my scrapbook. The reason being that I became drawn to the priesthood at the ordination of Fr. Tom Pfeffer. He and I became friends and he came to my ordination to the priesthood, here in St. Louis, Missouri in January of 1990; as I have been an Episcopal priest for 29 years now. Again, please accept my condolences. I scan the obituaries in the Des Moines Register on line every day and just happened to put two and two together. I rejoice in the wonderful memories you shared of Jim and ask that God would be with you to comfort you. The Rev. Dr. Virginia L. (Keller) Bennett*

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**The Rev. Virginia L. Bennett** - January 23, 2019 at 10:38 AM

FM

“ Jim has always been one of my good friends from way back. I really enjoyed his sense of humor. I was unaware of his death until now. I will offer Mass tomorrow, Jan. 23 for the repose of his soul. Fr. Paul Monahan (Diocese of Des Moines).

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**Fr. Paul Monahan** - January 22, 2019 at 09:20 PM

AK

“ So sorry to hear of your loss. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family. Arden & Barb Kain

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**arden & barb Kain** - January 20, 2019 at 08:02 PM