

Sr Stan obituary describes 'dedicated' campaigner, advocate.

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Campaigner and advocate Sister Stanislaus Kennedy has died at the age of 86.

By Conor Hunt

Known to many as Sr Stan, she died this morning at St Francis Hospice, Blanchardstown, following a period of illness.

Sr Stan was born Treasa Kennedy on 19 June 1939 near Lispole on the Dingle Peninsula in Co Kerry. She described her childhood as simple and carefree, and said from her early life she was aware that some people were better off than others and wanted to help those who were less advantaged than her. Aged 18 she left home, and entered into religious life, joining the Sisters of Charity and becoming Sr Stanislaus Kennedy. She was sent to Kilkenny to work with Bishop Peter Birch, where they set up a social services network. Among them, a meals on wheels, said to be one of the first of its kind in the country. Sr Stan joined the Sisters of Charity at the age of 18. Described as dedicated and idealistic, her work for social justice would become her main drive, telling RTÉ in 1972: "I deal with all kinds of families, they may be materially in need or emotionally in need. "This may mean giving them material help, it may mean very long-term intensive work with the parents and the children."

People follow her, there's no doubt about that.

She described the death of Bishop Birch in 1981 as "a huge loss", and left Kilkenny two years later. She recalled how she first encountered homeless people in Dublin, moving

there to study the issue in UCD. It would become the cause that she would dedicate most of her life to. Sr Stan set up a number of voluntary organisations, was appointed the first chair of the Combat Poverty Agency, and in 1985 set up Focus Point - the charity still running today as Focus Ireland. Her lifelong friend, Sr Sheila Wall, once said Sr Stan would go to the ends of the Earth for anyone. "People follow her, there's no doubt about that," she said.

Sr Stan has been described as dedicated and idealistic.

In 2009, the Ryan Report found that two lay workers at St Joseph's residential home in Kilkenny had abused children in the 1970s. Sr Stan had lived and worked there at the same premises. She later said the first time she heard of any sexual abuse there was in 1995 when the gardaí investigated. In 2020, she told the RTÉ documentary *Being Stan*, a *Life in Focus*: "I was accused of being complicit with it, in the sense that it was alleged that I knew about the abuse and did nothing about it. "I knew I knew nothing about the abuse, absolutely I didn't know. But nevertheless, the allegation really upset me. It questioned everything I was about. "I had to realise what I was suffering was nothing compared to what the boys had suffered."

Immigrant Council of Ireland.

In the early 2000s, she took up another issue - the number of new arrivals to the country, some overwhelmed and needing help. She set up the Immigrant Council of Ireland, saying on its opening: "They're a huge benefit to our society, and have the potential to be huge benefit, not only economically, but socially and culturally as well." In May 2015, she announced that she would be voting yes in the marriage equality referendum. But it was tackling homelessness that remained a constant, her message remaining consistent: "To think at this stage in Ireland, we a wealthy country, have that number who are homeless. "It's appalling. It is a disaster that's caused by the priorities and policies of successive governments that did not provide social and affordable housing. It's that simple."

When she set up Focus 40 years ago, she believed homelessness could be solved within a decade. The problem though persisted, so too did her campaigning.

Born Treasa Kennedy, becoming Sister Stanislaus Kennedy, known to all as Sr Stan.