



Society of the Holy Child Jesus
AMERICAN PROVINCE

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Sheila I. McNiff, SHCJ
June 18, 1938 – August 13, 2026
Educator, Administrator, Pastoral Care Minister

Rosemont, Pennsylvania—Sheila McNiff, a Sister of the Holy Child Jesus for 67 years, died peacefully on Thursday, August 13, 2026. She was 88.

Longtime friends and community members, Susan Slater, SHCJ, and France White, SHCJ, reflected on the many gifts of Sister Sheila: “Sheila was known for her gracious spirit, her generosity, her willingness to help, and her ‘Actions Not Words’ in every situation. It seems that Sheila was always helping and at the same time graciously welcoming all who came. She looked for needs and found ways to address them. Hers was a practical spirituality which at the same time responded precisely to the person or people who were present.”

Born in Los Angeles, California, the fourth of seven children of Isabelle (Dowell) and Francis McNiff, Sister Sheila's love for the Holy Child Sisters dated to her childhood. She was taught by the Sisters at Mayfield Junior School of the Holy Child Jesus and Mayfield Senior School of the Holy Child Jesus, both in Pasadena, California. After high school graduation in 1956, she entered the Society and made her final vows in 1964. She became well known by her former religious name, Sister Maria Pacis.



Sister Sheila began her 23-year teaching ministry at Holy Spirit School in Sharon, Pennsylvania (1959–62). She moved to Pasadena, California, where she served at Assumption School (1962–68) and her alma mater, Mayfield Junior School (1968–76), first as a teacher and then as head of school, during which time she founded the school's first Board of Trustees. In 1977, Sister Sheila began a five-year ministry in the Society's African Province, serving as Principal of Saint Ann Secondary School in Otukpo, Nigeria, a boarding school for 500 girls of the Idoma tribe.

When she returned to the United States in 1982, Sister Sheila lived in the Holy Child Sisters' communities in Potomac, Maryland, and Washington, D.C. She worked at Saint Luke Institute in Suitland, Maryland, where she held roles including Vice President and Chief of Operations, Director of Educational Outreach, and individual and group therapist.

In 1994, Sister Sheila returned to California, where she served as a consultant for two years and then as Director of Psychology at Saint John Seminary in Camarillo.

In 2002, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles named Sister Sheila as coordinator of the newly created Victims Assistance Ministry. She helped victims of sexual abuse by clergy, religious, or any laity working or volunteering in the Archdiocese to make formal complaints of abuse and to obtain support for the

For this is our mission: to help others to believe that God lives and acts in them and in our world, and to rejoice in God's presence.

victims and their families. Sister Sheila was passionate to help the victims, “to walk with many of these victims, to listen to their stories, to offer support and counseling, and to be available to them when needed.” In an article published in the *Los Angeles Times* on December 16, 2007, Sister Sheila stated, “We must remain vigilant to protect children...”

Sister Sheila continued her ministry of service in the years that followed. From 2008-09, she served as Coordinator of Justice and Peace for the Society's USA Province and as Co-Chair of the Region XI Religious Vocation Conference. From 2009-15, she was principal of Saint Catherine of Siena Parish School in Reseda, California, serving a largely underserved population of children and coordinated the parish's Bethany House Discernment Community. Beginning in 2017, she brought her gifts to Casa Cornelia Law Center, providing interfaith educational outreach on immigration and refugee issues.

Sister Sheila served as a board member of Holy Child schools and ministries in California, including Casa Cornelia Law Center in San Diego; Cornelia Connelly School of the Holy Child in Anaheim; Mayfield Junior School of the Holy Child Jesus and Mayfield Senior School of the Holy Child Jesus, both in Pasadena; and South Central LAMP in Los Angeles. She also volunteered her time with several other organizations that reflect the Society's mission that “God lives and acts in all.”

Wherever Sister Sheila ministered, she shared her loving, gentle, and joyful spirit and her commitment to helping others. Francine Gunther, SHCJ, American Province Leader, offered the following about Sister Sheila: “Sheila embodied a quiet and serene spirit, and yet, her kindness and compassion were spoken loudly. She will be dearly missed.”

Sister Sheila earned a B.A. in History and a Master of Arts in Religious Education from Immaculate Heart College in 1969 and 1974, respectively. She also received a Master of Science in Pastoral Counseling from Loyola College in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1985. Sister Sheila completed several certificate programs, including certification as an addiction therapist.

She joins her parents, Isabelle (Dowell) and Francis McNiff, and siblings and their spouses: Ann (Bill) Henke, Sue (Jack) Hayes, Mary (Don) Foree, Paul Kerry, Judie McNiff, and Dorothy McNiff. She is survived by brothers Grant and Frank (Janet), and sister Ellie (Tony) Kovach.

Funeral services are scheduled for Friday, September 11, 2026, at 11:00 a.m. at Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church, 2640 East Orange Grove Boulevard, Pasadena, California 91107. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be sent to the Society of the Holy Child Jesus – American Province, 1341 Montgomery Avenue, Rosemont, Pennsylvania 19010, or made online at <https://www.shcj.org/american/donate>.



Sister Sheila with France White, SHCJ, at the Walk for Freedom to End Human Trafficking, 2024