

Sister Mary Alice Butts, “Sister Peggy”, CND (1924–2004)

“Rebel with a Cross”

Sister Mary Alice Butts – affectionately known as Sister Peggy – was born on August 15, 1924 in Bridgeport, on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. She discovered her religious vocation while she was a student of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame at Mount St. Bernard College in Antigonish. After completing her Bachelor’s degree in Philosophy at St. Francis Xavier University, she entered the novitiate of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame in Montreal in 1949. She pronounced her first vows in 1951 and began her career in education as principal of Holy Angels High School in Sydney, NS.

From 1954 to 1967, she taught at Mount St. Bernard College and then in different educational establishments in New Glasgow, New Victoria, Toronto, Montreal and Sydney. After her doctoral studies in Political Science at the University of Toronto, she taught from 1971 to 1994 at University College of Cape Breton. In addition to her brilliant intellectual accomplishments, Sister Peggy actively campaigned for social justice in Nova Scotia. She was a founding member of the Eastern Regional Health Board of Nova Scotia; she served on the provincial Task Force on the East Coast Fishery and was a member of the Nova Scotia Round Table on the Economy and the Environment.

In 1995 she received the Weiler Award in honour of her exceptional contributions to community and social development in Canada. In 1997, at age 73, she was appointed to the Canadian senate by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. She was the first religious sister to be so honoured and she was nicknamed “Rebel with a Cross.” She considered her work at the Senate as a means of pursuing her ministry with the poor, women and children. She stayed on until she was 75, mandatory age of retirement from the Senate. She was the Director of the Social Justice Office for the Diocese of Antigonish until her death in 2004.



LINKS:

<http://liberalsenateforum.ca/hansard/the-honourable-sister-peggy-butts/>

<http://www.lop.parl.gc.ca/ParlInfo/Files/Parliamentarian.aspx?Item=d2d84f16-2b55-44f1-8043-24de200a012e&Language=E&Section=ALL>