

Obituaries

# Nancy W. Ignatius, environmental activist and National Cathedral lay leader, dies at 93

By staff reports  
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Nancy W. Ignatius, an environmental activist, longtime lay leader of Washington National Cathedral and a member of the Grammy Award-winning Washington Chorus, died Jan. 18 at her home in Washington. She was 93.

She had complications from a recurrence of breast cancer, said a son, Washington Post columnist David Ignatius.

In 1970, Mrs. Ignatius was a co-founder of Concern Inc., an organization that distributed “Eco-Tips,” consumer guides containing information on environmentally friendly products. She worked at the Environmental Protection Agency in the early 1980s.

Among many roles she had at the National Cathedral, Mrs. Ignatius was a member of the Peace Commission and a board member of St. Albans School, a boys’ school on the cathedral grounds attended by her sons.

In the 1980s, she became president of the National Cathedral Association, a nationwide group to support the cathedral’s mission. In 1990, when the final stone was put in place marking the completion of the cathedral’s construction, she took part in a ceremony led by [President George H.W. Bush](#). First lady [Barbara Bush](#), who died in April, was a personal friend.

Mrs. Ignatius was a member of the Dean’s Council and continued her volunteer work at the cathedral until her death.

A skilled pianist and singer, she was a member of the Oratorio Society of Washington (later known as the Washington Chorus) for two decades. She was a chorus member when it won a Grammy Award in 2000 for its recording of Benjamin Britten’s “War Requiem.”

Nancy Sharpless Weiser was born Sept. 10, 1925, in Holyoke, Mass. Her father was an engineer and an executive with a paper manufacturing company, and her mother chaired the board of trustees of Mount Holyoke College.

After attending the private Baldwin School outside Philadelphia, she graduated in 1947 from Wellesley College, where she majored in philosophy and was head of the choir.

In December 1947, she married Paul R. Ignatius, who later served as Navy secretary and as president of The Washington Post.

She received a master's degree in international affairs in 1969 from American University, which hosts an annual Nancy W. Ignatius lecture on environmental issues.

Mrs. Ignatius first overcame breast cancer when she was 49 and was among the first patients to undergo chemotherapy. She later advised a close friend and tennis partner, Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, to seek treatment for breast cancer.

O'Connor was concerned that chemotherapy would affect her judgment and other abilities, Mrs. Ignatius told Evan Thomas for an upcoming biography of the former justice.

Breast cancer "was an unusual attack on Sandra's belief that she could be good at everything," Mrs. Ignatius told Thomas. "She needed someone who had been through it all who could say that it would be okay."

In addition to her husband, of Washington, survivors include four children: David Ignatius of Washington; Sarah Ignatius, executive director of the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research, of Somerville, Mass.; Amy Ignatius, a New Hampshire state court judge, of Concord, N.H.; and Adi Ignatius, editor-in-chief of the Harvard Business Review, of Brooklyn; nine grandchildren; and two great-granddaughters.

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