



WEST CATHOLIC ALUMNI ASSOCIATION  
"PRO DEO ET PATRIA"  
FOR GOD AND COUNTY



[Return to Obituary Page](#)

**Dolores A. Purcell, 79; taught physical education**



Dolores Antoni Purcell, 79, of Drexel Hill, a retired physical education teacher and winning coach at West Philadelphia Catholic High School for Girls, died of leukemia Wednesday, July 28, at Delaware County Memorial Hospital.

Mrs. Purcell was a 1948 graduate of West Catholic, where she was an All-Catholic basketball player and team captain. In 1965 she returned to her alma mater to coach basketball. She also taught physical education and later was athletic director.

In 1970, she coached West Catholic's basketball team to the Catholic League championship. The school won the title again in 1977, and teams coached by Mrs. Purcell made the playoffs eight times. She stopped coaching in 1986, but continued to teach physical education until she retired in 1993. She also was a volleyball and basketball referee.

"Dolores enjoyed teaching her students about sports, but was far more interested in teaching them life skills," said Linda Donnelly, who was on the faculty at West Catholic in the 1970s. In an essay published in the Catholic Standard and Times in 1985, Mrs. Purcell wrote, "It's a lot easier to learn about working together for a common goal on a court than in a classroom. Involvement in a sport certainly strengthens courage and perseverance. A healthy self-image also emerges from giving time and energy to a worthy cause, playing for one's school."

During her yearlong illness, Mrs. Purcell received hundreds of cards from former students. At Christmas, 30 former students and fellow teachers gathered on her lawn to serenade her with carols, her family said. In March, she was inducted into the Philadelphia Archdiocese Catholic Youth Organization Hall of Fame. Mrs. Purcell was the youngest of five children. Her father died before she was born and she spent eight years in an orphanage before her mother was able to reunite the family. In 1951, she married John F.X. Purcell. While raising a family in Drexel Hill, she was a volunteer basketball coach at St. Dorothy's School.

Accomplished at needlepoint, she had worked at Needle Me in Havertown since retiring from West Catholic. Mrs. Purcell's first husband died in 1987. In 1995, she married longtime friend Frank Murphy. He died in 2002. She is survived by sons John and Joseph; two granddaughters; a sister; and two brothers.

Friends may call from 7 to 9 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 1, and from 9 to 9:45 a.m. Monday, Aug. 2, at Ruffenach Funeral Home, 4900 Township Line Rd., Drexel Hill. A Funeral Mass will be said at 10 a.m. Monday at St. Dorothy's Church, Township Line and Burmont Roads, Drexel Hill. Burial will be in SS. Peter and Paul Cemetery, Marple Township.

July 31, 2010 | By Sally A. Downey, Inquirer Staff Writer