

Sandra Day O'Connor, first female Supreme Court justice, and an Episcopalian, dies at 93

by [Episcopal News Service Staff](#)

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Justice Sandra Day O'Connor speaks as part of the McCloskey Speaker Series in 2010. (Nora Feller/The Aspen Institute)

Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman appointed to the United States Supreme Court, died December 1 in Phoenix, Arizona, due to complications related to advanced dementia and a respiratory illness. She was 93.

O'Connor was [baptized in the Episcopal Church](#) and attended Sunday worship services at Washington National Cathedral during her tenure on the Court. She served on the cathedral chapter, the governing body of the congregation, for eight

years.

“Justice O’Connor embodied an even-handed embrace of equal justice under law. By zealously clinging to the center, she rejected the false allure of polarized ideological purity,” said Washington Bishop Mariann Budde and Randolph Hollerith, the cathedral’s dean in a [written tribute to O’Connor](#).

“That commitment to common ground and the common good made her an indispensable member of our nation’s highest court. We mourn the loss of her no-nonsense approach to complicated questions that refused to surrender to petty partisanship.”

O’Connor was born on March 26, 1930, to cattle ranchers in El Paso, Texas, where she grew up without electricity or indoor plumbing. In 1946, at the age of 16, she graduated from high school and enrolled at Stanford University. She was one of only five women in her incoming class at Stanford Law School.

In 1981, President Ronald Reagan nominated O’Connor, then 51 years old, to the Supreme Court, fulfilling a campaign promise to appoint the [first female justice](#). Prior to the Supreme Court, O’Connor served as a judge on a midlevel appeals court in Arizona. After serving for 24 years in Washington, DC, she retired in 2006.

During retirement, O’Connor sat as a visiting judge on federal appeals courts around the country. She also was a vocal supporter of judicial independence and civics education. —Episcopal News Service