News



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Bishop William Curlin of Charlotte, North Carolina, is seen with St. Teresa of Kolkata in this undated photo. He died in Charlotte Dec. 23 at age 90. (CNS/courtesy Catholic Standard)

Retired Bishop William Curlin of Charlotte died of cancer Dec. 23 at Carolinas Medical Center. He was 90.

Curlin was the third bishop of the Diocese of Charlotte, serving from 1994 until his retirement in 2002.

He was known as a champion of the poor and comforter of the sick and the dying. A friend of St. Teresa of Kolkata, he often preached about the love of Jesus during

more than 60 years of priestly ministry, first in the Archdiocese of Washington and for the last 23 years in the Charlotte Diocese.

Charlotte Bishop Peter Jugis asked the faithful of the diocese to pray for the repose of Curlin's soul and described him as an "inspiring and faith-filled shepherd of our diocese who had a special love for the poor and ministry to those who were sick and near death."

"May he rest in the peace of Christ, knowing that his tireless efforts brought many to salvation in the Lord," Jugis said in a statement.

During his homily for Christmas midnight Mass, Jugis said the Christmas season was one of Curlin's favorite times of the year.

"For him, Christmas was easily the feast that he loved most," he said. "I have to think that his passing so close to Christmas must have been by God's design — so that we will able to remember Bishop Curlin each year during the season that was so close to his heart."

Born Aug. 30, 1927, in Portsmouth, Virginia, Curlin was the son of Mary and Stephen Curlin.

He attended St. John's College in Garrison, New York, and Georgetown University in Washington before entering St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1957 in the Archdiocese of Washington by Washington Cardinal Patrick O'Boyle and for the next three decades, he ministered mostly in poor parishes in the Washington area, where he opened a women's shelter and 20 soup kitchens and homeless shelters.

During a Mass celebrating the 60th anniversary of his ordination May 20, Curlin reminisced about his life as a priest.

"I remember ordination eve, we were at Catholic University. I remember I was so excited thinking about what was going to happen tomorrow, to become a priest. I went down to the chapel around midnight. I remember going back to my room and getting dressed in the morning. I was so excited to be a priest," he recalled.

"I can say 60 years later, I am still excited about being a priest. I love it. I thank God every day that despite all my limitations, my lack of talents — and I am sure my

many mistakes — that God allowed me to be a priest."

Curlin also told stories about the long days he spent visiting the sick, responding to emergency calls and offering the sacraments.

"To be a priest, you say to yourself, 'This man or this woman, a young person, they come to me expecting to find and see Jesus.' It's not a job. It's not just vestments. We're supposed to reflect in our life an intimacy so profound that you see the presence of Jesus."

Curlin met St. Teresa of Kolkata in the early 1970s when he was the pastor of a poor parish in Washington. In a 2016 interview with the Catholic News Herald, newspaper of the Charlotte Diocese, the bishop said he remembered celebrating Mass at the National Shrine of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception one Sunday and Mother Teresa was there during a U.S. visit. She approached him after Mass and asked if they could talk. They spent hours conversing about her plans to help the poor, and he was struck by her fervor and her faith.

Sometime after that, she phoned him from India to tell him he would be coming to give her and her sisters a retreat there. He told her that as a pastor of a poor parish, he didn't have the money to travel, but she was adamant about him leading the retreat. Sure enough, a friend gave him the money to fly to India for the first of what became many visits.

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"It was a wonderful experience to meet her in her home environment and to be with her where she really began her ministry to the poor in the world," Curlin said. He collaborated with her on several projects in the U.S., especially the Gift of Peace Home for AIDS patients, which opened in 1983 in Washington.

In 1988, he was appointed auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Washington. Prior to his episcopal ordination, he ministered at several parishes and served as archdiocesan director of vocations for men, director of the permanent diaconate program and director of the House of Formation for seminarians at The Catholic University of America.

After six years as auxiliary bishop, he was named the third bishop of the Diocese of Charlotte, where he served for eight years until his retirement in 2002.

A funeral Mass is scheduled for Jan. 2 at St. Gabriel Church in Charlotte. He will be buried at Belmont Abbey in Belmont, North Carolina.

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Contributing to this story was Patricia L. Guilfoyle, editor of the Catholic News Herald, the newspaper of the Diocese of Charlotte.