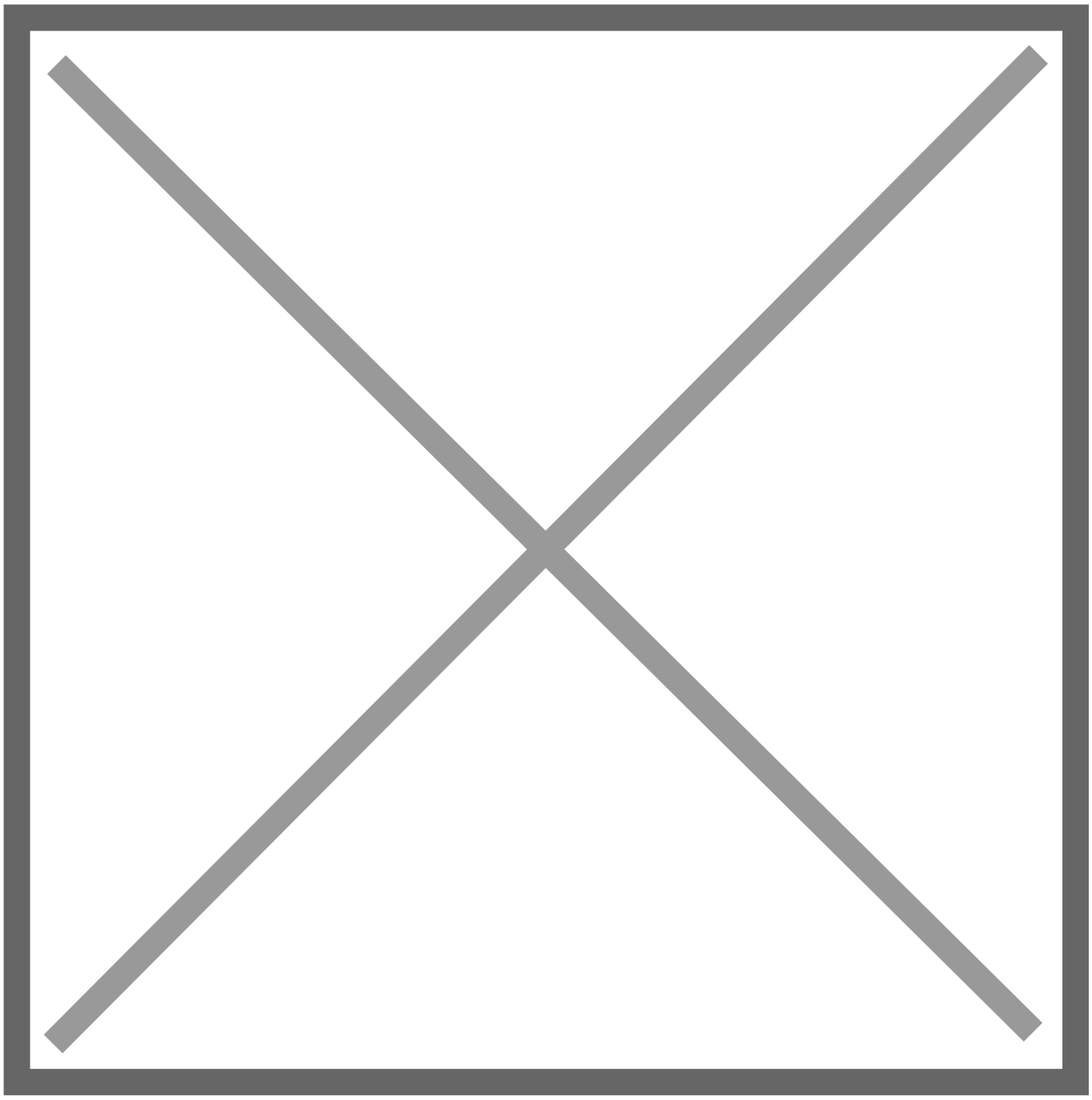
News



People react after a deadly explosion at the parish center of the Church of Our Lady of La Paloma in downtown Madrid Jan. 20, 2021. A priest and a member of the parish were among four killed in the explosion, which was caused by a gas leak. (CNS photo/Reuters/Susana Vera)

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Vatican City — January 21, 2021
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A young priest ordained only six months ago was among the casualties of an explosion at a parish center in Madrid.

The Archdiocese of Madrid confirmed Jan. 21 that Fr. Ruben Perez Ayala, a priest at the Church of Our Lady of La Paloma, died in the early hours of the morning due to internal hemorrhaging he suffered after the blast.

The archdiocese also shared an interview Perez shortly gave before his priestly ordination in June, in which he said that his experience at the seminary taught him that "happiness is not in living for oneself, but in giving oneself to others."

According to the Spanish newspaper El Pais, Perez's death brought the death toll from the explosion to four.

David Santos Muñoz, 35, an electrician, died in the Jan. 20 explosion after he was called in to inspect the boiler room because of a strong smell of gas. Muñoz, a married father of four, was an active member of the parish.

Two unnamed men also died, and 10 people were injured in the blast, El Pais reported.

Cardinal Carlos Osoro Sierra of Madrid, who rushed to the parish shortly after the explosion, mourned the death of Perez in a message on his Twitter account.

"The young priest Ruben Perez Ayala, who I ordained just six months ago, died this evening," the cardinal tweeted. "I am grateful for his life of dedication to Christ and his church. I pray for his family. I also pray for those who died after the explosion at La Paloma and for all those affected."

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According to the archdiocese, the parish center housed the priests' apartments, as well as parish and local Caritas offices.

In a WhatsApp message to Catholic News Service Jan. 21, Fr. Gabriel Benedicto, pastor of Our Lady of La Paloma, said, "I am well. It's been a long day, but God helps us."

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, conveyed Pope Francis' "closeness and affection" in a statement released by the Vatican Jan. 20.

The pope "raises prayers to the Lord and commends to his mercy especially the eternal rest of the victims, as well as the injured and their families," Parolin wrote.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said he expressed his "support and solidarity" in a phone call with Madrid Mayor Jose Luis Martinez-Almeida.

"We send our condolences and affection to the families of the dead and the wounded," he tweeted.

Martinez-Almeida, who frequently updated reports about the explosion on his Twitter account, also expressed condolences to the victims' families.

"No matter what happens, the people of Madrid are always there to help no matter how difficult the circumstances," he tweeted.