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Cardinal Jorge Urosa Savino of Caracas, Venezuela, is pictured outside the apostolic nunciatur

Cardinal Jorge Urosa Savino of Caracas, Venezuela, is pictured outside the apostolic nunciature in Bogota, Colombia, Sept. 7, 2017, during Pope Francis' visit. Cardinal Urosa Savino, who was hospitalized in late August after contracting COVID-19, died Sept. 23 at the age of 79. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

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After a monthlong battle with COVID-19, Venezuelan Cardinal Jorge Urosa Savino, who led the Archdiocese of Caracas for 13 years, died at the age of 79.

Announcing the cardinal's death Sept. 23, Cardinal Baltazar Porras, apostolic administrator of the Archdiocese of Caracas, asked "everyone to pray for his eternal rest as the church in Venezuela and the universal church mourns."

Pope Francis expressed his condolences in a telegram to Cardinal Porras, remembering Cardinal Urosa as a "selfless shepherd who, throughout many years and with faithfulness, gave his life to the service of God and the church."

Cardinal Urosa was hospitalized Aug. 27 after he was diagnosed with COVID-19 and was transferred to the intensive care unit the following day.

Shortly after the announcement of his death, the Venezuelan bishops' conference released a letter Cardinal Urosa had written before being moved to intensive care.

In it, Cardinal Urosa said he was grateful for his vocation and asked forgiveness of "God and all my brothers and sisters for the faults I may have committed, especially for the faults of omission."

"I have never wanted to harm anyone, and I have always tried to act seeking the glory of God and the good of the church and of the souls and persons involved; I hope that this will be taken into account," he wrote.

The cardinal expressed his love for the people of Venezuela and renewed his "absolute dedication to their freedom, to their institutions, to the defense of the rights of the people in the face of the abuses committed by the national authorities."

"In that regard, I have always acted, not out of hatred, not out of resentment, but in defense of freedom, justice and the rights of the Venezuelan people," Cardinal Urosa wrote. "I hope that Venezuela will come out of this negative situation."

The cardinal insisted his work "has always been guided by an immense patriotic love" for all Venezuelans "in line with the national constitution which establishes inalienable rights that cannot be violated by any government."

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He also urged his fellow bishops to "preserve our episcopal unity" and to not "be carried by vain illusions" but instead to always "seek the glory of God, the evangelization of the people, which is the most important thing."

"What interests us above all is that the Venezuelan people love, have faith and serve Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth and the life, the only one in whom we find salvation and forgiveness of sins," he said.

Born in Caracas in 1942, he studied philosophy in Venezuela and theology in Toronto as well as at Rome's Pontifical Gregorian University.

Ordained to the priesthood in 1967, he served as rector of St. Joseph's Seminary and as vicar general of the Archdiocese of Caracas before being named auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese by St. John Paul II in 1982. Eight years later, he was named archbishop of Valencia.

He was appointed to lead the Archdiocese of Caracas in 2005 and created a cardinal in 2006 by Pope Benedict XVI. Pope Francis accepted his resignation in 2018 after the cardinal reached the age of 75.

His death leaves the College of Cardinals with 218 members, 121 of whom are under the age of 80 and eligible to vote in a conclave.