News

Bishop Raymundo J. Peña is seen in this 2006 file photo, when he was bishop of the Diocese o

Bishop Raymundo J. Peña is seen in this 2006 file photo, when he was bishop of the Diocese of Brownsville, Texas. Bishop Peña, who retired in 2009, died Sept. 24, 2021, under palliative care at a nursing home in San Juan, Texas. He was 87. (CNS photo/Brad Doherty courtesy of The Brownsville Herald)



by Catholic News Service

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Bishop Raymundo J. Peña, retired bishop of Brownsville who was an advocate of immigrant rights and opposed the border wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, died Sept. 24 at age 87.

Bishop Peña died at San Juan Nursing Home on the grounds of the Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle-National Shrine in San Juan, Texas.

A funeral Mass will be celebrated Sept. 30 at the basilica.

"We give thanks to God for his service to the diocese and pray for the repose of his soul. May God reward him for his labors," Brownsville Bishop Daniel E. Flores said in a statement.

"During his time as shepherd of the people of the Rio Grande Valley he lived his motto, 'Haz todo con amor' ('Do everything with love'), taken from 1 Corinthians 16:14," said Bishop Flores, who succeeded the late bishop when he retired in 2009.

Bishop Peña, he said, continued to play an active role in the diocese during retirement, participating in the ordination of a transitional deacon at Immaculate Conception Cathedral in Brownsville Aug. 21.

"He was an example to me of tireless service to the church and a trusted adviser. We will all miss him very much," Bishop Flores added.

Born Feb. 19, 1934, in Robstown, Texas, Bishop Peña was ordained a priest in 1957 in the Diocese of Corpus Christi, Texas. He served 19 years as a priest in the diocese, which included the Rio Grande Valley until the Diocese of Brownsville was created in 1965.

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Bishop Peña was one of the country's youngest bishops when St. John Paul II in 1976 appointed him at age 42 as auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of San Antonio. Four years later he was named bishop of the Diocese of El Paso, Texas, and served the church there until being installed in Brownsville in 1995.

Learning of the death, El Paso Bishop Mark J. Seitz offered prayers for the deceased bishop and his family. "We pray that as he makes the transition to his home with our heavenly Father, he may intercede for us, and all the faithful he served during his ministry on earth," Bishop Seitz said in a statement.

In El Paso, Bishop Peña founded the Tepeyac Institute as a formation center for laypeople in 1988. He also established The Rio Grande Catholic, the diocesan newspaper, in 1991, and also started the Progress Ministry Appeal to help fund the diocesan ministries serving the diocese.

In a statement, the diocese said Bishop Peña was a strong advocate for immigration rights along the border and a critic of President Bill Clinton’s plans to build a border fence in El Paso in the 1990s.

Bishop Peña led the Brownsville Diocese for 14 years until retiring in 2009 at age 75, the age at which canon law requires a bishop to resign.

In Brownsville, Bishop Peña worked to increase vocations to the priesthood. By the time of his retirement, he had ordained almost half the diocesan priests and nearly

tripled the number of seminarians.

He established the San Juan Diego Ministry Institute in San Juan, Texas, for training future permanent deacons and lay ecclesial ministers. He also opened a diocesan immigration office in San Juan.

In addition, Bishop Peña included women in leadership positions in the diocese and diocese-related entities.