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MEXICO CITY — Retired Bishop Onésimo Cepeda Silva of Ecatepec — the colorful and controversial Mexican bishop who rubbed shoulders with the rich, served one of the country's roughest dioceses and made a brief, but disastrous foray into electoral politics — died Jan. 31. He was 84.

The Diocese of Ecatepec confirmed Bishop Cepeda's death, as did the Mexican bishops' conference, which barely 10 months earlier disavowed his registration as a legislative candidate for a minor political party.

Bishop Cepeda had contracted COVID-19 three weeks earlier, according to church statements. Mexican media reported he had been intubated.

Bishop Cepeda cut a controversial course through Mexico's public life. He served the ramshackle suburbs of Mexico City, but appeared in society publications and played golf at expensive country clubs.

Politicians and business elites regularly attended his birthday celebration. He reputedly came under investigation for his acquiring a wealthy church donor's art collection, which contained works by Latin masters Diego Rivera and Rufino Tamayo.

Bishop Cepeda also served as a godfather to bullfighters, according to Mexican media.

Such was his stature that his death was a trending topic on social media — the product of his unusual biography, political connections and tendency to speak intemperately.

"My friends are the poor and the rich. Unfortunately, I was born rich," Mexican media quoted Bishop Cepeda as saying.

Bishop Cepeda was born March 25, 1937, in Mexico City. After graduating with a law degree, he entered the world of finance and founded a bank with Carlos Slim Helu, who later became the world's wealthiest man for a time.

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But he later entered the priesthood. He served as seminary rector in the Diocese of Cuernavaca, when the local leader was Bishop Sergio Méndez Arceo, who was branded the "red bishop" by critics for his promotion of liberation theology.

According to journalist Emiliano Ruiz Parra, who covers Mexico's Catholic Church, Bishop Cepeda parted ideologically with Bishop Méndez and gravitated toward charismatic Catholicism. In 1995, St. John Paul II appointed him bishop of the newly formed Diocese of Ecatepec on the northeastern outskirts of Mexico City. He retired in 2012.

Pope Francis visited the diocese in 2016. Upon visiting the diocesan seminary, he signed the guestbook, "Don't be clerics of the state."

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador — an opponent of many of the politicians friendly with Bishop Cepeda — expressed condolences for the deceased bishop at his Feb. 1 morning news conference.