News
Obituary



Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop David G. O'Connell is pictured during a Nov. 17, 2021, session of the fall general assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Baltimore. According to local news reports, he was fatally shot Feb. 18, 2023. (Bob Roller/OSV News)

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Los Angeles — February 19, 2023
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Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop David G. O'Connell, a native of Ireland who spent most of his four decades as a priest ministering in L.A.'s inner city, has died. He was 69.

According to local news reports, he was fatally shot Feb. 18, 2023.
Local news reports said Los Angeles Country sheriffs arrived at 1 p.m. to the bishop's home and found him dead of a gunshot wound to his upper torso. An investigation was under way for a suspect and motive.

"I am very sad this afternoon to report that our beloved Auxiliary Bishop David O'Connell has passed away unexpectedly," said Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles in a statement Feb. 18. "It is a shock and I have no words to express my sadness."

"Bishop Dave," as he was known, was episcopal vicar for the archdiocese's San Gabriel Pastoral Region since 2015, when Pope Francis named him an auxiliary bishop.

In his statement, Archbishop Gomez said O'Connell will be remembered as “a man of deep prayer who had a great love for Our Blessed Mother.”

"He was a peacemaker with a heart for the poor and the immigrant, and he had a passion for building a community where the sanctity and dignity of every human life was honored and protected," the archbishop said.

"He was also a good friend, and I will miss him greatly," continued Gomez, who asked for prayers for the bishop and his family in Ireland.

"May Our Lady of Guadalupe wrap him in the mantle of her love, and may the angels lead him into paradise, and may he rest in peace," said the archbishop.

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Born in County Cork, Ireland, in 1953, O'Connell studied for the priesthood at the former All Hallows College in Dublin and was ordained to serve in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in 1979. After ordination, he served as associate pastor in several parishes and as pastor at St. Frances X. Cabrini, Ascension, St. Eugene and St. Michael’s parishes -- all in south Los Angeles.

There, O'Connell ministered to a community afflicted by gang violence, poverty, broken families, as well as tensions between locals and members of Los Angeles Police Department and the LA Sheriff’s Department that eventually boiled over during the LA riots in 1992 that followed the beating of Rodney King by police officers.

The riots broke out during then-Fr. O'Connell’s first tour at St. Frances X. Cabrini (1988-98). Bishop O'Connell would later tell how he was in Washington, testifying before a panel on Capitol Hill about violence in urban America, when the riots started. He came home days later to find widespread destruction in much of his parish's territory.

Apart from aiding neighborhood recovery efforts, O'Connell pushed to restore trust between the inner-city residents and law enforcement. He and other local faith leaders helped organize meetings with police officers in people’s homes and provide opportunities for dialogue and reconciliation.

As a pastor, O'Connell also saw firsthand the effect of broken families on the community. That inspired him to organize retreats for men -- usually in the mountains -- focusing on how to be good fathers and husbands, something he saw as key to the health of a community.

During his time as auxiliary bishop in Los Angeles, evangelization, pastoral care for immigrants and ensuring the future of his region's Catholic schools were all top priorities for O’Connell.

He was the chair of the interdiocesan Southern California Immigration Task Force, helping coordinate the local church’s response to the influx of migrants from Central America in recent years and navigating the challenges presented by changing immigration policies.

Last September, O'Connell was recognized for his tireless service to the community and the church in Los Angeles with the prestigious Evangelii Gaudium Award from St. John’s Seminary in Camarillo.

At the national level, O’Connell currently was serving as chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Subcommittee on the Catholic Campaign for Human Development.

But despite his long list of accolades and accomplishments, O'Connell was known as a low-key priest with a down-to-earth demeanor and an Irish brogue he never bothered to try hiding. Those who knew him testify that he seemed most at ease with the people he spent all those years with in south L.A.

"It's been the great joy of my life to be the pastor of these people, especially the ones who are suffering or in need or facing difficulty," O'Connell said after being named a bishop in 2015. "And it's been a great privilege, a great blessing to be given these parishes all these years, to be pastor all these years. The people have touched my heart the way they are sincere."

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