News

A white man with a moustache wears a violet zucchetto and green stole over white vestment

Retired Auxiliary Bishop John R. Manz of Chicago, who died unexpectedly July 15, 2023, at age 77, was well-known as a supporter of immigrant rights. He is pictured in a file photo at the 2009 fall general assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. (OSV News photo/CNS file, Bob Roller)



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Retired Auxiliary Bishop John R. Manz of Chicago died unexpectedly July 15. No cause of death was released. He was 77.

A native of Chicago ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Chicago in 1971, Manz was named a Chicago auxiliary in 1996 by St. John Paul II. He retired in July 2021 at 75, the age at which canon law requires bishops to turn in their resignation to the pope.

More than 50 years after his ordination to the priesthood, Manz still lived among the Hispanic immigrant community that he served for his entire ministry and was known affectionately as "Father Juan."

The bishop had long been an advocate for justice and dignity of immigrants and other vulnerable people, having served as chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Subcommittee on Pastoral Care of Migrants, Refugees and Travelers and as a member of the USCCB's Committee on Cultural Diversity in the

Church and the Subcommittee on the Church in Latin America.

As an auxiliary, Manz resided at Good Shepherd Parish in Chicago's Little Village neighborhood -- best known as "La Villita." Over 80% of the residents are of Mexican descent and the community is home to the largest foreign-born Mexican population in Chicago. He also was vicar of the archdiocese's Vicariate IV, which includes the near west suburbs of Chicago and portions of the West and Northwest sides.

Manz began working with immigrants and migrant communities even before he was ordained a priest.

"Once you begin to learn a language, it becomes no longer an abstract thing, and you get to know individuals, not just a social class of people," he said in a statement at the time of his retirement. "That's how barriers are broken down. We all have prejudices, but the only way to break them down is by getting to know the person."

The work of a priest has never been easy, he said. "But I feel very fortunate. I have had many experiences; I have never been bored and I think it is because I like people. As a priest, I believe I have received more than I have given."

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In a May 2021 interview in the Chicago Catholic, the archdiocesan newspaper, the bishop said, "I have always felt very welcomed by Hispanics. I have been able to develop friendships with them and understand their issues, many times not seen by the media. My involvement with them has made me a better priest and a better person."

His responsibilities serving USCCB committees took him to 15 states with a significant Hispanic presence to minister to and speak with migrant workers and to listen to them. He visited workers in Kentucky and Alabama, and also traveled to Latin American countries, including Panama, where he spent half a year.

The situation of migrants in the United States was a pastoral priority for Manz and a topic he spoke about with concern and disappointment.

"There are many problems at the border, with people coming from Central America," Manz said. "The new (Biden) administration has been open to finding improvements

in solving these immigration problems, but I don't think they are prepared. It is important to start over with new structures, especially to solve the case with minors."

At the time of his retirement, Cardinal Blase J. Cupich of Chicago thanked the bishop for his ministry and service to the faithful.

"He has won the heart of Latinos and inspired us by his advocacy for justice and dignity as our nation responds to immigrants in our country," the cardinal said.

Auxiliary Bishop Robert G. Casey, vicar general of the archdiocese, also thanked Manz as he began his retirement for helping to form the next generation of priests, assisting so many to discern and discover the gift of a priestly vocation.

"With his heart centered on humble service and his ability to hold onto humor, even on the toughest days, Bishop Manz has been a great shepherd for our local church," Casey said.