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Men in suits and vestments surround a casket draped in a white sheet

Pallbearers walk with the casket of Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop David G. O'Connell during his funeral Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels March 3, 2023. Bishop O'Connell was fatally shot at his home in Hacienda Heights Feb. 18. (OSV News photo/Sarah Yaklic, courtesy Archdiocese of Los Angeles)

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Vatican City — January 2, 2024
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In its annual report on Catholic missionaries murdered during the year, the Vatican-based news agency, Fides, noted what many of them had in common was living a normal life in areas where violence had become common.

"They did not carry out any sensational actions or out-of-the-ordinary deeds that could have attracted attention and put them in someone's crosshairs," the report said.

"They could have gone elsewhere, moved to safer places, or desisted from their Christian commitments, perhaps reducing them, but they did not do so, even though they were aware of the situation and the dangers they faced every day," it added.

Fides, the news agency of the Pontifical Mission Societies which is part of the Dicastery for Evangelization, reported Dec. 30 that 20 pastoral workers were killed in 2023: one bishop, eight priests, two religious brothers, one seminarian, one novice and seven laypeople.

The agency said its tally was slightly higher than in 2022 when it counted 18 missionaries who died violently.

In the 2023 list, Fides included Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop David G. O'Connell, a native of Ireland who had been a priest and later a bishop in Los Angeles for 45 years. He was the co-founder of the Interdiocesan Immigration Task Force and a steadfast advocate for immigrants and the marginalized.

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The bishop was found dead in his bedroom at home Feb. 18, 2023, after being shot multiple times. The man accused of his murder, Carlos Medina, was set to return to court Jan. 10 for a further remand hearing. Medina's wife worked as the bishop's housekeeper and Medina, who has pleaded not guilty, also did some work for the bishop.

The list also included U.S. Fr. Stephen J. Gutgsell, 65, who died after being stabbed in the rectory of his parish in Fort Calhoun, Nebraska, Dec. 10, 2023.

Fides reported that the highest number of missionaries killed was registered in Africa, where nine missionaries were killed: five priests, two religious brothers, one seminarian and one novice.

The Americas followed with six missionaries murdered: one bishop, three priests and two laywomen. Four lay men and women died violently in Asia, including a Palestinian mother and daughter who were shot by an Israeli army sniper in Gaza Dec. 16, 2023. Seven others were also wounded.

Nahida Khalil Anton and Samar Kamal Anton were shot as they were walking on the premises of the parish of the Holy Family to the convent of the House of the Sisters of Mother Teresa, where Nahida worked as a cook.

One layman was killed in Europe: Diego Valencia, 65, sacristan of a parish in southern Spain, who was killed with a machete Jan. 25, 2023. The accused attacker

is a Moroccan national who, before attacking Valencia the same evening, attacked and wounded 74-year-old Salesian Fr. Antonio Rodríguez with a machete as he celebrated Mass in a nearby church.

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