News

Washington Cardinal Robert McElroy gives the homily at a Mass marking the 111th World Day

Washington Cardinal Robert McElroy gives the homily at a Mass marking the 111th World Day of Migrants and Refugees on Sept. 28 at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington. The Archdiocese of Washington disclosed Nov. 5 that McElroy had been diagnosed with cancer. (OSV News/Mihoko Owada, Catholic Standard)



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Cardinal Robert McElroy, head of the Archdiocese of Washington and an outspoken advocate for Catholic social justice, has been diagnosed with a "non-aggressive" cancer that will be surgically removed Nov. 13.

A Nov. 5 statement from the archdiocese said the cardinal has "well-differentiated liposarcoma, which is a non-aggressive cancer that tends not to metastasize. For these reasons, the Cardinal's doctors are in consensus that his prognosis is very good."

The Mayo Clinic describes liposarcoma as a rare type of cancer that forms in the fat cells of the body's connective tissues. It says treatment typically involves surgery or radiation therapy.

The night before this announcement was made public, the statement said, McElroy spoke with archdiocesan priests attending an annual convocation in Maryland and

told them he was "at peace with this challenge and hope and believe that in God's grace I will be Archbishop of Washington for many years to come."

He told the priests: "I ask (for) your prayers and support in these days and plan to resume full duties two weeks after the surgery."

Cardinal Robert McElroy of San Diego exchanges high-fives with young members of the parish

Cardinal Robert McElroy of San Diego exchanges high-fives with young members of the parish of St. Frumentius, his titular church in Rome April 23, 2023. Pope Francis appointed McElroy as archbishop of Washington in 2025. (OSV News/Chris Warde-Jones, Catholic News Service)

The cardinal, who is 71, began his role as archbishop of Washington March 11 after serving as bishop of San Diego for 10 years. He has been vocal in his opposition to the Trump administration's actions against immigrants, particularly its promised aims to deport 1 million in the first year of his second term

In a Sept. 28 homily at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington, McElroy said: "This year we are confronting — both as a nation and as a church — an unprecedented assault upon millions of immigrant men and women and families in our midst."

Speaking on World Day for Migrants and Refugees, he added that the current "comprehensive governmental assault" was "designed to produce fear and terror among millions of men and women," and said that the government's actions make life unbearable for migrants, robbing them of peace.

Just three months into his role as shepherd of the archdiocese which includes the District of Columbia and five Maryland counties, McElroy announced to archdiocesan staff that the archdiocese had been operating under a deficit of $10 million a year for the last five years and planned to eliminate 30 positions.

Washington Cardinal Wilton Gregory and Cardinal Robert McElroy leave a Jan. 6, 2025, news c

Washington Cardinal Wilton Gregory and Cardinal Robert McElroy leave a Jan. 6, 2025, news conference at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington. That morning, Pope Francis accepted Gregory's resignation and named McElroy of San Diego as his successor. (OSV News/Geoffrey Ros, Archdiocese of Washington)

Faced with what he described as "crippling economic challenges" to the archdiocese's administrative center, the cardinal said in his June 5 memo that he had come to the "painful realization that the only way forward" was to take "drastic measures" to achieve a balanced budget by July 1.

McElroy, who succeeded Cardinal Wilton Gregory, attributed the archdiocese's financial problem to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the fallout from the Theodore McCarrick scandal, coupled with an extended period of inflation and volatile financial markets. The annual deficits caused the archdiocese to draw from its financial reserves to cover shortfalls.

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Prior to coming to Washington, McElroy was one of the most vocal champions of Pope Francis' pastoral agenda among the U.S. hierarchy. He frequently echoed Francis' prioritization of migrants and refugees, environmental concerns and a more welcoming approach to LGBTQ people.

He was named an auxiliary bishop of San Francisco in 2010 by Pope Benedict XVI and then bishop of San Diego by Francis in 2015 and a cardinal in 2022. Mcelroy has a bachelor's degree from Harvard University, and a master's in U.S. history and a doctorate in political science from Stanford University.