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Pax Christi USA mourns death of former bishop-president

by Thomas C. Fox

NCR Today

Pax Christi USA issued a statement today mourning the loss of Bishop Walter Sullivan who served as bishop-president of Pax Christi USA from 1991 through 2003.

He passed away on Tuesday, December 11, 2012 at age 84.

The statement reads:

"Bishop Sullivan was an extraordinary man, a prophet to the church," stated Pax Christi USA Executive Director Sr. Patricia Chappell, SNDdeN. "He witnessed to the power of church leadership to speak out against war and violence, economic injustice and environmental destruction. He was truly representative of the peace of Christ in our Church and in the world."

Bishop Sullivan served as the bishop of the Diocese of Richmond (VA) for nearly 30 years before retiring. Besides being a long-time member of Pax Christi USA and the second bishop-president of the organization, Bishop Sullivan was also a Pax Christi USA Ambassador of Peace, empowered to represent the organization through ongoing outreach efforts on a variety of issues important to the mission.

"Bishop Sullivan was a longtime friend of Pax Christi. His consistent encouragement of the work for peace and justice helped us all to believe that a just peace was possible," wrote Marie Dennis, Co-President of Pax Christi International, from the Middle East, shortly after learning of Bishop Sullivan's passing. "His own kindness, sense of humor and leadership helped us through many challenges. He was a courageous man and a faithful servant. He will be sorely missed."

Many issues were important to Bishop Sullivan. He spoke out against torture and war, including every war from Viet Nam to the war in Iraq. He espoused the virtues and benefits of interfaith dialogue. He promoted the work of the church in Haiti and he was a passionate defender of the people and land of Appalachia. His influence was evident in the U.S. bishops' pastorals on war and peace and economic justice.

"We are so grateful for Bishop Sullivan's leadership and love for Pax Christi USA," stated Sr. Josie Chrosniak, HM, Chair of the Pax Christi USA National Council. "We celebrate his life with so many others who were touched and inspired by his words, his witness and his warmth and humor. He was a great gift to our movement, his diocese and the entire church."

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