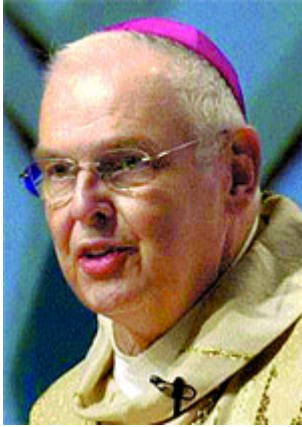


‘A sad day’ Bishop Edwin Conway, vicar general, dies



By Michelle Martin
Staff writer

Catholics in the Archdiocese of Chicago mourned the death of Bishop Edwin M. Conway Aug. 9.

“This is a very sad day for the Archdiocese of Chicago and for the many who benefited from Bishop Conway’s ministry,” Cardinal George said in a statement. “Bishop Conway was an exemplary bishop of the Catholic Church. A man of deep faith, his courage during his illness was an inspiration to all who knew him. The Catholics of the Archdiocese of Chicago have lost a kind and dedicated priest and bishop, and I have lost a good friend and trusted advisor.”

Bishop Conway, 70, died at Loyola Medical Center in Maywood from complications of esophageal cancer. He was to be waked Aug. 12 and 13 at Holy Name Cathedral, with a funeral Mass to be celebrated by Cardinal George on the afternoon of Aug. 13. For full coverage of the funeral, see the Aug. 29 edition of The Catholic New World.

The bishop served as the archdiocese’s vicar general for the last year of his life, after spending nearly all of his priestly career at Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago, serving as the agency’s administrator from 1983-96.

Ordained in 1960, the future bishop began working at Catholic Charities as a counselor in 1962, while working as an associate pastor first at St. Bonaventure Parish and then at St. Mary of the Lake Parish, where he would continue to reside until 2003.

In 1970, he earned a master’s degree in social work from Loyola University Chicago, and was a licensed social worker.

Father Michael Boland, who succeeded Bishop Conway as the agency’s administrator, said his training in social work and his skill at resolving conflicts made him an effective and beloved leader.

“He had a true respect for people,” Boland said. “He was always quiet, compassionate. ... He brought his concern for the poor to everything he did, and he understood what the problems were that people had.”

As then-Father Conway progressed from program to department director to division manager to administrator, he expanded programs for children, seniors and families. He regionalized services, connecting them to parishes in suburban locations. Frail seniors were a particular concern, so nursing homes, senior housing and in-home services were added to accommodate this growing population. A Catholic Charities’ senior residence was named for him in 2003.

While at Catholic Charities, Bishop Conway served as president, chair, director or member of the boards of more than two dozen Catholic institutions serving the elderly, children, developmentally disabled people or adults recovering from addiction. By 1995, more than 500,000 people were being served each year by Catholic Charities.

Bishop Conway’s older brother, Jerry, said he was never surprised by his brother’s success because the bishop had a combination of genuine caring for people and sharp managerial skills.

“He was very smart,” Jerry Conway said. “He was able to put those two factors together and run very successful organizations.”

Father Roger Coughlin, who worked with Bishop Conway for more than 30 years at Catholic Charities, attributed his popularity and success

as an administrator to the bishop's practice of visiting people in person and showing up at events.

"He didn't communicate too much by telephone," Coughlin said. "I think people responded to that."

Coughlin first met him Bishop Conway when the then young priest was assigned to Our Lady of the Angels Parish and the future bishop was a student at Quigley Preparatory Seminary.

The two became close over the years, and Coughlin said the Gospel reading for Aug. 10, the day following Conway's death, brought his friend to mind. The reading, from Chapter 12 of John, starts: "Jesus said to his disciples: 'Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.'"

"That's not about physical death," Coughlin said. "That's about love, how you give little pieces of yourself away when you love, and you don't get them back. ... Ed was always ready to do that. He had a lot of physical strength and a lot of emotional strength."

During his time at Catholic Charities, he also served as the spiritual director of the archdiocesan St. Vincent De Paul Society, helping to revitalize the group dedicated to outreach to the needy in the 1970s. His father had been active in the group at Our Lady of the Angels, and Bishop Conway said during his life that he always had a personal devotion to him. For the past five years, he had served as the national spiritual advisor to the group.

In 1995, while still serving as administrator of Catholic Charities, he was ordained an auxiliary bishop and appointed the episcopal vicar for Vicariate II, the North Side of Chicago and several north suburbs. The area includes everything from Uptown, a highly diverse neighborhood that was once home to many people in poverty who suffered from high crime and low employment rates, to some of the wealthiest enclaves in the United States.

He also served as the long-time health care liaison for the archdiocese. His involvement in health care issues was highlighted this summer, when he celebrated the opening Mass for the

Catholic Health Association's national assembly in June.

Father Michael Place, president and CEO of the association, called Bishop Conway a "great friend" to Catholic health care in the archdiocese and across the country, saying he was instrumental in founding the Illinois Catholic Health Association and serving effectively as episcopal liaison to a national association of Catholic hospital chaplains.

"Over the years, he assumed a leadership role in helping the Catholic health care institutions in the archdiocese realize significant possibilities for collaboration," said Place, a priest of the archdiocese.

Bishop Conway also was honored by the National Catholic AIDS Network with its Lumina Award at its conference in July.

"I am sad that the Church of Chicago, of the United States has lost such a wonderful man of service," said Dan Lunney, executive director of the network. "I am sad that the National Catholic AIDS Network has lost such a great friend. It is with certainty that his legacy and spirit will live on. It will live on in the many people he touched with his life. The many who have life abundantly because of his leadership at Catholic Charities."

Bishop Conway was the second son of Edwin and Nellie Conway, faithful parishioners at Our Lady of the Angels. They were a wonderful family, he said, with Edwin Conway Sr. the very involved in the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

"His mother was the kind of woman that the parish depends upon to do a million things," Coughlin said. "They always had that persona about them that said, what can I do to help? I think that was carried on in Ed."

In addition to many other honors, Bishop Conway was designated a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre in 1987 and received the "Heart of Loyola Award" this year. He is survived by his brother Jerry (the late Loretta); nephews Timothy (Cindy), Daniel (Pam), David (Laura) and Thomas (Kerri); niece Judy (Mark Smith); and 13 great-nieces and nephews