



Archbishop John G. Vlazny of Portland, Ore., is pictured in a 2012 file photo, a year before he retired. Known for his pastoral care for immigrants and the Hispanic community, the retired prelate died May 23, 2025, at age 88 at his Beaverton residence. (CNS/Paul Haring)

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Portland, Ore. — June 5, 2025

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Archbishop John George Vlazny, the retired archbishop of Portland, who was known for his pastoral care for immigrants and the Hispanic community, died at his Beaverton, Oregon, residence May 23. He was 88 years old.

"This great spiritual father led this local Church in the Archdiocese of Portland through some of its most challenging days," Portland Archbishop Alexander K. Sample said in a statement May 25, expressing "the greatest sorrow" at the loss of his predecessor.

"He was a man who always fully exhibited the joy of the Gospel. He was truly one of the kindest and most thoughtful men that I have ever known. His love for the priesthood and his own episcopal ministry was evident at all times," Archbishop Sample said.

The archbishop said Archbishop Vlazny left "a lasting and remarkable legacy" in western Oregon, and he would personally be "forever grateful for his kindness to me."

"He will be missed very deeply by all of us," he said. "We now commend him to the mercy of the Lord, whom he served so well. We ask the Lord to grant him now the blessed reward of a good and faithful servant. Rest in peace, my dear brother."

Parishes around the state of Oregon shared the sad news with the community of Catholics that Archbishop Vlazny guided with love, compassion and spiritual wisdom during his 16 years as the Portland Archdiocese's shepherd — a time when he was the pillar of faith for many Catholics, including Hispanic Catholics.

Many in the Hispanic community regarded his presence as a symbol of compassion, love and understanding. He was remembered as always ready to reach out to the poor, the immigrant families and people who came to the United States desperately

seeking a future.

St. Matthew Church, one of the parishes where Portland's Hispanic Catholics gather, was among the first to share the sad news through Facebook.

"To say that he will be missed is a great understatement. Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord," the parish said in a post.

John Limb, former publisher of Oregon Catholic Press and a close friend of Archbishop Vlazny, had the chance to celebrate the late archbishop's 88th birthday.

"So thankful for the gift that he was to all of us! He will be missed," he said.

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Archbishop Vlazny headed the Portland Archdiocese from 1997 to 2013, when he retired and was succeeded by Archbishop Sample. He had been a bishop since 1983, when he was named a Chicago auxiliary.

John George Vlazny was born in Chicago Feb. 22, 1937. Called to the priesthood as a young boy, he graduated from Quigley Preparatory Seminary in the city and then St. Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein, Illinois, before going on to the North American College. He was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Chicago in 1961 at St. Peter's Basilica.

Four years after serving as an auxiliary bishop of Chicago, he was made bishop of the Diocese of Winona, Minnesota, in 1987. Ten years later, he was appointed to the Portland Archdiocese.

He had served as chair of a number of U.S. bishops' committees, including the vocations, evangelization and the national collections. He had been a member of many others, including those engaged with administration of the bishops' conference and Migration and Refugee Services.

He obtained a licentiate in sacred theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, a master of arts in the classics from the University of Michigan and a master of education in educational administration from Loyola University Chicago.

Archbishop Vlazny is remembered among Oregonians of all faiths for his ecumenical and interfaith efforts to promote peace and understanding.

He traveled during his time as archbishop to each parish in the state of Oregon, where Hispanics were a growing population. They arrived to see him and listen to his message of love and faith in Spanish. Under his leadership, the parishes opened Hispanic ministries to serve the community.

He presided over the Encuentro 2000 at the Portland Coliseum, which gathered Catholics from around the state of Oregon, as a multicultural celebration of faith.

Archbishop Vlazny will be remembered for having steered the community through tumultuous times as the Portland Archdiocese became the first diocese in the U.S. to declare bankruptcy over sex abuse claims in 2004.

Archbishop Vlazny was a writer and speaker, publishing regular, award-winning columns in *The Catholic Sentinel* and *El Centinela*, where he frequently raised the plight of immigrants, refugees and the need to open the church's doors with compassion. Both news outlets, which served the Portland Archdiocese, closed in 2022.

"The Easter candle is the light of Christ, bringing new life, new hope, new joy," he once wrote. "We were children of darkness but we became children of the light. As that light of Christ grows brighter in each and every one of us, we will become much more effective witnesses to a world that desperately needs to be reminded once again that He is alive!"

In 2009, the University of Portland presented its Christus Magister Medal, the school's highest honor, to Archbishop Vlazny. He was the 15th recipient of the medal, awarded annually to men and women of international distinction in the fields of art, science and government.

Funeral arrangements for Archbishop Vlazny include visitation June 5 from 1-6:15 p.m. at St. Mary's Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Portland, followed by a 6:30 p.m. vigil service immediately afterward.

The archbishop's funeral Mass takes place June 6 at 11 a.m. at the cathedral, which will be carried over livestream, with the rite of committal at Mount Calvary Cemetery at 2:30 p.m.