



Retired Bishop Tod D. Brown of Orange, Calif., center, and bishops from California, Hawaii and Nevada concelebrate Mass in the crypt of St. Peter's Basilica during their "ad limina" visits to the Vatican Jan. 27, 2020. Brown, who headed the Southern California diocese from 1998 until his retirement in 2012, died at age 86 Oct. 15, 2023. (CNS photo/Stefano Dal Pozzolo)

Julie Asher

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Retired Bishop Tod D. Brown, the third bishop of the Diocese of Orange, died early Oct. 15 at Providence St. Joseph Hospital after being hospitalized, according to the diocese. He was 86.

Msgr. Tuan Joseph Pham, a close friend of the late bishop, told the Los Angeles Times the prelate died after a long battle with lymphoma.

Bishop Kevin W. Vann, who succeeded Brown as shepherd of the diocese, said in a statement he was "deeply saddened" to announce the passing of his predecessor, who retired in 2012.

"With his tireless spirit and witness to Christ, Bishop Brown faithfully served the people of the Diocese of Orange since 1998 when Pope St. John Paul II appointed him bishop and ordinary of our diocese," said Vann, who remembered especially "his kindness to me when I was a newly ordained priest years ago."

In the fall of 1981, then-Frs. Brown and Vann were at the Casa Santa Maria in Rome, a residence for seminarians studying at the Pontifical North American College.

"I ask for your prayers for the repose of his soul and for thanksgiving to God for his many years of ministry and evangelization," Vann said.

An evening vigil is scheduled for Oct. 29 at Holy Family Church in Orange. The funeral Mass will be celebrated the morning of Oct. 30 at Christ Cathedral. Both will be livestreamed.

Brown will interred in the St. Callistus Chapel and Crypts, which are being constructed beneath Christ Cathedral and are scheduled to be completed in 2024. Details have not yet been released as to where the late bishop will be laid to rest before the crypts are finished.

The late bishop was known "as a collaborative leader" who hired women for key diocesan leadership positions, the Orange County Catholic, the diocesan news outlet, reported in a profile of the late bishop. Also during his tenure, Orange County parishes saw "boosted Mass attendance and an increasingly diverse Catholic population," it said.

The Orange County Catholic noted that Brown also wanted to ensure leaders of the local church reflected their communities. In the late 1990s, he requested the pope appoint a Hispanic bishop as an auxiliary. On March 23, 2000, St. John Paul II named then-Msgr. Jaime Soto as an auxiliary for Orange in 2000. Seven years later, Bishop Soto was named coadjutor of Sacramento, and he has headed the diocese since November 2008.

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Brown later requested a Vietnamese bishop, which led to St. John Paul's appointment of then-Fr. Dominic Dinh Mai Luong as an Orange auxiliary in April 2003. At the time he was serving in the Archdiocese of New Orleans, where he was the founding father of the Vietnamese Catholic community. Ordained a bishop June 11, 2003, he was the nation's first Catholic bishop of Vietnamese origin. He retired in 2015 and died in 2017 at age 76.

The second priest born in Vietnam to become a U.S. bishop is current Orange Auxiliary Bishop Thanh Thai Nguyen. Pope Francis named him in 2017 to serve the diocese alongside Auxiliary Bishop Timothy E. Freyer.

"Bishop Brown was also regarded for helping guide the Diocese of Orange through the sex abuse crisis of the early 2000s," the Orange County Catholic said. In 2005, he was the first bishop in California to settle sex abuse claims, agreeing to pay \$100 million to 90 victims and publicly releasing files on clergy abuse allegations. At the time, it was the largest abuse settlement payout in the U.S. Catholic Church.

"Bishop Brown also agreed to personally apologize to each of the victims. His leadership put in place a series of policies and procedures to ensure parishes and schools remain safe for both children and adults," the news outlet said.

The diocese implemented various new protocols, including requiring background checks for all clergy and lay employees; mandating safe environment training;

creating a diocesan child protection office; strengthening abuse reporting education at schools and parishes; and establishing an all-volunteer independent Oversight Review Board to consider all sexual abuse claims against clergy or church staff.

Another major accomplishment of Brown's tenure was spearheading the diocese's purchase of the Crystal Cathedral campus in Garden Grove after its ministry -- founded and run by Protestant televangelist the Rev. Robert Schuller -- fell into bankruptcy. The 34-acre property, home to the popular "Hour of Power" broadcast, later became Christ Cathedral following a years-long transformation that culminated with the cathedral's solemn dedication July 17, 2019.

After the sale was completed in 2012, according to the Orange County Catholic, Schuller told the priests of the diocese, "I trust it to you. It's yours. â?¡ This could be a global place for dynamic energy to be generated. And that's what the church needs today and tomorrow -- dynamic creative energy. If it's to be found anywhere, it's got to be in you. You are the church. I know that, respect that, honor that, and thank you for taking charge of a physical facility that can be used for the glory of God."

Born in San Francisco Nov. 15, 1936, the future bishop studied in California at Ryan Seminary in Fresno, St. John's Seminary in Camarillo and in Rome at the Pontifical North American College and the Pontifical Gregorian University. He was ordained to the priesthood May 1, 1963, for what was then the Diocese of Monterey-Fresno (it was split into two separate dioceses in 1967). Then-Msgr. Brown was vicar general of the Monterey Diocese when St. John Paul appointed him the sixth bishop of Boise, Idaho, Dec. 27, 1988, which he led until his appointment to the Diocese of Orange in 1998.

Brown is survived by his brother, Daniel, and sister-in-law and their children and grandchildren.