

Statement from the Diocese of Duluth

Dec. 2, 2019

Father James Bissonette, who served as vicar general under the late Bishop Paul Sirba, offered the following statement today as the faithful of the diocese and Catholics around the region and the country continue to mourn the sudden death of Bishop Sirba:

Our faithful are in shock and they're grieving, and rightly so, because they loved Bishop Sirba, and he was a very kind, gentle, faithful shepherd. A lot of people felt that and understood that and now are showing appreciation for that. I myself am grieving not only because like the other priests of the diocese I lost a good shepherd, but he was also a good friend, and he will be missed greatly.

Our first priority is to pray for and say goodbye to Bishop Sirba until we see him again on the day of resurrection, because we are people of hope, and we believe in the fullness of eternal life in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The news of the bishop's death was announced to the faithful Dec. 1 in a message from Father Bissonette. Bishop Sirba suffered cardiac arrest that morning at St. Rose Church in Proctor, where he had been living at the rectory, on his way to celebrate Sunday Mass at the parish. He was rushed to Essentia Health St. Mary's Medical Center where life-saving efforts were unsuccessful. He received the last rites from Father John Petrich and died shortly after 9 a.m.

Bishop Sirba was ordained the ninth bishop of Duluth on Dec. 14, 2009 and was anticipating celebrating his 10th anniversary at the time of his death.

Plans are for a vigil to be held at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Rosary in Duluth Thursday, Dec. 5, from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. and then continuing from 8 a.m. Friday until the funeral at 11 a.m. His surviving family includes his mother, Helen, and his siblings, Father Joe, Kathy, and John, and their families.

Under church law, within the next several days a group of diocesan priests called the College of Consultors will convene to choose a diocesan administrator. The priest chosen for this role will take care of the diocese until a new bishop is appointed by Pope Francis. The length of that process is uncertain, but it typically takes about a year.

