

American Cardinal John Foley dies at 76

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(RNS) Cardinal John P. Foley, the longtime chief of communications for the Vatican who brought Christmas midnight Mass from St. Peter's Basilica to millions of Americans, died on Sunday (Dec. 11) just outside of his native Philadelphia. He was 76.

Although the Archdiocese of Philadelphia did not provide the cause of his death, The Associated Press reported that he had been suffering from leukemia.

"Cardinal Foley was a man of great apostolic energy," said Philadelphia Archbishop Charles J. Chaput. "By sheer forces of his personality, he drew people to the faith and to himself."

Foley, a former journalist who graduated from Columbia University Journalism School, served as the president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications for more than 20 years.

Starting in 1984, he provided American viewers with commentary on midnight Mass from St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. His last broadcast was in 2009.

A Vatican spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, told Vatican Radio that Foley "incarnated in the best way the friendly, open, attentive relationship of the church in the world of social communications."

Most recently, Foley served as grand master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, which supports the Catholic Church in the Holy Land. Pope Benedict XVI named Foley to the position in 2007, and later that year elevated him to the rank of cardinal.

The pope sent a telegram to Chaput to express his condolences and recognize Foley's long record of service to the Catholic Church. Foley's funeral is scheduled for Friday (Dec. 16) in Philadelphia.