

Ernesto Cardenal, Nicaraguan poet-priest, restored in Catholic Church

Cardenal was suspended for his role in the 1980s Sandinista government—considered a partisan public office prohibited for clergy.

by [Christian Century staff](#) in the [March 27, 2019](#) issue



Ernesto Cardenal in Munich in 2010. Public domain photo by Herbert Erwin.

Ernesto Cardenal, a Nobel Prize-nominated Nicaraguan poet, priest, and former government official, was restored to exercising his ministry by Pope Francis on February 17.

Pope John Paul II had suspended him in 1984 “because of his political militancy and for joining the Sandinista government of Daniel Ortega as Minister of Culture,” Vatican News wrote. Canon law forbids clerics from holding partisan public office.

In lifting the suspension, Vatican officials wrote that Cardenal has abided by the sanctions against “carrying out any pastoral activity.” They also noted that Cardenal had been a leader of efforts in the 1980s that taught 500,000 Nicaraguans to read and write.

He composed [the book *The Gospel of Solentiname*](#), published in 1976, from edited transcripts of dialogues about the Bible among members of a rural Nicaraguan community he pastored.

In 1994 Cardenal left the Sandinistas after criticizing what he saw as authoritarianism in the party. Nicaraguan president Ortega has been [decried by church and civil society leaders in the past year for violent crackdowns on protesters objecting to the ways he has centralized power](#).

Cardenal, 94, has been ailing recently and was hospitalized for two weeks in February, the Associated Press reported. He received the news from the Vatican during that time and sent a letter expressing gratitude to the pope. “I would also like to thank you for your blessing, which I receive with love,” Cardenal wrote.

Waldemar Sommertag, an archbishop and Vatican ambassador to Nicaragua, told Vatican News that he and Cardenal said mass together in the hospital after Cardenal’s restoration. It was the first time Cardenal had celebrated the Eucharist in 35 years. —*Christian Century* staff

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title “People: Ernesto Cardenal.”