

Raymond Hunthausen, Catholic archbishop who advocated for progressive causes, dies at age 96

The Vatican investigated his pastoral and administrative practices in the 1980s.

by [Christian Century staff](#) in the [August 29, 2018](#) issue

Raymond Hunthausen, a retired Catholic archbishop and advocate for progressive causes who was disciplined by the Vatican, died at home with family in Helena, Montana, on July 22 at age 96.

Hunthausen was the bishop of Helena from 1962 to 1975, then led the Seattle archdiocese until 1991. He was the last surviving American bishop to have participated in all of the Second Vatican Council sessions in the 1960s, the *New York Times* reported.

The *Times* detailed his progressive stances, such as declining to condemn birth control, allowing a gay Catholic group to have mass at the Seattle cathedral, and supporting women leaders in churches.

“In 1980, he wrote what is believed to be the first pastoral letter by an American bishop identifying steps the church should take to value the gifts of women equally with those of men,” according to *Northwest Catholic* magazine.

He was also known for his opposition to war, including the nuclear missile submarines on the Puget Sound in his archdiocese. He withheld half of his income taxes in 1982 as an act of protest against nuclear weapons. The IRS garnished his wages, and the Vatican investigated his pastoral and administrative practices, including appointing an auxiliary bishop to share power for two years.

Catholic peace activist Jim Douglass told the *National Catholic Reporter* that his longtime friend “acted as a prophet when he saw his country preparing instruments of war that could destroy humanity. He pastored the people of his diocese—and far beyond—with unconditional love. For his courageous faith in every direction, he was punished by the church he loved.”

In 1981, Hunthausen told the *Christian Century* he wanted to “emphasize that each of us has a personal responsibility for nuclear arms.” He called on other to join him in withholding a portion of their income taxes. His own protest was a culmination of reflections and prayers that began in August 1945 with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He noted that the weapons on submarines based in Seattle would have five times more destructive power than the ones used in Japan. In August 1981 Hunthausen and leaders of several other denominations protested nonviolently against the Trident nuclear submarines.

“I am told by some,” he said in a speech quoted in that article, “that unilateral disarmament, which is one obvious meaning of the cross, in the face of atheistic communism is insane.” He added: “I find myself observing that nuclear armament by anyone is itself atheistic, and anything but sane.”

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