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"He brought joy to many patients"

The chaplain-engineer at Laguna Hospice Care Center, Father José Ruiz, died during the early stages of the pandemic in Madrid. His friends pay tribute to his life in this article and video.

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(An article published in *ABC* Madrid)

Don José really liked to sing. He brought joy to many patients

receiving palliative care at the Laguna Hospice center in Madrid, sometimes by singing for them “mañanitas” [a traditional Mexican birthday song, usually sung early in the morning to awaken the birthday person].

He once appeared dressed as a mariachi singer with the son of a woman who was being cared for in the hospice. When she passed away, Don José Ruiz, the chaplain of this center for the terminally ill, "adopted" the woman’s son as if he were a lifelong friend. Every Christmas he invited him back to Laguna to sing a duet for the residents and help bring some joy to their hearts.

Something similar happened with his dear friend Fermin, who died two weeks ago of coronavirus. Don José is going to be our Spanish Giuseppe Berardelli—a priest in Casnigo in the

Italian diocese of Bergamo who died a few days ago at the age of 72 after giving up his respirator that was needed by a younger man. The Italian priest died of coronavirus, but the young man was saved.

Don José was the faithful companion of Fermin since his wife died a month ago. Together they had spent many hours keeping vigil at the bedside of Fermin's sick wife. When Fermin lost his spouse, Don José accompanied him at every meal to help ease his loneliness. But two weeks ago the coronavirus claimed Fermin's life too. And one week ago the 80-year old chaplain was taken to the University of Navarre Hospital, seriously ill with the virus. He died last Tuesday amid the pain of the Laguna medical staff and friends who were unable to bid him a final goodbye.

Don José poured himself out in caring for patients in the pediatric unit, and moved heaven and earth to fulfill their final wishes. Mateo, gravely ill with ALS, shared with him a love for the Andalusian rhythms of flamenco. So a “going away party” for Mateo was held in his hospital room in Madrid, with a flamenco dance organized especially for the occasion. As Don José always insisted, “I am here to serve.”

Don José was not born with a cassock. He wasn’t ordained a priest until he was 53. A member of Opus Dei for many years, he was an industrial engineer and prestigious businessman, with great intellectual drive, as his colleagues recount.

But he decided that the two virtues lauded by his friends should serve another purpose in the last twenty years of his life: “He always found the appropriate warm words, a joke

at the right time. Even when you came to him with your small daily concerns, amid his care for the sick in their last hours and so much work (he was on duty from Monday to Sunday and rested only on Saturday), he made time for you and shared with you his contagious and quiet joy," says Ana, a colleague at Laguna Hospice Center.

He held each patient's hand and found ways to give each person what they needed. He had a gift for entering each patient's inner world, without judging. Don José was present at thousands of farewells, thousands of wakes.

End-of-life instructor

Before coming to Laguna he had been head chaplain for the National Police, where he sometimes had to console the families of victims of terrorist attacks. He continued going

regularly to give talks to the police and offer light on current issues.

He also attended many medical conferences and trained hospital chaplains on end of life care. He gave guidelines on what is “morally acceptable and clinically feasible.” If he had had died in normal times, his friends are sure that “the line to honor him would have extended around the entire clinic.”

Last year he wrote an article at Easter time that was published in *Alpha y Omega*. He spoke about the miracle of the resurrection of Christ, and said he wants to help carry the heavy burden of his Cross. Now that José Ruiz has gone from us, infected with the friendships he contracted in the anteroom of holy suffering, it all seems to make sense.

This article was originally published in ***ABC:****Nuestro Giuseppe Berdelli*

español: el último deseo de Don José, un servidor "esencial"

Below is a short video (in Spanish) about his life:

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