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Priest dies from cartel-military crossfire

by David Agren by Catholic News Service

MEXICO CITY -- A Catholic priest died of his injuries July 2, shortly after being caught in the crossfire of a shootout between drug cartel gunmen and the military in the border city of Matamoros.

Father Marco Antonio Duran Romero, 48, pastor of the St. Robert Bellarmine Parish and host of a local television program, was shot in the chest after encountering the shootout while driving, said Father Alan Camargo, spokesman for the Diocese of Matamoros. Father Duran, who had just left a prayer meeting in his parish, died after emergency surgery.

"He was very dynamic, creative, very charismatic and had a way being very open and direct with young people," Father Camargo said.

A funeral Mass was celebrated July 4.

Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Texas, across the border from Matamoros, issued a statement expressing sorrow and offering prayers for Father Duran, the church of Matamoros and "all those who live in circumstances of great danger."

"Many innocent people have been killed as a result of the violence in northern Mexico, and Father Duran Romero is among the most recent," the bishop's statement said. "A priest should be with his people in times of trial," and Father Duran's death "witnesses to this solidarity."

The death was the latest difficulty for the Catholic Church as it serves regions of Mexico rife with violence from drug cartels and organized crime.

One priest in the Diocese of Matamoros fled a violent region of Tamaulipas state earlier this year due to threats from drug cartels, which are disputing a region coveted for its smuggling routes to the United

States.

Father Camargo said priests in Tamaulipas have been stopped and searched at checkpoints manned by cartel toughs and impeded from leaving the towns they serve due to local sieges by the warring criminal groups, but generally have not been targets.

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