

Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir, a cardinal and former head of the Maronite Church, dies at age 98

Sfeir became patriarch amid Lebanon's civil war. He became known as a voice against injustice.

by [Christian Century staff](#) in the [June 19, 2019](#) issue



Nasrallah Sfeir. Public domain photo.

Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir, former head of the Maronite Church and a prominent figure in Lebanon, died May 12 in Beirut at age 98.

Sfeir, who was also a cardinal, had been ill for a long time, Vatican News wrote. The Maronite Church is an Eastern Catholic church in communion with Rome.

Pope Francis called Sfeir “a free and courageous man” and “a key architect of mediation, peace, and reconciliation.”

Sfeir became patriarch in 1986 as Lebanon was wracked by civil war and became known as a voice for the poor and against injustice.

Politicians of many backgrounds sought his counsel even after he resigned in 2011, wrote Agence France-Presse.

“He was a respected power broker during the 1975–1990 civil war, which saw bitter infighting between rival militias including opposing Christian factions,” AFP wrote. “His backing of the 1989 Taif agreement that brought the 15-year civil war to an end bolstered Christian support for the accord, but reduced the powers of the presidency, a seat reserved for Lebanon’s Maronite Christians under the country’s confessional power-sharing.”

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title “People: Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir.”