



**ARCHDIOCESE OF SANTA FE
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS/MEDIA**

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PRESS RELEASE

**Death of Archbishop Robert Fortune Sanchez
January 20, 2012**

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ALBUQUERQUE, NM – Friday, January 20, 2012 IMMEDIATE RELEASE-- The Archdiocese of Santa Fe is saddened to announce the death of Archbishop Robert Fortune Sanchez who served as the 10th Archbishop of Santa Fe from 1974-1993. His family has deep roots in New Mexico with many ancestors among the first Hispanic settlers. On March 20, 1934 when Robert was born to Julius C. and Priscilla Fortune Sanchez, neither he nor his parents knew what God would call Robert to do. Robert was taught well by his parents to love God; and they made sure he received all his Sacraments.

Robert grew up in Socorro, New Mexico where he attended Mount Carmel Catholic School and Socorro High School. For a short period of time he also attended St. Mary's Boys Catholic High School in Phoenix, Arizona. He heard the call to the priesthood at a young age entering Immaculate Heart of Mary Seminary in Santa Fe, where he attended and graduated from St. Michael's College (later known as College of Santa Fe). He continued his studies for the priesthood at the Pontifical North American College in Rome, Italy where he earned degrees in Philosophy and Theology. At the end of his studies he was ordained a Priest by Bishop Martin J. O'Connor on December 20, 1959.

Upon his return to New Mexico he was assigned to reside and assist at Our Lady of the Annunciation Parish in Albuquerque while at the same time holding many positions at St. Pius X High School. These included teacher, assistant principal and counselor. He earned his teaching certificate from the University of New Mexico in 1964. He later attended Catholic University in Washington, DC for Canon Law Studies.

In 1965 he was appointed as the Archdiocesan Director of Extension Lay Volunteers and in 1968 was a representative to the New Mexico Council of Churches' Institutional Ministry and Pastoral Care Program. Also in 1968 he was appointed Pastor of San Felipe de Neri Parish in Albuquerque. During this time he served on the Archdiocesan Personnel Board, as President of the Priest Senate, as Region X Representative to the National Federation of Priest Councils, and briefly as the Vicar General of the Archdiocese.

Pope Paul VI appointed Robert as the 10th Archbishop of Santa Fe. He was ordained as Archbishop on July 25, 1974 with over 14,000 people attending the event, making it the highest attended Episcopal ordination in history to that point in time. He was the first Hispanic Bishop in the United States and the first native priest to be appointed as a Bishop in the Southwestern United States. Archbishop Sanchez' programs implementing Hispanic



Ministry, cultural preservation and the preservation of historic churches continue to be models for the Country.

Locally, Archbishop Sanchez increased outreach to the many and varied cultural communities in New Mexico. He was the first Archbishop to offer an apology to the local Native American peoples as well as to establish an Office for Native American Ministry. He ordained now deceased Bishop Donald Pelotte for the Diocese of Gallup, who was the first Native American Bishop in the United States.

Archbishop Sanchez established the first Archdiocesan Youth Conference, the first Native American Liturgy at the Cathedral, the first Ecumenical Commission of the Archdiocese, and the Commission for the Preservation of Historic New Mexico Churches. After putting together the first Archdiocesan-wide Pastoral Plan – the first west of the Mississippi River – he established the resources and offices needed at the Archdiocesan level to serve the needs of the parishes and the pastoral needs of the people of the Archdiocese. He also wrote the most comprehensive Pastoral Letter on HIV/Aids at that time.

He erected several new parishes: San Isidro y San Jose in Santa Fe; St. Jude Thaddeus in Albuquerque; Our Lady of La Vang in Albuquerque; Risen Savior Catholic Community in Albuquerque; Santuario de San Martin de Porres in Albuquerque; John XXII Catholic Community in Albuquerque; St. Joseph on the Rio Grande in Albuquerque and Santa Maria de La Paz in Santa Fe.

Together with the other Bishops of the State, Bishop Ricardo Ramirez of Las Cruces and Bishop Pelotte of Gallup, they established the New Mexico Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Nationally, Archbishop Sanchez served on several boards and committees which included the Pontifical College Josephinum, the Pontifical North American College, the Mexican American Cultural Center, the Bishops' Committee for Hispanic Affairs (where he was instrumental in writing the United States Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Hispanics in the United States); the Bishops' Commission on Family Life representing the Bishops of the United States at the Synod on the Mission of the Family at the Vatican in 1980. He was also appointed by Pope John Paul II to the Vatican's Commission on Immigration Affairs.

As a result of the sexual abuse scandals, and allegations made against his own personal conduct which were brought to the forefront, he resigned as Archbishop in 1993. Many would claim that he was not as proactive as he could have been in the disciplining and expulsion of priests who were alleged of sexual misconduct. As he became ill, Archbishop Sanchez reiterated his love and blessings always for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, her priests, people and his family.

Archbishop Michael J. Sheehan stated, "Archbishop Sanchez was much loved as a native son by the people of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe. He was respected by his brother Bishops and looked up to by his priests. We continue to acknowledge the good he did during his Episcopacy, are well aware of his human failings, and mourn his death today."--END

