



## Chicano Priest First In Diocese

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John Richard Garcia, a living example of the transitions his church and his people are going through, soon will embark on a career he has planned since age 13 --- being "a servant to my people."

Having completed seven years of college and a year's internship, Garcia will be ordained in June to the Catholic priesthood in a series of "firsts."

He will be the first "Chicano" priest ever to be ordained in the San Francisco Archdiocese.

In the several decades which St. Patrick's Seminary in Menlo Park has been producing clergy for all of Northern California, a few Mexican-Americans have become priests.

But never has there been a "Chicano" priest, one who is actively involved in the Chicano movement.

Garcia also will be the first priest to be ordained in this diocese in a ceremony entirely in Spanish.

And he will be the first man to be ordained in San Jose by Archbishop Joseph McGucken, who speaks fluent Spanish.

Garcia was born in San Francisco's lower-middle class "south of Market Street" district which has undergone two transitions in his time.

In the early years of his childhood, the neighborhood was predominantly Mexican-American and black, he recalls. Then Filipinos came into the majority. Now, the Filipino family homes are giving way to light industry, he said.

Garcia is a man of transition.

Besides growing up in a changing neighborhood, he has seen profound changes in the church's concern for his people and has experienced both the old and new ways of training priests.

Only in recent years, he said, has the church reached out to help Mexican-Americans.

"We have to reach out to people instead of just letting them come to us in time of crisis, such as death in a family. We have to be there whenever they need us --- when grandma is dying in a hospital, when a child has been kicked out of school, when a father is in prison."

Garcia began his training for the priesthood in a seminary high school, which he considered a "testing ground" to determine whether he really wanted to be a priest.

Garcia was raised in a deeply religious "extended family," he said.

The Chicano deacon spoke only Spanish until he was six years old, but he was luckier than most bi-lingual pupils, he recalls. No attempt ever was made by a teacher to discourage him from using his native tongue or hanging on with pride to his Mexican culture.

Garcia is living also in a transition period involving the attitudes of laymen toward priests. There was a time, he pointed out, when priests were put "on pedestals" by laymen.

Even today, some older people refuse to let the men with turned around collars step down from the pedestal and act like human beings, he said.

Recently, he recalled, he was in a restaurant having a beer with a friend. Some older Mexican-Americans saw him drinking, disapproved and remarked "and you're going to be a priest?"

To be a "servant of the people," he said, "you have to go where they are --- whether in a tavern, a hospital or a jail."

The transition in priests' training Garcia has experienced can be seen in rules laid down for seminarians.

When he was in the high school seminary, any boy who dated girls when he went home for visits was subject to dismissal from school. It's not that way, anymore, he said.

Garcia wants to be assigned to a Mexican-American

parish somewhere in the Bay Area. And he hopes eventually to return to college for a master's degree in psychology to increase his knowledge of counseling.

Garcia majored in the humanities, with a specialty in psychology, at the undergraduate college level and has served part of his pastoral training by counseling men and women alcoholics and drug addicts at Agnews State Hospital. He hopes to spend much of his career in counseling married couples and "entire families."

The young Chicano sees a different way of life for priests in the future. One day, no doubt, they will have the option of marriage, he said.

But Garcia is more concerned about living arrangements.

He wants to have a place of his own, perhaps a back-room in somebody's house or a small office-apartment, where he can be by himself.

"I really believe in service to the people, in being available to the people. But how long can I be of service if I work 20 hours a week?" he said.

Garcia, in wanting to be a priest to his people, has a big job ahead of him.

There are very few Chicano priests in California, where 66 percent of Catholics are Spanish-surnamed.

