

# Reflection of the Last 50 Years and Some Lessons Learned

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Archbishop Michael J. Sheehan, May 2014 *People of God*

This July, I will be celebrating my 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of priesthood ordination and 75 years of age. It is hard to believe that on July 12, 1964 I was in Rome being ordained and celebrating my first Mass the very next day in front of the Tomb of St. Peter! I have been reminiscing not only about my own priesthood but about the many priests who helped form my faith as a child and young adult in Texarkana, TX; the priests who I worked with as a newly ordained priest myself in the Diocese of Dallas; and of course of the many priests whom I have worked with in the Diocese of Lubbock and the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.

We have so many good, faithful priests in so many places who have dedicated their lives to help people reach eternal life in Heaven. I wanted to share some of their stories with you and how I have learned from them. Here are a few of the many priests who have helped me through the years.

Msgr. Douglas A. Raun has been a great help to me in many ways. He started Perpetual Adoration at St. Thomas Aquinas and it has deepened devotion to the Eucharist for many. I believe it has been a major reason he has so many seminarians in his parish. He started a thriving Catholic School and gives successful parish missions around the archdiocese during Lent. He serves as dean which places him on the Presbyteral Council and Personnel Board. He connects well with his people and fellow priests.

Msgr. Richard Olona has been a great help since my coming to the archdiocese in 1993. He was my chancellor after Fr. Ron Wolf was assigned to a parish. He has served also as vicar general and as a member of the Presbyteral Council and College of Consultors. We have also travelled together. He has been a key advisor and a friend.

Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler, TX was a former student of mine when I was rector of Holy Trinity Seminary from 1976-1982. He is a dear friend and I have known him since he was 17 years old. We both come from the Texarkana, TX area and I have known his family for many years. We travel on vacation together and I am fond of him.

Msgr. Francis X. Eggert of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe who has been a priest now for 56 years, is 84 years old and continues to serve as a pastor of a parish with a Catholic School! He has taught me to persevere in serving the people of God even beyond the age of retirement which in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe for priests is age 70!

Very Rev. John Cannon of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe who celebrates 10 years as a priest this year and is only 48 years old and currently serves as our chancellor, vicar for priests, moderator of the curia and vicar for religious. He has taught me that our converts have much to offer us "cradle Catholics". You see, Father Cannon was raised as a Protestant, converted to our Catholic

faith when he was 25 years old and was ordained a priest when he was 38. He embraced the Catholic faith with gusto and walks with those he serves to bring them closer to God whether they are his parishioners, brother priests, or employees.

Msgr. Bennett J. Voorhies now of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, formerly of the Diocese of Lafayette, who has been a priest for 31 years, has taught me the gift of laughter. Anyone who knows “Fr. J.” knows he tells the best jokes and can light up a room with his presence. I’m trying to tell jokes like, he does but I have a ways to go!

Msgr. Jerome Martinez y Alire of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, who has been a priest for 38 years, has taught me to do everything with class and grace. When I appointed him as rector of then the St. Francis Cathedral in Santa Fe it was a parish that was not very lively and even sort of dark because of the lack of maintenance. Msgr. Jerome renovated the cathedral inside and out and brought life to the parish making it vibrant. He also worked diligently with me and several others to obtain the title of Cathedral Basilica from the Vatican. All through the years, he served there, it was top-notch, with every celebration done with class and he accepted compliments on behalf of all involved with grace and kindness.

Rev. Timothy A. Martinez served as my chancellor from 2005-2010 and has been on our Presbyteral Council and other advisory groups. He has been a priest for 24 years. Msgr. Lambert Joseph Luna serves has been my vicar general since 2007 and is a key advisor. He has been a priest for 36 years.

Very Rev. Vitus Ezeiruaku is from the Diocese of Awka in Nigeria but has served in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe since 2006. I have learned the joy of the priesthood from him and his fellow Nigerian priests. Fr. Ezeiruaku has been a priest for 18 years and no matter where you see him he will have a smile on his face. The joy of Christ just radiates from him and lights the way for others to follow.

But I have also reflected on others, in different vocations, from whom I have learned.

Sr. Nancy Kazik OSF, former vice chancellor, vicar for religious, editor of the *People of God* newspaper and case manager for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe has taught me to be strong in the face of turmoil. Her strength and pastoral care in dealing with all the abuse cases since my arrival in 1993 until her retirement in 2005 was instrumental in the archdiocese. She entered vowed religious life directly out of high school and has served more than 60 years!

The vocation of marriage embraced by my parents, Joe and Mildred Sheehan, taught me the love of family and how they can nurture the faith formation of children. This can have a ripple effect to future generations. My two brothers, Joseph and John, and my sister Mary all were called to the vocation of marriage. I was called to the vocation of priesthood. I love my two brothers, Jody and John Sheehan, and Mary (may she rest in peace) and their families.

Permanent Deacon Donato Lucero has role modeled the perfect combination of holy orders and marriage. He was ordained a deacon in 1993 and his wife, Carmen (may she rest in peace), supported his ministry with prayer. They were devoted to each other and their children. When

Carmen died, Deacon Donato continued to serve the church and continues to lead others to Christ, including his grandchildren.

Tony Salgado, Executive Director of our Finance Office for the past 30 years, has been instrumental in the financial security of the archdiocese. Deacon Steve Rangel has been a help to me working with our deacons; as well as Deacon Juan Barajas who worked in Hispanic Ministry and Evangelization in the past.

Many lay friends have also been very special to me, such as Jim & Kay Magovern, Bing & Carmoline Grady, Dick & Charlene Knipfing and Allen Sánchez who is the Director of the New Mexico Catholic Bishops Conference. And, of course, my many priests and seminarians for whom I care very much.

I have been impacted by many who live the single life, never taking vows but who strive to serve Jesus Christ and His church and the people of God by living the sacramental life of the church and role modeling our Catholic faith. Some of these are Michelle Montez, Executive Director of Pastoral Ministries, my niece Ann Sheehan and nephew Steve Sheehan; and of course, my Secretary of 15 years, Dolores K. Cordova.

It has been a good 50 years, filled with gifts from God of people who come from all walks of life. I look forward to the years God will grace me with in the future!