

# Msgr. Leo Martinez dies April 5 at age 89

Msgr. Leonel “Leo” Martinez passed away April 5 at the Padua Place residence for priests. He was 89, and was ordained to the priesthood on Dec. 21, 1963.

Father Leo was born on July 3, 1931 in Sabanalargo, Colombia. He was the third in a family of eight brothers. He worked from the age of 14, entered college and studied mechanical engineering. After graduation he became a teacher of industrial mechanics in the college from which he graduated.

“But there was an emptiness within me that material things could not satisfy or fulfill,” he said in a Dec. 30, 1988 interview with *Today’s Catholic* marking his 25th jubilee of priesthood.



Father Leo explained that he dated his vocation to the time he heard a radio broadcast on the parable of the Prodigal Son. He began to think seriously about a religious vocation and entered the seminary when he was 26. He was ordained on Dec. 21, 1962 at Sacred Heart Church in Bogota Colombia, by Bishop Pedro Graw for the Claretian congregation.

For the next decade, from 1964 to 1974, Father Leo served in Colombia and in the Philippines. In 1975 he came to serve in his first parish in the United States.

He ministered as associate pastor at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in San Antonio in 1975 and then at St. John the Evangelist Church in San Marcos in 1976.

In 1977 he was appointed pastor of St. Mary’s Church in San Saba and named director of the Cursillo movement for the Diocese of Austin. This was followed in 1978 by his assignment as associate pastor of St. Joseph’s Church in Bryan, where he continued to serve as director of

the Cursillo movement. Later that year he was assigned as associate pastor of St. Julia's Church in Austin.

In addition to the Cursillo movement, Father Leo was active in the Knights of Columbus and with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Father Leo was the associate pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Uvalde from 1979 to 1983. In 1983 he was appointed pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Crystal City, where he built up the parish into a vibrant community, revitalizing many existing organizations, introducing several new groups, and adding to the parish facilities.

At that time Crystal City was a parish in the Archdiocese of San Antonio. When the Diocese of Laredo was formed in 2000, the church became a part of the Laredo Diocese.

Father Leo was named Honorary Prelate of His Holiness – Monsignor – on Nov. 29, 1984. He served as a member of the archdiocesan College of Consultors from 1985 to 1990 and as dean of the Uvalde Deanery from 1986 to 1991.

He last served at Our Lady of Good Counsel in San Antonio prior to his retirement in 2001.

Reflecting on his priestly vocation more than three decades ago, Father Leo said, "The calling to the priesthood is a gift from God. I always had a fulfilling life doing my apostolate because I am working for God. I own nothing, yet I have it all."

A Mass of Christian Burial will be held Thursday, April 8, at 11 a.m., at the Chapel at St. Anthony Retreat Center at 100 Peter Baque Road in San Antonio. Burial will follow at Padua Place Cemetery.