



**+ BISHOP ALPHONSE NAPOLEÓN GALLEGOS, O.A.R**

**Order of Augustinian Recollects 1958 - 1981**

**Auxiliary Bishop of Sacramento 1981 - 1991**

**1931 – 1991**

# SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

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## Fr John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist

Alphonse Gallegos and his twin brother Eloy were born on February 20, 1931 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Their father, José Angel Gallegos, was a carpenter and their mother, Caciaa Apodaca, a homemaker cared for their 11 children of five sons and six daughters: Sally, Leonard, Ralph, Sena, Arlene, Vangie, Rita, Eloy and Alphonse, twins, Lena and Raymond. The Gallegos children were fourth generation Mexican American. The family moved to Los Angeles and lived in the Watts area where many Hispanic families lived. Alphonse attended public schools in Los Angeles and received the sacrament of confirmation from the hand of then auxiliary bishop Timothy Manning.

In 1950, Alphonse entered the Augustinian Recollect Monastery and attended Rockhurst University, Kansas City, Missouri; St Thomas College, Sparkill, New York; St John University, New York; and Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles. He finished his studies for the priesthood at Tagaste Monastery in Suffern, New York. While a seminarian at Tegaste Monastery, his superiors learned that Alphonse was born with a severe myopic eye condition. He had undergone a number of eye surgeries before entering the seminary but had to wear thick glasses in order to see since he was nearly blind. In spite of his serious eye condition, he was ordained a priest on May 24, 1958 and at first worked in ministries related to his order as prefect of professed students and assistant prior. He also pursued advanced studies and received Masters of Art degrees in psychology, education and religious studies as well as a Master of Education degree in inner city education.

Despite the debilitating eye condition which caused him to lose one of his eyes, he plunged into ministry among the Hispanic community of Los Angeles, serving as pastor of San Miguel and Cristo Rey parishes. He was also an advisor to Los Angeles Cardinal Timothy Manning on Hispanic affairs. He helped set up a training program for the Hispanic permanent diaconate of the archdiocese. Fr Alphonse was fearless in walking the streets of Los Angeles in his attempt to reconcile opposing gangs.

In 1979 he was appointed the first director of Hispanic Affairs of the California Catholic Conference of Bishops. This meant a move for him to Sacramento. He took up residence at St Rose Parish on Franklin Boulevard and after two years working in Hispanic Affairs at the conference, Pope John Paul II appointed Fr Gallegos Titular Bishop of Sasabe and auxiliary bishop of Sacramento. He was ordained a bishop on November 4, 1981 in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament by Bishop Francis Quinn and co-consecrators Archbishop John R Quinn of San Francisco and Archbishop Robert F Sanchez of Albuquerque. His ordination as bishop caused great enthusiasm among the Hispanic community because it was a sign that Hispanics had finally arrived at a position of leadership in both the church and society.

Bishop Gallegos threw himself into his new ministry as bishop. After a year getting to know the diocese, Bishop Quinn appointed Bishop Gallegos pastor of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in 1983. He also served as vicar general of the diocese and director of the Hispanic Apostolate. Since his ministry as auxiliary bishop often demanded that he be away from his parish, Fr Paul Fierro, SDS tended to the day-to-day affairs of the busy parish.

Bishop Gallegos made a special effort to reach out to the low-riders, a popular automobile group among Hispanic youth. As he had done in Los Angeles, he walked the streets of Sacramento trying to avert gang warfare which now included drive-by shootings in Sacramento. Bishop Alphonse was a strong supporter of pro-life causes and often spoke of the need for Catholics to be consistently for life in all its forms.

As time passed, Bishop Gallegos grew frustrated that he had not been given a diocese. According to historian Fr Steve Avella, "In 1985, Bishop Gallegos made a full-court press to be posted in his own diocese, and Bishop Quinn recommended him to Apostolic Delegate Pio Laghi. However, troubles with his eyes, some discontent among Hispanic clergy with his leadership, and a lack of attention to detail may have precluded his appointment."



**Bishop Gallegos Talks with Pope John Paul II**

I remember the night before his untimely death when he addressed the deacons and their wives at the annual deacon dinner at St Rose Parish in Roseville. He spoke with great emotion about the need for Catholics to speak up for life in all its forms. That would be his final farewell message because the next night, Sunday, October 6, 1991, the chauffeur driven car he was riding in suddenly lost all power as it neared Yuba City on Highway 99. The bishop was on his way home from a confirmation that day at Sacred Heart Parish in Gridley. As Bishop Gallegos got out of the car to push the vehicle off the road, a young woman driving on the same road came over the hill and did not see the stalled car ahead of her. She crashed into the car, striking Bishop Gallegos and hurling his body a hundred feet, killing him instantly. His sudden and tragic death sent a shock-wave throughout the diocese, across California and the whole nation, causing great grief among Hispanic Catholics who knew and loved him.

The Funeral Mass for Bishop Gallegos brought together thousands of people to the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. Bishops from across the United States came for the funeral of their brother bishop and friend. Bishop Francis Quinn presided at the Funeral Mass and Cardinal Roger Mahoney gave the homily in both English and Spanish. Hispanic low-riders of Sacramento

formed an honor guard on the highway to St Mary Cemetery and the funeral procession was one of the longest in Sacramento history.

A few years after Bishop Gallegos' death, a group of his admirers gathered public support and funds to erect a monument to Bishop Gallegos on Eleventh Street between K and L Streets. Sacramento city officials named that section of Eleventh Street *Gallegos Square* in honor of the bishop. A statue of Bishop Gallegos designed by John Houser was unveiled and blessed in February 1997 at *Gallegos Square* which is next to the Cathedral in downtown Sacramento.



Photo by John E Boll 2013

### **The Body of Bishop Gallegos was moved to Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in 2006**

At the 2004 general chapter of the Augustinian Recollects, the Augustinian community advanced a plan to begin the process of beatification and canonization of Bishop Gallegos. His cause for beatification was opened at a special liturgy at the Cathedral in January 2006. His tomb was opened and his body examined as the Vatican process for canonization demands, and after a Pontifical Mass was celebrated at the Cathedral with his casket present, his body was taken to the National Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe on 7<sup>th</sup> and T Streets where it was entombed in a vault in a small side chapel of the church where he had been pastor. His tomb is now easily accessible to people so they can come to ask for his intercession. If a miracle happens and can be shown to have occurred through Bishop Gallegos' intercession, he could be raised to the rank of *Blessed*.

Bishop Gallegos' significance to the diocese was summed up well in an editorial of the *Catholic Herald* in these words: *“Ministry to Hispanics was already one of the diocese's priorities when he was named auxiliary bishop. Yet he was able to bring to Hispanic ministry in the diocese something it did not have before. He embodied a sense of identity, provided a rallying point, became a symbol, almost a sacramental sign of both the possibility and the need for a church that was one body, though many members.”*

Although Bishop Gallegos was auxiliary bishop for ten years and died at the age of 60, he left a grand legacy of faith and service to the People of God of the Church of Sacramento. He challenged all of us to be who we are, the Body of Christ and the living stones of the Temple of God.

May Bishop Alphonse rest in the peace of God and intercede for us, the Church of Sacramento, which he loved!



From the Diocesan Archives

## **Bishop Alphonse Napoleón Gallegos' Coat of Arms**

**“Love One Another”**