

Fr. Edmundo Rodriguez: Engaged for Peace

By Claire Peterson

In the turbulent sixties, when protests in the streets occasionally flared into chaos, the *Wall Street Journal* predicted the next big riot would happen in San Antonio, Texas. It didn't. Instead, the potential for destruction turned into productive training for lay Church leaders, and tensions were eased. Father Edmundo Rodriguez, SJ, played a critical role in defusing the situation.

Born in El Paso, Texas, in 1935, Fr. Rodriguez entered the Society of Jesus in 1953 and was ordained in 1966. He was assigned as assistant pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in San Antonio in 1968. There, lawyers, union laborers and college professors approached him, concerned about police shootings of unarmed youth. Rodriguez and fellow priests offered the church as a meeting place where they planned a city-wide march from Our Lady of the Lake College to the Alamo in protest of the violence. They also worked their networks.



city was neglected, but once we did that, the city was no longer neglecting the old parts of town." He helped solidify PADRES (*Asociados para Derechos Religiosos, Educativos, y Sociales* / Priests Associated for Religious, Education, and Social Rights) and was involved in launching COPS (Communities Organized for Public Service).

These efforts in San Antonio succeeded so well that calls came in from Laredo and Houston, Texas, as well as Los Angeles and other cities asking for help to create similar programs.

In 1980, Rodriguez became the Assistant for International and Pastoral Ministry for the former New Orleans Province and traveled the world.

While in Rome, he fell ill, but spent his time at the Roman Curia infirmary in the room next to Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ. He remembers their conversations warmly. When the Japanese provincial came to visit Arrupe, Fr. Rodriguez translated. "That was a real treat for me."

He became provincial of the New Orleans Province in 1983 and served until 1989. During that time, he visited Sri Lanka in the midst of a civil war, disguising himself as a long-time missionary in order to reach Jesuits who were working there.

At the Archdiocese of Dallas seminary, he facilitated understanding between seminarians of different cultures. Later, he became the director of the Jesuit Spirituality Center at St. Charles College in Grand Coteau, La.

Reflecting upon his life, Fr. Rodriguez, recalled, "For as long as I can remember, I kept busy, from the time I was four or five years old." This remains true. He continues in retreat and spiritual direction ministry at the St. Alphonsus Rodriguez Pavilion in Grand Coteau. He enjoys speaking Spanish while leading retreats and during Mass.

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"Several of us got the police chief's private number," Fr. Rodriguez recalled. "He put some of the policemen who were involved in those shootings on desk assignment rather than street assignment. Things calmed down."

Rodriguez also helped change the city council to require a representative from each district. "Most of the money the city spent using bond issues were for development where the city needed to grow. The old