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Cardinal's death triggers speculation about new Filipino cardinals

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NCR Today

MANILA, Philippines -- Former Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Clergy Cardinal Jose Sanchez was laid to rest Monday morning near Manila after a funeral Mass presided by Cardinal Ricardo Vidal, Cebu's retired archbishop.

Sanchez, 91, died of multiple organ failure Friday at Cardinal Santos Memorial Medial Center, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) said.

Pope Benedict XVI sent a message offering his condolences to Vidal and gratefully recalling "the late cardinal's dedicated service to the Lord as priest and bishop in his native country, as well as our service together in the Roman Curia during the pontificate of Blessed John Paul II."

Sanchez's death triggered hopes and speculation about the pope creating new cardinals for the Philippines.

While the country has two surviving cardinals, both Vidal, 81 and Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales, 80, are beyond the 79-year-old voting age for a conclave, which elects the pope's successor.

Under normal church observance, their successors, Archbishops Luis Antonio Tagle of Manila and Jose Palma of Cebu, would be named cardinal, canon lawyer and retired Archbishop Oscar Cruz said.

"I'm sure that even without the passing away of Cardinal Sanchez, the Holy Father does not forget us," said former Ambassador to the Vatican Henrietta de Villa.

Sanchez was born March 17, 1920, in Pandan, Philippines, and was ordained a priest for Sorsogon in

1946. At 47, he was appointed auxiliary bishop of Caceres and was named coadjutor bishop of Lucena three years later. He succeeded Bishop Alfred Obviar in 1976, then became archbishop of the Nueva Segovia in 1982.

He left the Philippines in 1985 after Pope John Paul II named him secretary of the Congregation of the Evangelization of Peoples. He served in the post until he was named prefect of the Congregation for Clergy in July of 1991, the same year he was elevated as cardinal. He resigned from the position in June of 1996.

He was appointed Cardinal-Priest of S. Pio V a Villa Carpegna on Feb. 26, 2002, at age 81.

His nephew, Manolo Sanchez, said at the funeral Mass that Sanchez planned to stay in Rome, but later came home to help the Philippines church lobby against the RH (reproductive health) Bill. Bishops and church members have been blocking the enactment of House Bill 4244, which provides for "a comprehensive policy on responsible parenthood, reproductive health and population and development."

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Until his death, Sanchez lived in a Dominican Daughters of the Immaculate Mother school in Quezon City.

In his homily for the funeral Mass, Vidal told the people packed into the Cathedral-Shrine of the Good Shepherd in Quezon City about Sanchez's faithfulness to God. This and his "passionate love" for the church characterized his 65-year ministry as priest and bishop in the Philippines, as well as in various roles he served in the Vatican, Vidal said.

He said strongest among Sanchez's passions was for increasing the number and addressing the needs of priests.

Manolo, in his message from the Sanchez family at the end of Mass, said the cardinal's last wish was for increased priestly vocations. He shared Sanchez's request to skip flowers in favor of donations to a fund for priests.

Vidal cited among the late cardinal's achievements the Vatican congregation's Directory on the Life and Ministry of Priests issued by Sanchez on Holy Thursday 1994. He suggested to about 100 priests at Mass to read the document issued in response to doctrinal, disciplinary and pastoral questions confronting priests in "these times of new evangelization." It touches on priests' identity, communion and spirituality.

Palma, CBCP's president, said in a statement that Sanchez's ministry is "worth emulating," and Tagle wrote that Sanchez's life "became a gift of service to the Church and society."

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