Monsignor Carlos Sanchez, 93, was an architect by profession before he entered the priesthood. Here he holds his 1928 certificate of graduation from Yale University with a degree in architecture. As a junior draftsman, Sanchez worked on plans for the Empire State Building.

"The only things that make sense to me are the love of Christ and the Catholic Church," says Sanchez, shown here with the rosary he keeps in a pouch at his side.

Retired priest found calling relatively late

By ROD DREHER
Advocate staff writer

Not all men are meant to be fathers in the traditional sense. Some are called to be fathers to all men. This is the story of how Father Carlos Sanchez, 93, a retired monsignor of the Baton Rouge diocese, found his calling.

Sanchez was born to a wealthy Guatemalan planter and his English wife in the closing years of the 19th century. Raised in comfort by an English governess in the family villa, Sanchez left Guatemala City after World War I to study at tiny but prestigious Dartmouth College in New Hampshire.

When he arrived at Dartmouth, Sanchez, as he puts it, "a good Catholic boy." At Dartmouth, Sanchez encountered professors who "jacked hammeried" his foundation of faith. "Boys like me, who grew up in the faith, who took it for granted, were not prepared to defend it," he said. "Those brilliant minds made a lot of boys lose their faith. They made me lose mine. Everything became so uncertain."

He had planned to become a medical missionary, but now that his faith was gone, that dream was over. Sanchez still held on to his idealism, and decided to study medicine so he might do charity work in China. Since it was easier to study medicine in Europe than in the Far East, Sanchez made his way to Berlin.

The young Guatemalan witnessed terrible hardships in the German capital, which was reeling from the suffering of the Great War and harsh punitive measures imposed on Germany by the Allies.

For daily exercise, Sanchez walks around the pool at his retirement complex, praying the rosary every step of the way.

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In Berlin, Sanchez became involved with a group of Quakers who had set up a house where hungry students could find a hot meal. “The Quakers did so much good for those students, though maybe they didn’t realize it. Young people don’t always realize the good others are trying to do for them,” he said.

Sanchez felt drawn to the Quaker faith, to its quietude of worship and gentleness of spirit. He began to consider himself a Quaker. He abandoned his medical studies because he hated the vivisection all medical students were required to perform.

“At that point, I had no discipline. I always thought you should do what you didn’t want to do in order to discipline yourself. I had always wanted to follow artistic pursuits, especially architecture,” he said.

At Yale, Sanchez was “like a duck in water.” He finished a four-year architecture course in three, graduating in 1928 with a master’s degree in architecture. The graduate found work in New York City with a prominent architectural firm, and was a junior draftsman on one of the century’s most enduring landmarks: the Empire State Building.

In his early 30s, as a brilliant up-and-comer with a marvelous career in the world’s greatest city, Carlos Sanchez too a trip that would change his life. Back in Guatemala City, his aged father decided to return to the Roman Catholic Church before he died. His mother arranged a special Mass of reconciliation, and invited all the old man’s children to attend. Sanchez returned home from New York for the occasion.

Now, the Sanchez family didn’t realize that the son who had lived so far away for so long had ceased practicing his faith. Not wishing to upset his family, the architect went to confession...