

# Priest who helped Nicaraguan exiles may leave parish

By KAREN BRANCH  
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The Rev. Ernesto Garcia-Rubio, the Cuban-born priest renowned for aiding Nicaraguan exiles in Dade County, has left his parish and may not return, according to parish officials.

Garcia-Rubio is studying a theology course at the Instituto Teologico Pastoral in Medellin, Colombia.

"He just celebrated 25 years as a priest, so the archdiocese sent him on sabbatical," said the Rev. Francisco Santana, his replacement at the Our Lady of the Divine Providence Catholic Church, 10205 W. Flagler St.

During a telephone conversation Friday, Garcia-Rubio, 51, said whether he returns to the Divine Providence parish "is up to the archbishop." Garcia-Rubio helped found the church in 1980.

Representatives from the Archdiocese of Miami's archbishop, chancellor and communications offices would not comment Friday.

Through the grapevine, poor Nicaraguans arriving in Miami without shelter always knew where they could turn. Garcia-Rubio helped feed, house and clothe thousands of newly arrived Nicaraguan exiles.

"Father Garcia-Rubio especially helped the poor classes," said Cristobal Mendoza, president of the Committee of Poor Nicaraguans in Exile. "He would find a place to stay for youngsters who didn't have any family here to turn to."

The priest left Miami for Colombia April 7.

He said his theology course will last three more months, and then he will return to Miami.

"It hurts us that he has gone,"



The Rev. Ernesto Garcia-Rubio: Studying theology in Colombia.

Mendoza said. "We remember him affectionately."

Tony Duran, president of the Sweetwater City Council and owner of a barbershop there, said he used to cut the priest's hair.

"He's a real humanitarian," he said. "The Nicaraguans didn't have anything and he helped them."

Mendoza said he misses having a partner in his work to aid down-and-out Nicaraguan refugees.