

Many NM Catholics are thankful for good lab jobs

By [Rev. Vincent Paul ChÃ¡vez / Pastor, Saint Therese of the Infant Jesus Parish and Catholic School, Albuquerque](#)

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I wish to apprise Archbishop John Charles Wester of some of the rest of the story to his June 19 guest column in the Sunday Journal, "Work for peace and well-being, not for nuclear weapons."

The largest owner of land in New Mexico is the U.S. federal government. These federally owned lands are the national forests, BLM and reservations of the ancient and noble sovereign peoples of New Mexico.

New Mexico is really a welfare state to the U.S. government. In the early 1960s, N.M.'s U.S. Sen. Dennis ChÃ¡vez – represented since 1966 in the U.S. Capitol's Statuary Hall – worked to convince the Kennedy administration of this and convinced them that as the federal government owns most of the land of New Mexico, New Mexicans were unable to benefit from land ownership. The result was the creation of the national scientific laboratories at Los Alamos and Sandia to provide employment to New Mexicans.

As 14th-generation New Mexicans of Spanish heritage, my very large extended family members have benefited immensely from good jobs at national laboratories in the state. In the past and currently, many immediate family members, uncles, aunts, cousins, siblings, a nephew, niece and parents were/are employed by our national laboratories as engineers and in other good-paying federal jobs with health insurance and retirement. I speak for many New Mexicans of Catholic affiliation who are/were provided good employment and retirement from the labs and thus are/were financially able to support the many ministries of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe and their local parishes.

My parents' employment at Sandia Labs paid for most of my nine years of seminary/priestly formation, and my parents even supplemented the annual food budget at the Santa Fe Seminary. The Archdiocese of Santa Fe paid the lesser portion of graduate school in the least costly seminary – room and board – and university, \$500 tuition per year, in Belgium.

My parents – both retired from Sandia Laboratories after 30 and 25 years – were able to send their sons to Catholic elementary, high school and Catholic colleges and universities in New Mexico (and) throughout the U.S. and Europe.

I remember being in the Archdiocesan Seminary in Santa Fe and the Catholic Christian Brothers College of Santa Fe when I found out what my dad did for a living. As children at Holy Ghost Parish and Catholic School, the answer that most of the students gave at the time was that “my dad, my mom works at the base.” Holy Ghost Parish and School on south San Pedro near Gibson was filled with students and families who lived and benefitted from Sandia Labs or Kirtland Air Force Base.

My dad designed guidance systems for weapons. Over the years, at the dinner table we would hear about other projects they were involved with such as the development of an insulin pump.

My mother and her group received a presidential commendation for a land mine detector they had developed from President George H.W. Bush. I believe the late Princess Diana of Wales used these in her humanitarian work.

I once asked my parents how they justified their work and employment from a moral stance as faithful, active, practicing Catholics. They said the labs were a source of employment where they were able to utilize their gifts and talents and feed, clothe, support and educate their family and remain here in New Mexico close to extended family and our own lands.

Good enough for me and another brother also ordained to priesthood for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.

You will discover similar stories from your Catholic people in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe who have association with LANL and Sandia National Labs.

I am proud of the archbishop’s pastoral letters and that he is applauded internationally for dedication to the important issue of nuclear disarmament. (But) the issue of New Mexico and the national labs is intricate.