



+ BISHOP ALDEN JOHN BELL

Priest of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles 1932 - 1956
Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles 1956 -1962
Sixth Bishop of the Diocese of Sacramento 1962 -1979
1904 - 1982

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Fr John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist

Alden John Bell was born in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada on July 11, 1904, son of Henry and Catherine (Galvin) Bell. He received his earliest education at Orillia, Ontario. Following a brief time in Ohio, the family moved to Southern California in 1918 where Alden enrolled in Sacred Heart School in Los Angeles. After his father's death, young Alden sold newspapers at the foot of Angels Flight, the funicular railway in Los Angeles, to help support his mother and six brothers.

Alden's Early Days in Los Angeles

Alden worked for four years as an office boy for the Pacific Telephone Company and at night took classes at the Polytechnic High School in commercial drawing and mechanics. In 1922, he entered the seminary to study for the priesthood for the Diocese of Monterey-Los Angeles. He attended St Joseph Seminary in Mountain View and St Patrick Seminary, Menlo Park and was ordained a priest by Bishop John J Cantwell on May 14, 1932 for the Diocese of Los Angeles – San Diego.

Father Bell begins his Ministry

Father Bell's first assignment was as a curate at St Elizabeth Parish in Altadena. He was then transferred to the Cathedral Chapel Parish in Los Angeles to serve as a curate. In 1937, the diocese sent him to the Catholic University of America for graduate studies where he earned a Master of Science degree in social work. He returned to Los Angeles and was assigned to the staff of the Catholic Welfare Bureau.

During World War II, Fr Bell served as a military chaplain for the Fifth US Air Force Division in New Guinea, the Philippines, Okinawa, Japan and other areas of the Pacific Theater of war. He returned from military service as a lieutenant colonel.

Named Monsignor by Pope Pius XII

After his arrival back to Los Angeles, Fr Bell returned to work at the Catholic Welfare Bureau. In 1950, Pope Pius XII named him a papal chamberlain and five years later a domestic prelate. In 1953, Monsignor Bell was appointed Rector of St Vibiana Cathedral and the following year he became director of Catholic Charities for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles

On April 11, 1956, Monsignor Bell was named to the Titular See of Rhodopolis and Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles. He was ordained a bishop on June 4, 1956 by Cardinal James Francis McIntyre. His episcopal ordination was the seventh held in St Vibiana Cathedral. Bishop Bell was made chancellor of the archdiocese while continuing as rector of the cathedral. During his years there he supervised several renovation projects on the cathedral as well as Our Lady's Chapel on Flower Street.

Bishop Bell named Sixth Bishop of Sacramento

On March 30, 1962, Pope John XIII appointed Bishop Bell to the Diocese of Sacramento as the sixth bishop of the diocese. On May 15, Cardinal McIntyre installed Bishop Bell at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in the presence of the bishops from the region, the priests of the diocese and the People of God of Sacramento.

Bishop Bell attend all the Sessions of Vatican II

As Bishop Bell was beginning his work as the bishop of Sacramento, Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council and Bishop Bell attended all the sessions of the Council. He often shared his experiences of the Council with the priests and people of the diocese when he returned home after each session. When the Council ended in 1965, he faced the great challenge of implementing the liturgical changes in the diocese with the help of his priests.



With many changes taking place both in the church and in American society, the 1960s and 1970s were busy ones for Bishop Bell. Within the first decade as bishop of Sacramento, he had established three parishes, opened four elementary schools and oversaw the construction of three high schools. He established a diocesan Liturgical Commission, an Office for Continuing Education for Priests, a Commission for Ecumenical Affairs and a separate department for the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.

Bishop Bell Physically Attacked in his Office

Many of us remember the day in October 1979 when a mentally ill man named William Luthin came to the chancery office then located behind the Cathedral and walked past the secretaries and entered Bishop Bell's office. Bishop Bell was preparing for his trip to Chicago to meet Pope John Paul II who was making a pastoral visit to

Bishop Bell Ordains Gerald Ryle 1968

the United States. This young man attacked the bishop with a knife. Luckily, because of the quick action of Jean Tamaki, Bishop Bell's secretary, she was able to grab Luthin's shirt and pull him away from the bishop. Luthin then ran out of the chancery and escaped. Had Jean not intervened at that moment, Bishop Bell may well have been killed by this deranged attacker. Luthin went to a hospital and told the nurses to call somebody because he had stabbed a priest. The police arrested Luthin at the hospital and found the knife on an office chair with the purchase receipt still attached from a nearby store.

Bishop Bell was taken to Mercy General Hospital with wounds to his hands and ribs. Needless to say, Bishop Bell did not attend the Papal Mass in Chicago that year.

In 1964, Jean Tamaki, the bishop's secretary, received the *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* award, the highest papal honor given to a lay person, from Bishop Bell, probably at the encouragement of Bishop McGucken. But given the fact that Jean was instrumental in saving Bishop Bell's life at

the hand of an attacker in his own office in 1979, this only confirms how valuable she has been to the bishops she has served over the decades.

Bishop Bell Prepares to Retire

Having reached the age of 75, Bishop Bell sent his letter of resignation to Pope John Paul II and was granted permission to retire in 1979. He continued to serve as administrator of the diocese until his successor, Bishop Francis A Quinn, was appointed to Sacramento. Bishop Bell continued to live in the Bishop's Residence on Fair Oaks Boulevard. After only two years of retirement he was diagnosed with cancer of the esophagus and died at Mercy Hospital in Sacramento on August 28, 1982 at the age of 78.

Funeral Mass for Bishop Bell held in the Cathedral

A Funeral Mass was held for Bishop Bell in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament and his body was entombed at the Bishops' Crypt at St Mary Cemetery, Sacramento, where he joined the other deceased bishops who had guided the Diocese of Sacramento in previous generations.

Bishop Bell was a Gentleman

Bishop Bell was handsome in appearance and reserved in personality. He had an air about him of culture, sophistication and refinement. He was always a gentleman, approachable and fair in his dealings with his priests and respected by both clergy and laity. We are grateful for his calm leadership during a very difficult and turbulent time of change in the life of the church and the world. May God grant Bishop Alden John Bell the fullness of life and joy in the glorious Kingdom of Heaven.



Photo by John E Boll, 2014

Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament



From the Diocesan Archives

Bishop Alden John Bell's Coat of Arms

"Charity"