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FATHER MICHAEL KIELY A Priesthood that Spanned Five Bishops

By Father John Dwyer, printed in the October 14, 1976 issue of the *Catholic Herald*



Photo from Diocesan Archives

Father Michael Kiely
His Priesthood Spanned Five Bishops

One of the “leading lights” of the Sacramento diocese during the days of Bishop Grace was Father Michael Kiely, a native of Kinsale, County Cork, Ireland. Father Kiely actually served under five bishops. It was Bishop O’Connell who accepted him into the Grass Valley diocese after he graduated from St. Vincent’s in the City of Cork, sent him to All Hallows and helped pay for his education.

But when Michael Kiely was ordained a priest on June 25, 1882 and sailed for California he found two bishops because Bishop Manogue had become the coadjutor in the previous year. On October 26, 1882, Father Kiely was appointed pastor of Cherokee in Nevada County where he remained until January 1884. His next assignment was as assistant at the Marysville Cathedral where on March 17, 1884 he witnessed the mixed feelings of old Bishop O’Connell when his resignation became effective.

Now his superior was Bishop Manogue who in the same year sent Father Kiely to be pastor of Eureka, Nevada. This assignment was to be terminated by another change, this time because of a change in diocesan boundaries.



Photo from the Archives of the Diocese of Reno

St Brendan Church, Eureka, Nevada

In 1886 the first change took place when the Grass Valley Diocese was changed to Sacramento. Then in April 1887 a second change was made when the State of Nevada was split vertically, with the western portion remaining in the Sacramento Diocese and the eastern portion, including Eureka, going to the Vicariate of Utah and Nevada under Bishop Lawrence Scanlan.



Photo by John E Boll 2012

Church of the Assumption, Ferndale

During these years Father Kiely continued to serve the diocese until in 1934 his eyesight failed him he had to resign all commitments. He died peacefully on January 16, 1936 after a long service of fifty four years and after serving five bishops, O'Connell, Manogue, Grace, Keane and Armstrong.

Therefore, Bishop Manogue recalled Father Kiely to Reno where he began a ten year pastorate. During these years he took no vacation until the year 1895 when he returned for a visit to Ireland. By the time his next transfer took place he was giving obedience to another bishop, this time, Bishop Thomas Grace who recalled him from Reno and sent him to Ferndale, an assignment which lasted fourteen years until 1912.

In that year when the Grass Valley parish became vacant due to the death of its pastor Father P.J. Clyne, Bishop Grace transferred Father Kiely to that venerable parish. He remained there until 1919 when he was brought closer to Sacramento to the parish of Roseville and was given several diocesan positions.

By 1922, ill health was plaguing this excellent priest so that he asked to resign his parish and began to live in Sacramento where he continued his diocesan commitments. It was at this time that he welcomed his fourth bishop to the diocese in the person of Bishop Patrick Keane who became the Ordinary on May 20, 1922.