

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 3

Father John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist

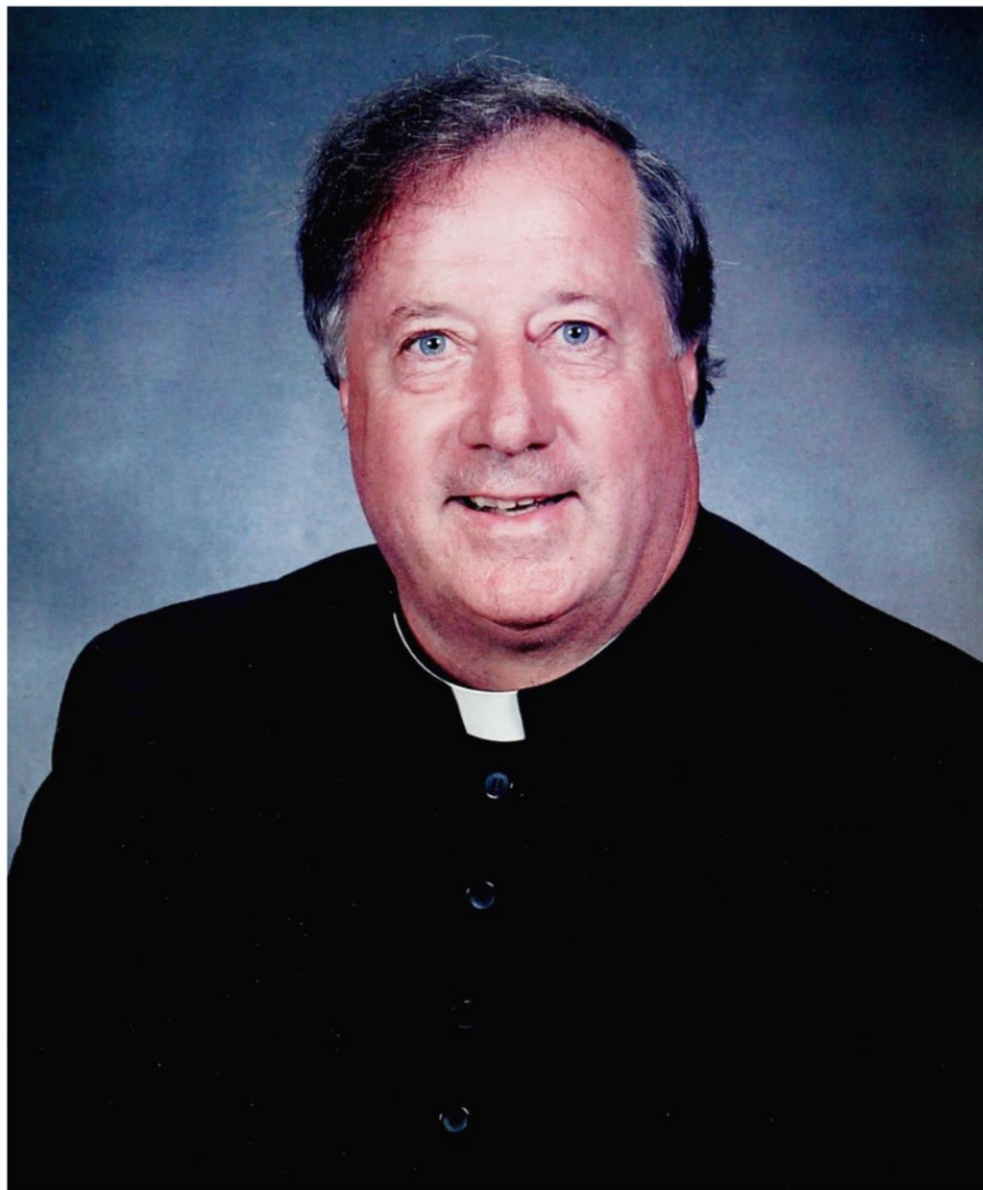
No 30

Father John J Cantwell

Native Son of Tipperary, Ireland

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor Emeritus of Saint Patrick Parish, Placerville



John J Cantwell was born in the family home at Moyne, Thurles, County Tipperary, Ireland on June 20, 1945. He was the third child of four born to Patrick Cantwell and Johanna Grimes. John's sister and brothers are Anne, Anthony and Jimmy.

JOHN BEGINS SCHOOL

John began his education at the local Moyne National School in 1949 when he was about four years of age. After completing grammar school in 1958, he began high school at the local Christian Brothers School in Thurles and graduated in 1963.

Patrick and Johanna Cantwell, John's Parents



SAINT PATRICK SEMINARY, THURLES

After high school, John entered Saint Patrick Seminary in Thurles in 1963. At that time, it was quite difficult for a student to be accepted for seminary studies for one's home diocese in Ireland since there was an abundance of priests at that time. As he began his first year of seminary studies, John's cousin, Father Michael Cormack, a priest of the diocese of Sacramento, returned home to Ireland for vacation. Father Michael suggested that John apply to the Sacramento diocese and join the many other Irish priests ministering in California, a land of promise and sunshine. John made up his mind then and there to apply to Sacramento. He was accepted by Sacramento's Bishop Alden J Bell and during his first semester in Thurles, John became a seminarian for Sacramento.



ORDAINED A PRIEST FOR SACRAMENTO

John spent six years at Saint Patrick College in Thurles preparing himself for ministry in California. He was ordained a priest in the local Cathedral of the Assumption in Thurles on June 7, 1969.

LEAVING IRELAND FOR A NEW LAND

One of the lowest moments of Father John's life was the day he left the land of his birth and home of his education. Saying good-bye to his parents and family

ST PATRICK SEMINARY, THURLES

whom he loved so much and leaving for a new land 6,000 miles away from home was very difficult for him. But suddenly that sadness was softened when the pilot of the flight to Boston announced that on that very day America had landed a man on the moon. He immediately felt that maybe this giant step for mankind might also mean one lucky step forward for him. Maybe this was his lucky day - July 20th , 1969 - and his sadness turned into joy.



Photo courtesy of Father John Cantwell

Father John with his parents and uncles and aunts on his Ordination Day

FIRST PARISH ASSIGNMENT IN FAIRFIELD



Photo by John E Boll

Holy Spirit Parish, Fairfield

Father John's next memory was the wonderful welcome he received from his first pastor, Father James Vaughan, in Fairfield when he said, "As one Irishman to another, you are most welcome to America." John felt at that moment that he belonged to a great brotherhood. Other priests used phrases like "Fratres in Unum" or "Brothers as One" and he felt at home with them from that time onward.

HOLY SPIRIT PARISH, SACRAMENTO



Photo by John E Boll

Holy Spirit Church, Sacramento

Father John's second assignment was Holy Spirit Parish in Sacramento with Monsignor Patrick McHugh as pastor.

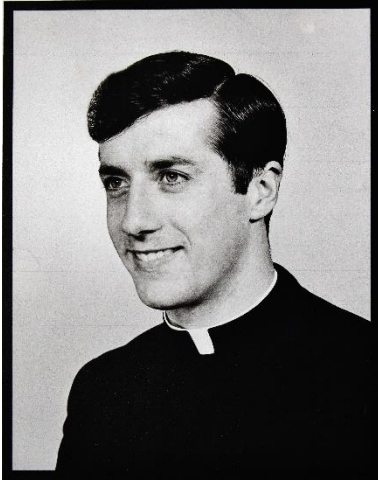
What stands out in Father John's memory most about that time was the presence of five priests living together in the rectory. The five were Monsignor Patrick McHugh, pastor; Monsignor Ed O'Neill, Superintendent of Catholic Schools; Father James Murphy, assistant editor of the Catholic Herald; Father Declan O'Sullivan, first assistant; and Father John Cantwell who was the new priest on staff.

Father Cantwell spent five very happy years at Holy Spirit parish before moving to his next assignment, Saint Philomene Parish in Sacramento, with Father Jimmy O'Dea as pastor.

CHANGES OF VATICAN II

As a young priest, Father John recalls the fun times he had with Father Pat Leslie helping Monsignor Ed O'Neill implement the New Mass - Missa Normativa - after the Vatican Council promulgated its decree, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. They had no modern high-tech equipment, just a few slide photos of the major envisioned changes in the liturgy and that was it. The diocese held training sessions for the priests all over the diocese and surprisingly enough the new liturgical changes were accepted quite well.

ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD



Father Cantwell's Ordination Photo

But life was not all joy in those days of the 1960s and 1970s. There was major turbulence and unrest in many places, including northern California, over the war in Vietnam and the implementation of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. He was surprised at the high level of unrest and anger between conservatives and liberals that could be seen almost everywhere.

Father John was troubled by the more than thirty priests who left the ministry in the Sacramento diocese during those years. But it was the faithful people in the pews who saved the day for Father Cantwell and many other priests. He has always felt that the American Catholic people are the best in the world. They were the ones who supported the priests during those difficult days. Father John says, "They were there for us, they cared about us, they forgave us, they praised us, they advised us, and above all they loved us. They made our lives worthwhile and life as a priest went on."



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Philomene Church, Sacramento

HAPPY DAYS WITH FATHER O'DEA

Father Cantwell recalls his five great years, 1975-1980, with Father Jimmy O'Dea at Saint Philomene parish in Sacramento as a "journey of blessings." Father Jimmy was just a joy to be with. Father John said he would gladly pattern his life after Father O'Dea. During those days, we had the updating and renewal of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Marriage. Seminars for the clergy were held on the liturgical changes initiated by the Second Vatican Council. The priests then instructed the people about the coming changes in the liturgy during Sunday homilies for four consecutive weeks.

CHAPLAIN AT MERCY SAN JUAN

After his five years at Saint Philomene Parish, Father John spent eight busy years as a teacher at Mercy High School and chaplain at Mercy San Juan Hospital in Carmichael.

PASTOR OF CORPUS CHRISTI PARISH, TAHOE CITY



Photo by John E Boll

Corpus Christi Church, Tahoe City

In 1988, Bishop Francis A Quinn appointed Father John pastor of Corpus Christi Parish in Tahoe City for "six beautiful years." The parish had nine Masses during the summer months to accommodate all the visitors in the Tahoe City area. He remembers well Father Pat Coffey who loved to be with the people in Tahoe City because he enjoyed their company when he saw them at their best while on vacation. Father John also enjoyed being with Father Louie Raymond, a

Jesuit priest from Montreal, Canada, who helped out in the summertime for 35 consecutive years at Tahoe City.

MOVE TO HOLY FAMILY PARISH, CITRUS HEIGHTS

After six years in Tahoe City, Bishop Quinn appointed Father John pastor of Holy Family Parish in Citrus Heights, a large suburban multi-cultural community. There, he quickly learned what complexity and challenge meant. The parish had the largest Catholic school in the diocese with 641 students plus 120 children in preschool. There were over 35 different organizations in the parish and Father John will never forget those numbers.



Photo by John E Boll

Holy Family Church, Citrus Heights

FINAL PARISH ASSIGNMENT, PLACERVILLE

Father Cantwell's last parish assignment was pastor of Saint Patrick Parish in Placerville where he spent fifteen glorious years of ministry. The Parish Council president, Jim Yates, summed up Father John's many years of ministry in Placerville with this observation: "Almost everything Father John tried to do in the Gold Country turned into gold, which led the people to the greatest treasure of all, Jesus Christ, the Savior." Again, it was the positive attitude of the people and their good will that made the difference.

RESTORED ROLE OF THE LAITY

The Second Vatican Council emphasized the role of the laity in the modern church so Father John always consulted his parishioners when major decisions had to be made. The parishioners were always just great and responded with unbelievable generosity.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Patrick Church, Placerville

INCREASE IN OFFERTORY GIVING IN PLACERVILLE

One time in Placerville, Father John appealed for an increase in the parish Offertory Program and the parishioners responded with a 31% increase in the Sunday collection. When a pastor sees that kind of support and generosity, he is motivated and inspired to care for his people with renewed vigor and joy.

STATE CHAPLAIN OF THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS

Father Cantwell served as California State Chaplain of the Knights of Columbus for two separate years. This charitable group of Catholic men numbers over 75,000 in the state of California. Father John also serves as Moderator of the Sacramento Diocesan Council of Catholic Women to which every Catholic woman in the diocese belongs either potentially or actually.

LIFE OF RETIREMENT

Father Cantwell retired from full-time ministry in 2015 and now lives in his own home in Sun City, Roseville. He is happy to help his brother priests by celebrating Masses in parishes as needed.

He enjoys the loyal company of his many priest friends as they continue golfing or skiing and having meals together on their day off. This support group has been the most valuable experience of his entire career.



Father John in Retirement



Father John and his Mother Johanna at her 80th birthday

Asked about what has been his choicest memory of his priesthood, Father John's answer comes quickly - "Appreciation of how welcomed I have been to the Sacramento Diocese."

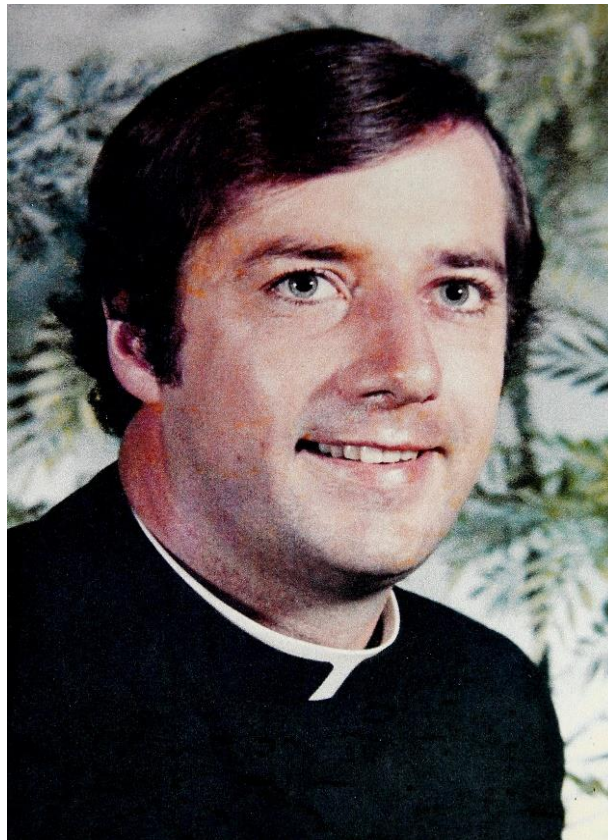
ACHIVIST'S COMMENT

As we read the story of Father John Cantwell's life of ministry in the diocese of Sacramento, it is clear that his life has been joyful. He had positive experiences beginning with his first pastors who helped him form a positive attitude about ministry. He learned that consulting the wisdom of the parish community whenever an important decision had to be made was good pastoral practice in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.

As Jim Yates of Placerville observed, "Almost everything Father John tried in the Gold Country turned to gold which led the people to the greatest treasure, Jesus Christ the Lord."

We thank Father John for his 48 years of happy priestly ministry and we wish him many great years in retirement as he continues to serve the people of the diocese as an active retired priest.

AD MULTOS ANNOS!



Father John J Cantwell

Photos on Father John's Journey of Life



The Cantwell Children

L-R, Father John, his sister Anne, brothers Anthony and Jimmy and brother-in-law Pat Casey



Father John on his Ordination Day in 1969 with Archbishop Thomas Morris and his Five Aunts who are Religious Sisters



John at age seven in 1952



Father John with two of his aunts



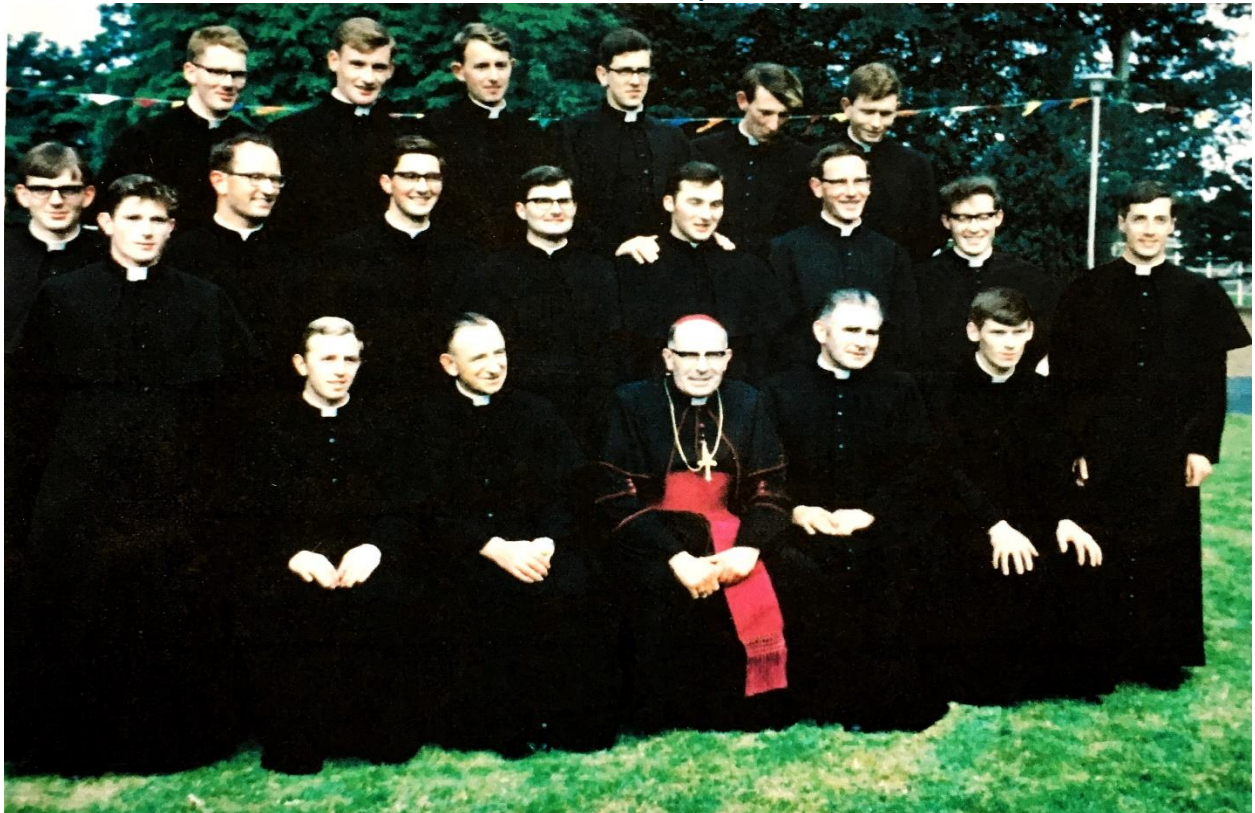
The newly ordained
Father John J Cantwell

Photos courtesy of Fr Cantwell



Photo courtesy of Fr John Cantwell

**Father John Celebrates a Wedding Mass in Saint Mary Church, Moyne, Ireland,
Church of his Baptism**



The 1969 Ordination Class of Saint Patrick Seminary, Thurles, Ireland

St. Patrick's College, Thurles.

Ordination Class

1969



REV. MICHAEL PURTILL
Hexham & Newcastle



REV. JOHN CANTWELL
Sacramento



REV. JOHN FLOOD
Shrewsbury



REV. EDWARD BOLAND
Duluth



REV. DANIEL TREACY
Hexham & Newcastle



REV. PATRICK BROWNE
Paterson



REV. ROBERT McNAMARA
Los Angeles



REV. PATRICK CARLEY
Salt Lake City



REV. NELIUS O'CONNOR
Hexham & Newcastle



REV. KEVIN KENNY
Miami



REV. OLIVER O'BRIEN
S. C. A.



REV. ANTHONY BLUETT
Orlando



REV. FRANK O'GRADY
Shrewsbury



REV. JOHN WALTON
Mobile-Birmingham



REV. JAMES WILLIAMS
S. C. A.



REV. DENIS O'BRIEN
S. C. A.



REV. PHILIP BARRY
S. C. A.



"For Christ, therefore, we are ambassadors" (2 Cor. 5:20)

Father John Cantwell's 1969 Ordination Class, Thurles Seminary, Ireland

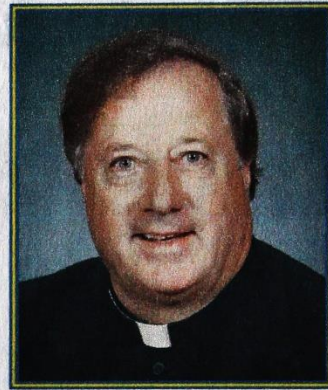


Father John Celebrates Mass at Saint Patrick Church, Placerville



This chalice was gifted to Monsignor Thomas J Hayes in 1910 by the Men's Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Sacramento's Cathedral Parish and is now used daily at the Masses at Saint Patrick Parish in Placerville.

Father John Cantwell



*Fortieth
Ordination
Anniversary Dinner
April 26, 2009*



Father John J Cantwell's Fortieth Anniversary of Ordination Dinner Invitation

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