

# SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

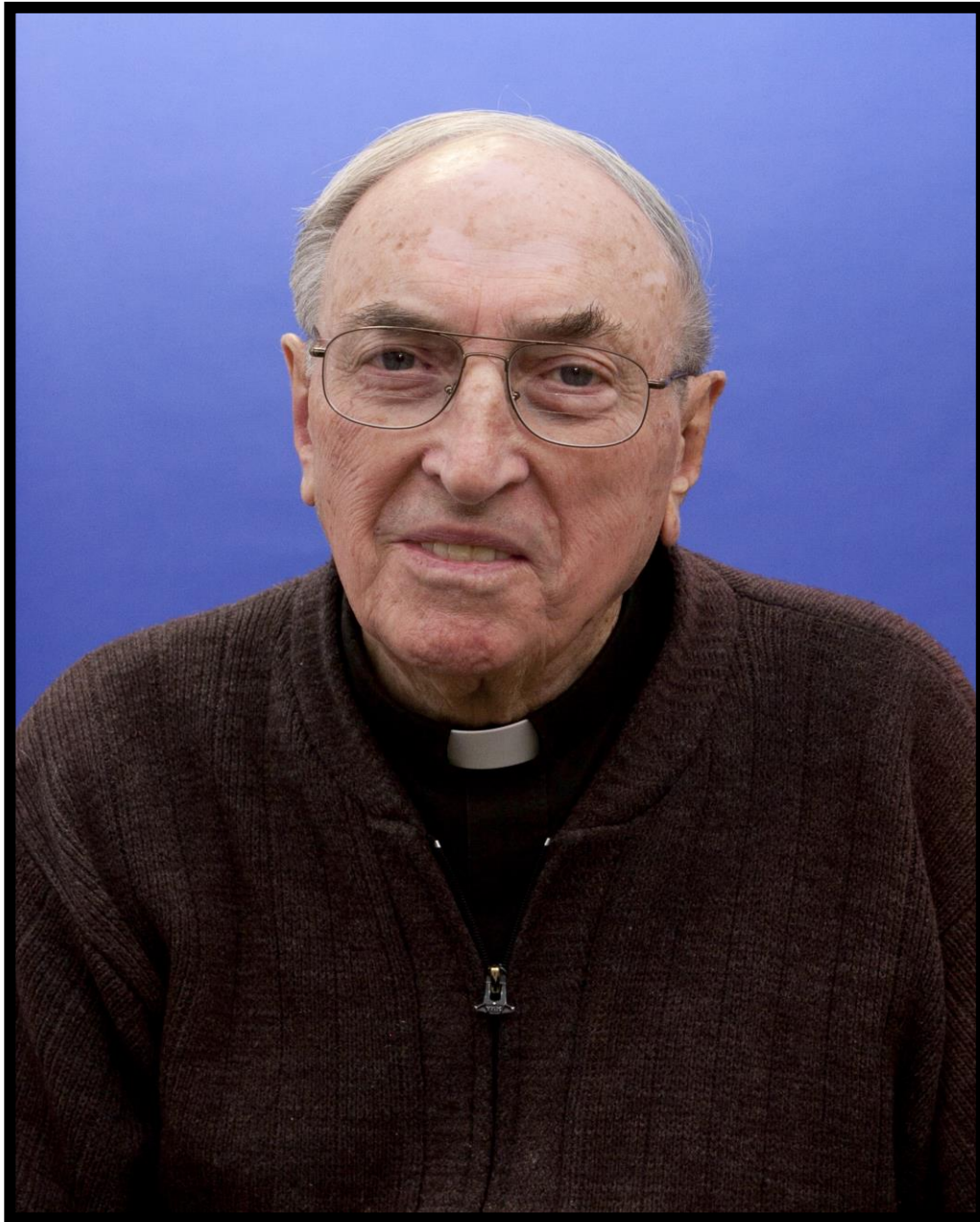
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## Monsignor Edward Joseph Kavanagh Pastor Emeritus of St Rose Parish, Sacramento

Interview by Father John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist



Monsignor Edward Joseph Kavanagh

***Edward Joseph Kavanagh*** was born on February 11, 1925 in Urlingford, County Kilkenny, Ireland, the second of four children born to James J Kavanagh and Molly McDermott. His siblings are Matthew, Kitty and James.

He grew up in the aftermath of World War I as everyone in Europe was trying to get back to some normalcy. It was not a prosperous time and many Irish went to England to work since there were more opportunities there.

### **The Kavanagh Family Business**

The Kavanagh family was in the grocery business, owned a garage and operated a bus service. The Kavanaghs also operated a wholesale newspaper distributor service in the South of Ireland. Ed worked in the family business, especially during World War II, because the news business was extremely important in that era.

### **Ed's Schooling**



Photo from St Kieran's Website

### **Saint Kieran's College, Kilkenny, Ireland**

Ed went to boarding school at Saint Kieran's School, Kilkenny. After primary school he entered Saint Kieran's Seminary in Kilkenny. In those days there were so many seminarians it was hard to get a sponsor diocese. Originally, Ed planned to go to South Hampton, Diocese of Plymouth, in

England but that diocese had plenty of priests. The year before he was ordained he heard of the priest shortage in Sacramento from Monsignor Thomas Kirby so he decided to sign up for Sacramento in 1947. On June 6, 1948, Edward Kavanagh was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Sacramento in Saint Mary's Cathedral, Kilkenny.

### **Father Kavanagh Arrives in Sacramento**



Photo by John E Boll 2013

### **Saint Rose Church, Sacramento**

Father Kavanagh left Ireland on December 8, 1948 and flew to New York. After spending a few days in the New York City, he headed west by train to Sacramento. While in Denver he met a man who asked him if he was a priest. That stranger was Bart Cavanaugh, the city manager of Sacramento. Bart was traveling on the same train and after arriving in Sacramento he took Father Kavanagh to the cathedral. Bishop Armstrong was at his cathedral office when Father Ed arrived and he called Saint Patrick's Home and asked Father Patrick Bennett, the pastor, to come to the cathedral to take Father Ed to Saint Patrick's Home.

Two weeks later, on December 21, 1948, Father Bennett died of a sudden heart attack and Father Carroll Lawsen was appointed the new pastor of Saint Rose Church. Father Lawsen was the first Native American to become a priest in the Diocese of Sacramento. When Father Ed was appointed to Saint Rose Parish as an assistant, little did he realize that he would spend the rest of his life serving the people at Saint Rose Parish.

### **Director of Saint Patrick's Home**

In 1954, Father Kavanagh was appointed director of Saint Patrick's Home for children. After the death of Father Lawsen on June 21, 1962, Father Kavanagh was appointed pastor of the parish. He was very happy living in Sacramento and felt blessed that the Sisters of Mercy of Omaha were staffing the parish school. The hundred children who lived in the orphanage and attended the parish school came from broken homes. Other students from the local community also attended Saint Patrick School.



Photo from the Diocesan Archives

### **Saint Patrick Orphanage and School**

#### **The Orphanage**

The original Saint Rose Church on Seventh and K Streets was the first Catholic Church in Sacramento. When Saint Patrick's Home was built in 1934, Eleanor McClatchy wanted to preserve the name of the first Saint Rose Church in Sacramento. Because of her influence, the school chapel on Franklin Boulevard was named *Saint Rose Chapel*. In the beginning, three Sunday Masses were celebrated in the chapel of the orphanage at 7, 9 and 11 AM. This same Mass schedule continued when Saint Rose became a parish in 1942.

The sixty acres on which the present Saint Rose Parish is built was once a Catholic cemetery. After Saint Mary's Cemetery was established in 1929, the bodies buried at the Franklin and Fruitridge property were moved to Saint Mary's Cemetery under the direction of Monsignor Thomas Kirby who was the diocesan Property Czar at the time. When the new Highway 99 freeway was built through Sacramento, ten acres of parish land were taken by the State of California for the freeway.

## Swap of Land Provided the Parish Site for Saint Charles Parish



Photo by John E Boll 2013

### **Saint Charles Parish, Center Parkway, Sacramento**

Saint Rose Parish struck a deal with the State. In exchange for the ten acres taken for the freeway, the State gave the diocese twenty-five acres of land south of the parish. When Saint Charles Parish was established in 1960, the diocese gave the twenty-five acres of land to Saint Charles Parish as a gift and Monsignor James Poole, the founding pastor, sold 10 acres to the Sacramento Public School District which provided the cash needed to begin Saint Charles Parish.

## **A Prune Orchard Gifted to Saint Patrick's Orphanage**

With the help of the priests in Colusa, a Colusa family donated to Saint Patrick Home a prune orchard with 500 acres of land in the Colusa area. This ranch produced prunes, walnuts and wheat which became a source of income for the orphanage. The ranch was sold in the 1970s while Bishop Alden Bell was bishop of Sacramento. The money from the land sale provided the resources needed to convert the orphanage to foster homes. The orphanage ceased but developed into two day care centers and several group homes in the south area of Sacramento.

Father Kavanagh worked closely with Monsignor Harry Markham in dealing with the orphanage and he says that Monsignor Markham was an outstanding social worker in the Catholic community.

## **Creation of Saint Patrick Thrift Shop**

In 1970, Saint Patrick's Home purchased the Serra Brothers grocery store and converted the building into Saint Patrick's Thrift Shop. Next, the parish purchased the lot next to the parish and made it the center to receive cars that people donated for the work of the orphanage. This center also receives cars donated for the work of Immaculate Heart Radio.

## **Growth of the Parish**

Saint Rose Parish has grown tremendously over the years. In the late 1980s, the parish built a multipurpose facility named after Monsignor Kavanagh. Today, this hall serves the Latino

community where the Masses in Spanish are celebrated on Saturday at 6:30 PM and Sunday at 8, 10 and 12 noon. The Masses in English are celebrated in the parish church, formerly the orphanage chapel, on the hour from 7 AM to 1 PM and 5:30 and 7:30 PM Sunday evenings.



Photo by John E Boll

### **The Monsignor Kavanagh Community Center**

The diocese gave consideration to relocating Our Lady of Guadalupe National Shrine on 7<sup>th</sup> and T Streets to the Saint Rose Parish site where a new and large church would be built but since there were insufficient funds for this move, it has been put on hold.

### **The Parish School Becomes Saint Patrick Academy**

In 2011, Bishop Soto made the decision to combine three parish schools in the area: Saint Anne, All Hallows and Saint Patrick schools. As of this writing, there are 320 students attending the Saint Patrick Academy.

### **Saint Rose Parish is a Busy Place**

Monsignor Kavanagh says that the parish continues to be very active and busy with catechetical instruction for 350 students in the Spanish program and 650 students in the English program. The parish has five hundred baptisms a year and forty to fifty marriages.

### **Retirement Comes to Monsignor Kavanagh at the Age of 80**

When Monsignor Kavanagh reached the age of 80, Bishop Weigand accepted his letter of resignation and he officially retired from his pastorate. Bishop Weigand appointed Monsignor James Church as pastor of Saint Rose Parish and he invited Ed to remain in residence at the

parish. Ed agreed to stay saying it beat having to move after living 60 years in the same home. From Monsignor Kavanagh's point of view, his living situation worked out well for him.



Photo by John E Boll

## St Patrick Academy

### A Legend in his own Time

Monsignor Kavanagh has served the Diocese of Sacramento and Saint Rose Parish for the past sixty-five years. Over the decades, the parish has grown tremendously and he has done his best to take care of the people entrusted to his pastoral care. For twenty years, he drove the parish bus on Saturday mornings picking up the public school children for religious education classes.

Monsignor Ed continued to make pastoral visits to the care homes in the area. Years ago there were care homes for men on the corner of Florin and Franklin. The parish used to provide Mass for these men and Father Tony Maio would come to the parish to hear confessions in Spanish.

For Monsignor Kavanagh, the Hispanic community is his family and he has always been open to and encouraging of them. He regrets he never learned to speak Spanish.

Monsignor Kavanagh says his biggest struggle was not having enough time for everyone as the parish grew. He always has had a soft spot in his heart for priests, especially those who were having a hard time in ministry. He would take in priests that no other pastor would accept. He hopes he gave a good example to others by the actions of his own life.

Monsignor Kavanagh is a legend in his own lifetime. He has been a voice for the voiceless, be they the unborn, the poor and homeless or those living on the margins of society. He is known to thousands of people who consider him their friend. He has been a friend to the rich and famous in Sacramento and well as to the poor and voiceless. He is the only priest in the history of the diocese who has served only one parish his whole life. Indeed, Monsignor Kavanagh is a one-of-a-kind priest in the history of this diocese. He reminds me of Father Michael Walrath, another famous priest of the diocese in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. What was said of him can be said of Ed Kavanagh: "After God created Ed Kavanagh, He threw the mold away."

### **Monsignor Kavanagh at Mercy McMahan Terrace**

Because of failing health, Monsignor Kavanagh now lives at Mercy McMahan Terrace on 39<sup>th</sup> and J Streets.

Thank you, Monsignor Kavanagh, for your dedicated life of service to the People of God. Indeed, you have walked in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd who gave his life for all so that all might live as the free sons and daughters of God. May the Lord grant you joy and peace!



Photo by John E Boll 2014

**Interior of Saint Rose Church, Franklin Boulevard, Sacramento**

***Ad Multos Annos!***