

# SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

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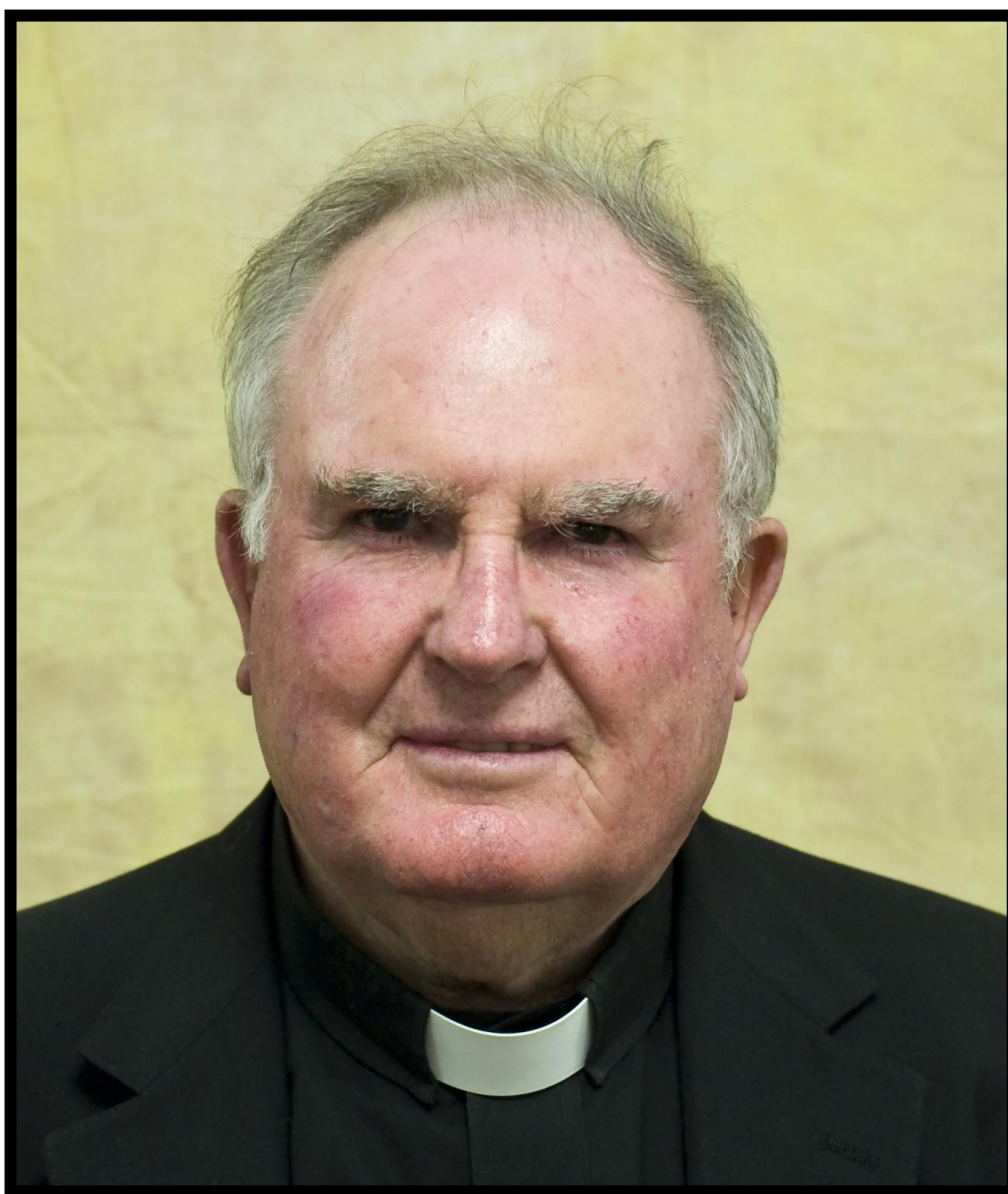
*Father Patrick Joseph O'Rafferty*

Native of Clonard, County Meath, Ireland

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor Emeritus of Immaculate Conception Parish, Downieville

November 2013



**Patrick Joseph O'Rafferty** was born on February 21, 1928 at Clonard, County Meath, Ireland, the first of seven children born to Patrick O'Rafferty and Julia McGarry. He grew up on a farm, helped with the farm work, milked cows, went to the bog to cut turf and harvested grain, oats, wheat and barley. He thinned turnips and beets in the fields.

### **Primary and Secondary School**

Patrick attended primary school in Kinnegad, County West Meath. On a frosty morning when the roads were covered in ice he could slide from County Meath to County West Meath which was one of the great joys of his youth. The school had about 100 students with a husband and wife team who taught all the children. The two teachers had one assistant.

After his primary school, Pat moved on to Finians College at Mullingar, County West Meath, for his secondary education. This was a boarding school with 200 boarders and 10 day students. He attended this school for five years.

### **Beginning of Studies at Saint Kieran's College**



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

Around the age of 17 during his fourth year in secondary college, Pat began to think about the priesthood. There were 30 students in his class and at least 23 went to Saint Kieran's College in

Kilkenny. Of that number, Pat estimates that 15 were eventually ordained priests for various dioceses in Ireland and for the world missions.

Pat says his experience at Saint Kieran's College was mixed. He found his two years of philosophy difficult. Theology was interesting and easy for him. Other graduates of Saint Kieran Seminary ordained for Sacramento were Ed Kavanagh, Pat Coffey and Nick Phelan. Father Phelan would write to the seminarians at Saint Kieran to tell them what it was like in Sacramento. Pat also knew Father Patrick Bennett who was in charge of Saint Patrick's Orphanage in Sacramento. He had been a neighbor of the O'Rafferty family in County Meath. Father Bennett was a quiet and unassuming man who died at the age of 48. Pat asked Father Bennett what Sacramento was like and he reported that it was rough in parts of the diocese. Pat was happy to hear Father Bennett's reports about Sacramento some six thousand miles away from Ireland. He decided to sign up for Sacramento.

### **Pat Signs up for Sacramento**

Students were not permitted to choose a diocese until they had entered theology. Pat was a first year theologian when he signed up for Sacramento. There were 120 to 130 students at St Kieran Seminary at that time. He found the move from secondary school to the seminary a pleasant change. The students were more mature, interesting and forgiving. The seminarians were not spiteful to one another but more gentlemanly, unlike the adolescents in high school.

### **Ordained a Priest in 1953**

Pat was ordained a priest for Sacramento on June 7, 1953 in Saint Mary's Cathedral, Kilkenny by Bishop Patrick Collier, Bishop of Ossory. From June to September, Father Pat spent time with his family and working on the farm. He left Ireland on September 12, 1953 from the Port of Cobh on the *Mauritania* bound for New York. It was a five day voyage across the Atlantic and upon arrival, Father Pat was met by neighbors from his hometown who had immigrated to New York. He stayed with them a few weeks and on October 5, 1953, he left Penn Station in New York on the San Francisco Overland train for the journey to California. The train made one stop in Chicago and Pat got off the train to get some exercise. This was the first time he had ever ridden a train.

### **Arrival in Sacramento**

Father O'Rafferty arrived at the Sacramento train station and was met by Fathers Carroll Lawson and Ed Kavanagh who took him to Saint Rose Parish in Sacramento. After dinner, Fathers Pat McHugh, pastor of Holy Spirit Parish, and his assistant, Father Tom Farrell, arrived at the rectory. Pat summed up Father McHugh quickly; he was either mentally off or intoxicated. Around 9:30 PM, Pat left with Fathers McHugh and Farrell for the short drive to Holy Spirit Parish. Father McHugh told Pat that he was sending a cablegram to Pat's parents to inform them that Pat had arrived safely. He called Western Union and dictated a message to be sent to Ireland. After Father McHugh hung up the phone, he said: "Now I have that out of my hair." This was the first time Father Pat had heard that expression.



## First Assignment to Holy Spirit Parish: A Tough Beginning



Photo by John E Boll

### Holy Spirit Church, Sacramento

When newly ordained priests arrived in Sacramento, they were given a temporary assignment until their appointments were made. Holy Spirit Parish was Father O'Rafferty's temporary assignment.

As it turned out, Father O'Rafferty's first priestly assignment was to Holy Spirit Parish in Sacramento. Father Pat says that this first experience of pastoral life in America from October 1953 to April 1956 at Holy Spirit Parish was tough for him and he had to make a lot of adjustments until he moved to his next parish assignment.

#### The Next Appointment

In 1956, Father Pat was transferred to Saint Patrick Parish in Grass Valley with Father Patrick Donnelly who was pastor. Father Donnelly was the dean of the area but six months later was promoted to the pastorate of Saint Bernard Parish in Eureka. Father Pat says Monsignor Donnelly was a saint and a very decent man.

Father O'Rafferty was in the Grass Valley parish during the inter-regnum of pastors. The new pastor was Father Jeremiah Boland. Father Pat remained in Grass Valley for only six months and was then transferred to Sacred Heart Parish in Red Bluff.

### **Red Bluff Assignment was only one Year**

The pastor of Red Bluff was Monsignor William Coen and Father James O’Dea was the assistant. Father O’Rafferty remained in Red Bluff for only one year.



Photo by John E Boll 2012

### **Sacred Heart Church, Susanville**

#### **A Move to Susanville**

Father Pat’s next assignment was Sacred Heart Parish, Susanville, with Monsignor Patrick Moran. He celebrated Mass at the military chapel in Herlong every Sunday. On Saturdays he drove to Herlong for confessions and returned home only to drive back again to Herlong Sunday morning for the 8 AM Mass and then to Susanville for the 10:30 Mass. Father Pat served Sacred Heart Parish for seven years.

There were two telephones in the house, one in the pastor’s quarters and the other in the house keeper’s quarters. Father Pat had no phone because Monsignor Moran liked to answer all the phone calls. Moran was not pleased when Father Pat had a phone installed in his room when Monsignor Moran was a patient in the hospital.

Father Pat says he enjoyed his years in Susanville. He took census and rang every doorbell in town. During the diocesan campaign in the early 1960s he raised \$30,000 dollars for the campaign, much to the unhappiness of other clergy in the area. Father Pat decided to handle the campaign on his own and did all solicitation by personally contacting the parishioners.



### **Next Assignment, Saint Robert Parish, Sacramento**

Father Pat's next assignment was for one year at Saint Robert's Parish with Father Hugh McTague. He found Father McTague to be a decent man and he enjoyed his year in the parish.

### **First Pastorate in Downieville**



Photo by John E Boll 2012

### **Interior of Immaculate Conception Church, Downieville**

Father Pat's first pastorate was Immaculate Conception Parish in Downieville. He divided his time between North San Juan and Downieville and says this pastorate was fulfilling for him during the five years he served as pastor. When Downieville was established as a parish in 1853, Archbishop Alemany was bishop of the whole of Northern California.

### **Pastorate in Corning**

Father O'Rafferty's last parish was Immaculate Conception Parish in Corning. He found this parish to be a good experience. Although the church was of recent construction, there was a problem with water leakage in the church. He served as pastor of Corning for five years.

### **Sabbatical**

In 1993, Father Pat took his first sabbatical at Marinella, Rathgar, in Dublin, Ireland. This was a Redemptorist House of studies that offered a sabbatical program for priests. The sabbatical was for three months and he enjoyed this experience very much. Priests from all over the English speaking world participate in the program. After his sabbatical, Father Pat turned 70 years of age and decided it was time for him to retire from active ministry. He moved to the Priests' Retirement Village in Citrus Heights where he continues to live.

### **Looking Back Over the Years**

As Father Pat reminisces over the years of his life and ministry, he wondered how he would be able to preach to the people with a foreign accent. As time went on, he says he had to change his thinking. He began to realize that Americans were a special people who had to deal with a lot of struggles. He decided he needed to be kind to the people in all circumstances. He reminded himself of this every week as he went out to minister to the people.

### **Thanks to Father O'Rafferty**

Father O'Rafferty has served the Church of Sacramento for the past sixty years. He willingly left his family and his native land of Ireland to serve the missions of Northern California. He has spent sixty years serving the Church of Sacramento and we are grateful for his life of service. We wish him continued good health and enjoyment in his life of retirement.

# **Ad Multos Annos!**



Photo by John E Boll 2013

## **Chapel, Priests Retirement Village, Citrus Heights**

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