

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

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HISTORY OF SACRED HEART PARISH, FORT JONES

Material for this article came from the Diocesan Archives for the Fort Jones Parish

In order to appreciate the history of Sacred Heart Church in Fort Jones, one must take into consideration the sequence of missionary activity that occurred in this vast wilderness before Fort Jones became the center of the parish in Scott Valley and outlying regions.

In early 1853, Father Florian Schwenninger, OSB, better known as just Father Florian, pastor of Shasta and Trinity Counties, is said to have been the first priest to visit and celebrate Masses at Sawyer's Bar and other Salmon River mining camps.

On July 18, 1855, Fathers James Cassin and Thomas Cody were appointed pastor and assistant pastor respectively of Siskiyou County and the Crescent City area. They celebrated their first Masses in the home of Mathias Callahan for the Catholics of the area after which they made their way to Rough and Ready (Etna), Fort Jones and Yreka. Saints John and Paul Catholic Church was built at Callaghan in 1858 as a mission with Father James Croke officiating.

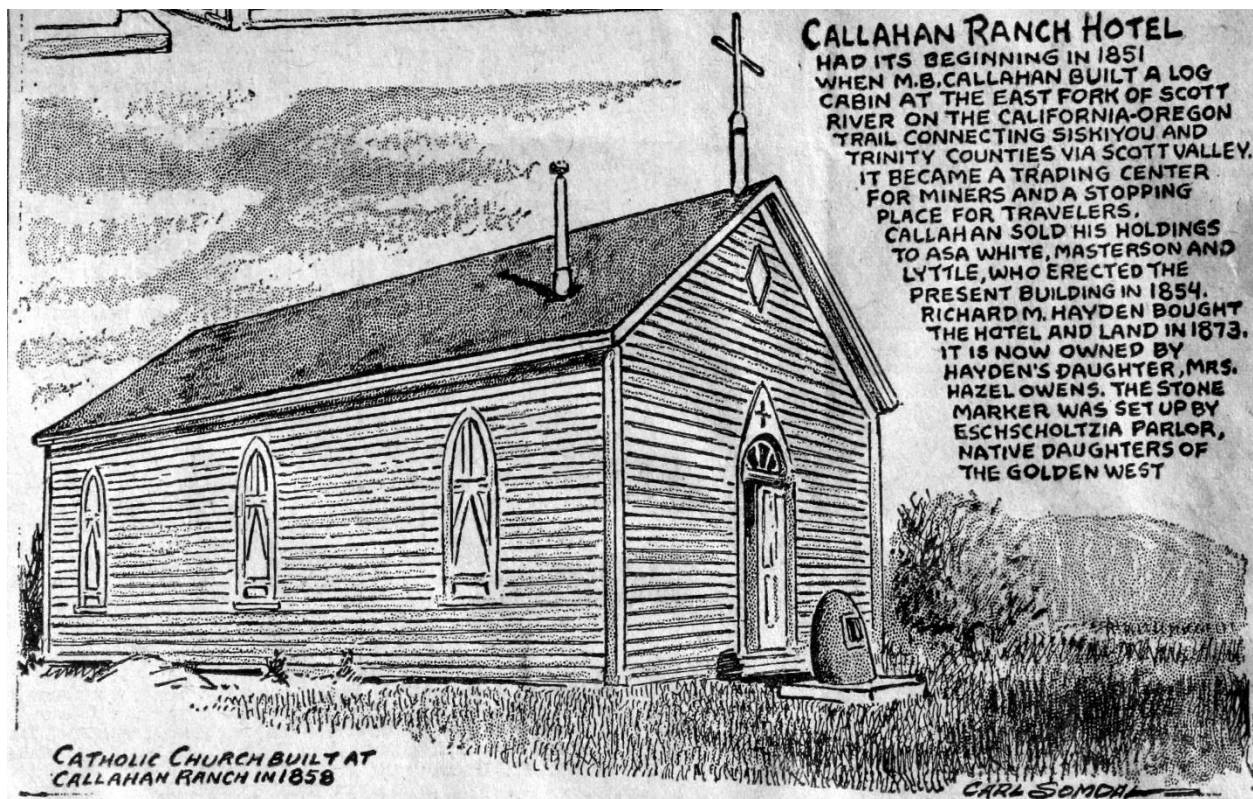


Photo by John E Boll 2015

Saint Joseph Church, Sawyer's Bar, Built by Father Florian in 1855

The first church in the area was Saint Joseph Church at Sawyer's Bar built in 1855 when Father Florian was pastor there. This modest house of worship is the most valuable relic left to us from that pioneer missionary era. It is the oldest in point of time and retains more of its original form than any of the other churches yet standing in the northern most counties of California.

In June of 1921, six months before the death of Bishop Grace, Sacred Heart Church in Fort Jones became a parish with a resident pastor, and the other churches in Callahan, Etna, Happy Camp, and Sawyer's Bar became missions of this new parish. The church in Callahan was dismantled in 1971 during the pastorate of Father Anthony Gurnell.



Sketch taken from the Diocesan Archives

Sketch of the Original Callahan Catholic Church circa 1858

The first Sacred Heart Church in Fort Jones was apparently built before 1881. In 1914 the church was destroyed by fire and a new building was erected in 1915. The new and present church is located in front of the former church's location, closer to the main street of Fort Jones.

Saint Mary Church in Etna was constructed around 1883 and remodeled by Father John McDonnell in 1965.

Masses in the early days of Happy Camp were offered in residents' homes until a church was built in 1967. This structure burned and a new church replaced it in 1997.



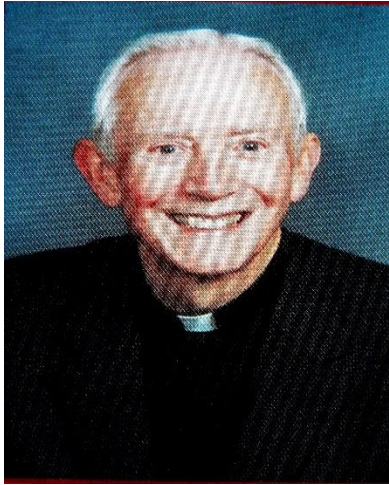
Photo by John E Boll 2015

Sacred Heart Church, Fort Jones

1971 Forward

We pick up the story of Sacred Heart Parish in 1971 with the appointment of Father Anthony Gurnell as pastor. Father Gurnell was Irish born and trained. Before entering the seminary he worked as a banker in the city of Cork, Ireland. His appointment to Fort Jones was his first pastorate. For us who knew him, Father Tony could be intense and tough minded and when he made up his mind, there was no changing it.

A Memorable Father Gurnell Story



Father Anthony Gurnell

Father John Sullivan who succeeded Father Gurnell as pastor of Fort Jones recalls a story told to him by Father Ed Mello who was then pastor of Weed. A parishioner from Etna died during the winter and the family made arrangements with Father Tony to do the committal service at Saint Joseph Cemetery in Sawyer's Bar. Because a winter storm was passing through the area at the time, the funeral director in Yreka told Father Tony that the burial would have to be postponed until after the storm passed.

Father Tony had made arrangements with the family and he intended to keep his commitment. When the funeral director refused to take the body to Sawyer's Bar for burial until the

storm had passed, Father Tony borrowed a pickup, went to the funeral home and loaded the casket into the back of the truck and headed off to Sawyer's Bar for the burial.

As he reached the six thousand foot summit the snow began to pile up and the pickup bogged down and became stuck in the snow. Undeterred by this challenge, Father Tony walked a half mile to a roadside emergency phone on the road to Sawyer's Bar and called for a tow truck.

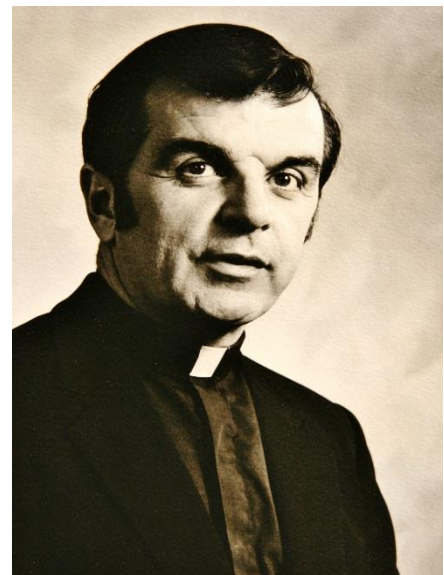
When the tow truck arrived, the pickup was pulled out of the snow and towed over the summit to a lower level where the snow turned to rain. Father Tony jumped into the pickup and headed on to Sawyer's Bar for the burial. Needless to say, word of this incident spread far and wide throughout Siskiyou County. No winter storm could deter this priest from burying the dead. Once he made up his mind, there was no turning back!

Father John Sullivan Appointed Pastor of Fort Jones Parish

In 1974, Father John Sullivan was appointed pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Fort Jones. This was his first pastorate and he fell in love with the Siskiyou country and the people of this rural part of the diocese.

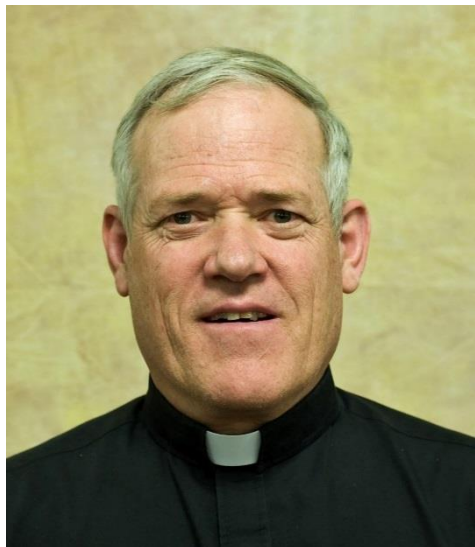
Father John served as pastor of the Fort Jones Parish for twelve years until Bishop Quinn appointed him pastor of Saint Patrick Parish, Placerville in 1986. For the second time, Father Sullivan succeeding Father Gurnell.

After Father John arrived in Placerville, he told the parishioners that this was his second time to succeed Father Gurnell as pastor. One parishioner remarked: "What are you, a slow learner?"



Father John Sullivan

Pastorate of Father Roy Doner



With the leadership of Father Roy Doner who served Fort Jones as pastor for ten years (1986-1996), the parishioners of Sacred Heart Parish were able to realize their dream of building a parish hall. The new hall was built across the street from the parish church on Main Street in Fort Jones. At that time, the parish had 180 families spread over an area of 2,700 square miles in Siskiyou County. Father Roy knew it was time to build a hall so parishioners could gather to socialize as a parish community.

The estimated cost of the hall was \$327,000 of which \$250,000 had already been raised through a successful Valentine dinner-dance, several bequests from estates, many individual donations and a loan from the diocese. Father Roy donated all his stipends for Masses and funerals to the building fund as part of his commitment to the project.

Bishop William Weigand challenged Fort Jones parishioners by committing to match the amount the community raised during construction up to \$20,000. Surprising even themselves, the parishioners raised \$13,500.

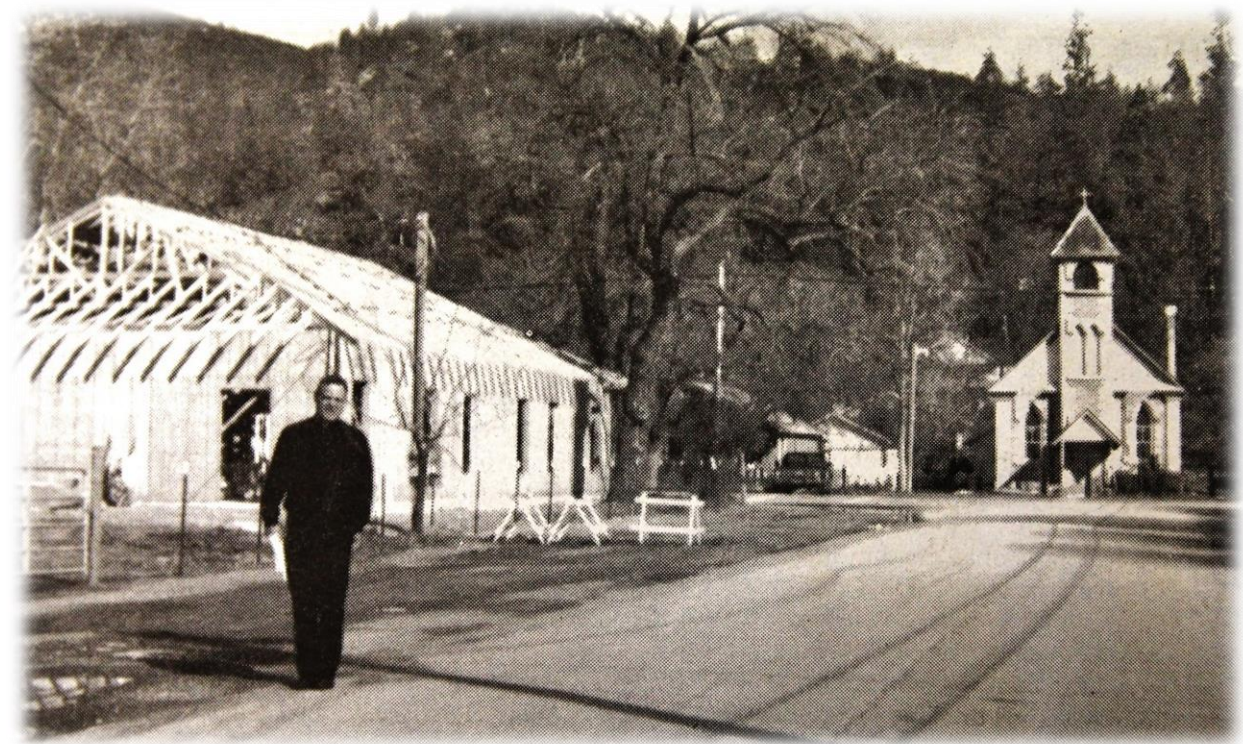


Photo by Kathy Moore/Catholic Herald

Father Roy Doner Stands in Front of the new Parish Hall under Construction in Fort Jones

The hall has a large meeting room of 2,800 square feet. The walls are of cedar paneling which Father Roy sawed from cedar trees on his parents' property in Challenge. The hall has a commercial kitchen and four meeting rooms which give the building a total size of 5,164 square feet. This hall is the largest gathering place in Scott Valley.



Photo by John E Boll 2015

Interior of the Fort Jones Parish Hall

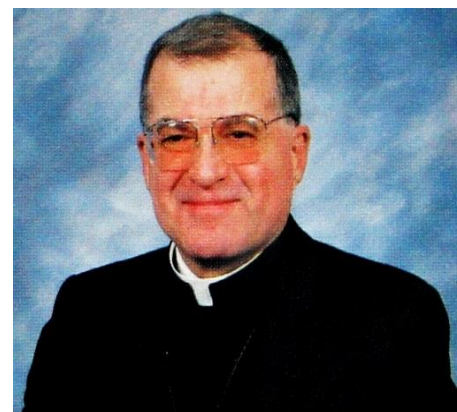
Next Pastors and Parochial Vicars

After serving the Fort Jones parish for ten years, Father Doner was named pastor of Divine Savior Parish in Chico, and Father John Lawrence succeeded Father Roy as Fort Jones parish administrator in 1996.

Sister Anne Chester, RSM Appointed Parish Steward

In 2002, Bishop Weigand made a change in staffing when he appointed Sister Anne Chester, RSM as parish steward and administrator of both Yreka and Fort Jones parishes with residence at Saint Joseph Church, Yreka.

Father Lawrence provided sacramental ministry to both parishes and their mission churches. He continued to reside at the Sacred Heart priest's residence in Fort Jones.



Father John Lawrence

Sister Anne Chester, RSM

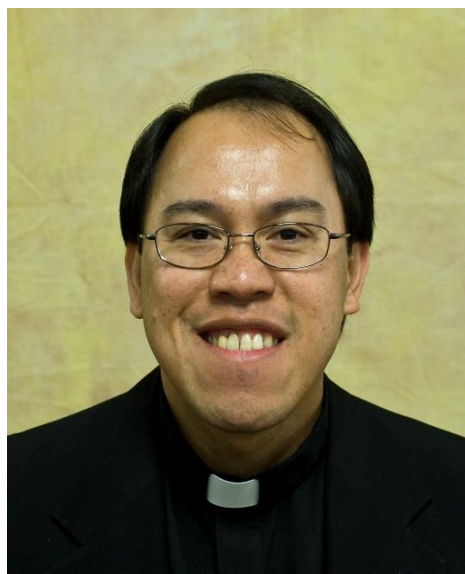


Sister Anne Chester, RSM served as parish steward for two years when the Sisters of Mercy elected her to the leadership team of the Mercy community. She had to step down from her parish steward post. Father John Lawrence was named administrator of Fort Jones once again where he continued to minister until 2007.

In 2007, Father Bernard Tape was appointed pastor of Yreka and Fort Jones and Father Felipe Paraguya served as parochial vicar with residence in Fort Jones. Both priests served these two parishes until 2009.

In 2009, Father Aldrin Basarte was appointed administrator of Yreka and Fort Jones and served in that role until 2012. Serving with him during this time as parochial vicars were Fathers Felipe Paraguya, Dariusz Malczuk, and Glenn Jaron, MSP, who resided in Fort Jones.

In 2012, because of the growing lack of priests in the diocese, Bishop Jaime Soto assigned Father Jaron to the Weaverville parish and asked the pastor of Yreka to cover both Yreka and Fort Jones on his own. For the first time since 1854, there was no longer a resident priest in Fort Jones. The parishioners of the Fort Jones parish were quite unhappy with this decision.



Father Aldrin Basarte



Father Julito Orpilla

In 2013, Father Julito Orpilla was appointed parish administrator of both Yreka and Fort Jones. His weekend Mass schedule is a challenge with Mass in Happy Camp on Saturday morning at 10 AM three Saturdays a month followed by a 4 PM Mass in Yreka and 6 PM Mass in Etna.

On Sundays, Mass in Fort Jones is celebrated at 9 AM followed by Mass in Yreka at 11 AM. The first Sunday of the month, there is a Mass in Spanish at 1 PM in Yreka. In addition to celebrating five Masses every weekend, Father Julito must drive 240 miles to celebrate Mass at the four churches. For him, the hardest part of his ministry is driving those long distances between churches, especially in the winter season when black ice forms on the mountain roads.

SUCCESSION OF PASTORS

Sacred Heart Parish, Fort Jones

Before Fort Jones became a parish in 1921, all of Siskiyou County was part of Saint Joseph Parish, Yreka since 1855. The following were pastors of Yreka which included Fort Jones, Etna, Sawyer's Bar and Happy Camp --

Father Florian Schwenninger, OSB	1854-1855
Father James Cassin	1855
Father Thomas Cody	1855-1856
Father James Croke	1856-1857
Father L Snyder	1857-1859
Father John Handy	1859-1860
Father Hugh Gallagher	1860
Father Thomas Crinnian	1860-1864
Father Guido Malassi	1864-1865
Father Patrick Farrelly	1865-1872
Father Stephen Kearney	1872
Father Patrick O'Kane	1872-1874
Father James J Callan	1874-1875
Father J Claire	1875-1879
Father W J Walsh	1879
Father Leon Hupts	1879-1887
Father Cornelius C McGrath	1887-1889
Father Patrick Guerin	1889-1891
Father P Fernandez	1891-1894
Father John F Quinn	1884-1897
Father Seraphin Soares	1897-1899
Father James O'Meara	1899-1902
Father Jerome J Enright	1902-1905
Father John Azevedo	1905-1908
Father James O'Flanagan	1908-1910
Father Michael Cahir	1910-1914
Father J P McCarthy	1914-1919
Father P J O'Sullivan	1919
Father Martin Sears	1919-1921
Father James Grealy	1921

Fort Jones Becomes a Parish in 1921

**Following are the Pastors and Parochial Vicars who
Have served Sacred Heart Parish, Fort Jones**

Father Patrick J Sullivan	1921-1927
Father Francis J McEnaney	1927-1931
Father James O'Flanagan	1931-1932
Father Stephen Stack	1932-1942
Father Jeremiah Boland	1942-1946
Father James Kenny	1946-1949
Father John J Healy	1949-1953
Father J.P. Farrell	1953-1957
Father Francis Sullivan	1957-1959
Father William Broderick	1959-1964
Father John T McDonnell	1964-1966
Father Leo Scheibel, C.P., Administrator	1966
Father Vincent O'Shaughnessy	1966-1969
Father Hugh J Bannon	1969-1971
Father Anthony Gurnell	1971-1974
Father John P Sullivan	1974-1986
Father Roy R Doner	1986-1996
Father John Lawrence, Administrator	1996-2002
Sister Anne Chester, RSM, Parish Steward	2002-2004
Father Aiden O'Reilly, Supervising Priest	2002-2004
Father John Lawrence, Administrator	2004-2007
Father Bernard Tape, Pastor	2007-2009
Father Felipe H Paraguya, Parochial Vicar	2007-2009
Father Aldrin G Basarte, Administrator	2009-2012
Father Dariusz T Malczuk, Parochial Vicar	2009-2010
Father Glenn Jaron, MSP, Parochial Vicar	2010-2012
Father Julito R Orpilla, PA and Pastor	2013-



Photo by Fr Julito Orpilla 2015

All Saints Mission Church, Happy Camp

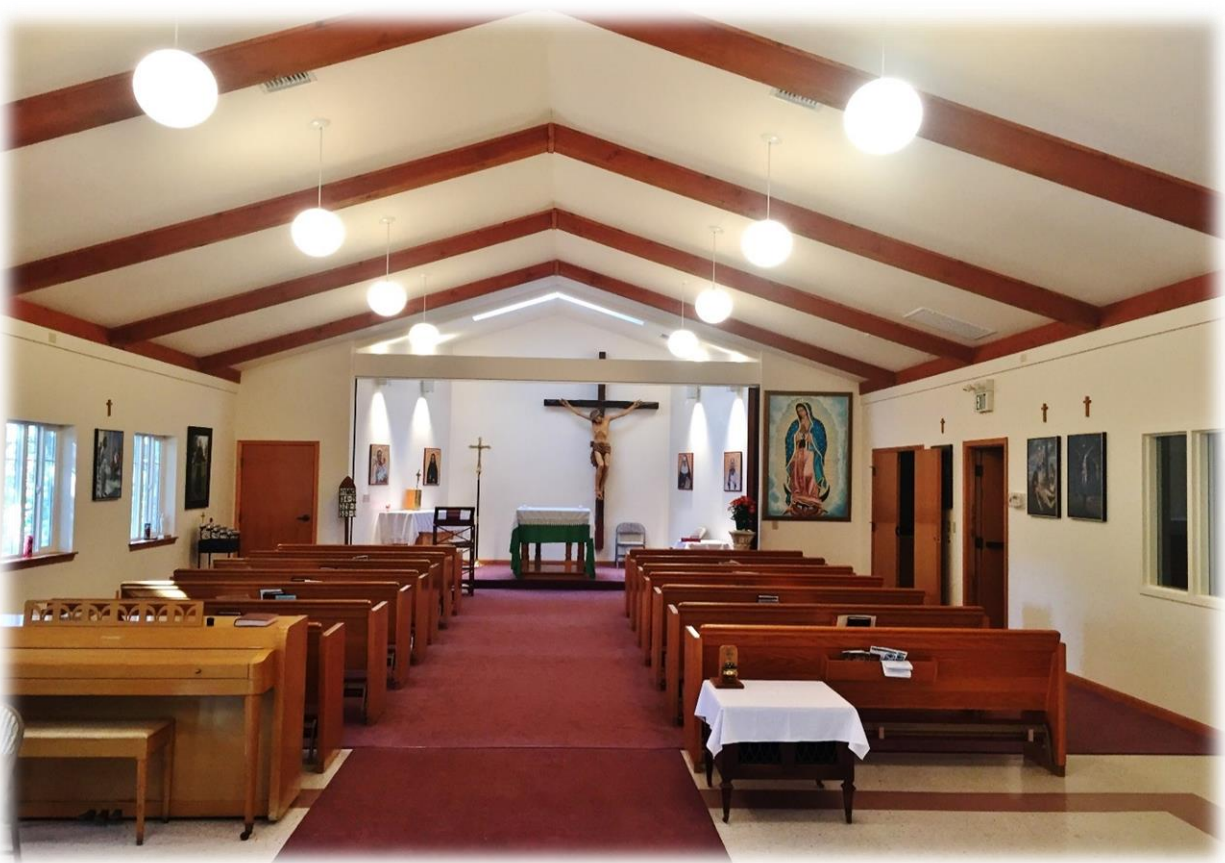


Photo by Fr Julito Orpilla 2015

Interior of All Saints Church, Happy Camp