

# SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 4

Father John E Boll, Archivist

No 41

## HISTORY OF SAINT JOSEPH PARISH, RIO VISTA

This article was compiled by the Diocesan Archivist from material in "*Images of America – Rio Vista*" by Philip Pezzaglia; newspaper articles by the *Catholic Herald*; and material from the Diocesan Archives for Saint Joseph Parish

### Early History of Rio Vista

On December 3, 1855, on the steps of the Benicia Courthouse, John Bidwell's 17,752 acre Mexican land grant, known as *Los Ulpinos*, was sold off in lots to the highest bidder. Colonel Nathan H Davis purchased six of those lots for a grand total of \$440. He intended to subdivide part of the land into a town, near the Patwin Indian village of Hale Che Muk. It was two years before Colonel Davis had the opportunity to travel to his newly acquired property to survey a plat on Lot No. 3. The location of this future town was approximately one mile below the mouth of Cache Slough on the Sacramento River. He called this settlement *Los Brazos del Rio* (Arms of the River), because it was near the confluence of the river and Cache and Steamboat Sloughs.

During the next five years, a number of settlers arrived, building residences and businesses. Due to the river traffic of miners, machinery, and supplies rushing to the gold fields, and the fact that the settlement was located at the halfway point between Sacramento and San Francisco, the need for a dock was evident.

In the spring of 1858, Colonel Davis hired John M Sidwell to construct a wharf 75 feet long and 24 feet wide. The following year, the California Transportation Company leased the wharf and doubled its size. This large structure made it possible for steamers like the *New World*, *Senator*, *Antelope* and *Eclipse* to make daily stops at the small, but rapidly growing settlement.

Colonel Davis realized that a local post office was one important thing that the small settlement lacked. He petitioned for one and it was approved on the condition that the name of the town be changed. Now the mail-carrying steamer *New World* had to stop there.

The new name, *Vista del Rio*, was agreed upon and used by the residents for a very short time. John Sidwell, who had constructed the wharf, was appointed first postmaster. He held this position until August 18, 1858 when Charles A Kirkpatrick was appointed. Shortly after Mr Kirkpatrick became postmaster, his wife suggested yet another name for the town: Rio Vista (*La Vista del Rio*, in proper Spanish), which means *River View*.

The year 1861 proved to be the hardest winter that Rio Vista had yet encountered. After an inclement fall, winter brought high winds and heavy rains which in turn caused the waters of the mighty Sacramento River to swell and overflow onto the lowlands. During the final days of

December 1861, the waters rose so high that they washed away many of the smaller buildings in Rio Vista. Those who lost property were quickly brought into the homes of the more fortunate. On January 9, 1862, a new storm arrived, bringing with it a fierce wind from the southeast and a driving rain. This lethal combination caused the river to rise up over its banks and flood the town. The waters ran as high as 12 feet at the base of Main Street. Before long, the entire town was submerged. Those who survived the flood remarked that for as many miles as the eye could see, the land was covered with water.

The population, approximately 150 people, quickly gathered what they could and, helping one another, headed for higher ground. They gathered on a mound just a short distance below the settlement, and for the next three to four days, waited in the pouring rain until it was safe for steamers to come and relocate them to safer and more comfortable locations.

After the ordeal, many townsfolk left for other settlements, but four men – Samuel R Perry, John M Sidwell, William K Squires, and Isaac Dunham – were determined to reestablish the town of Rio Vista. Abandoning any hope of settling on Captain Davis' Lot No. 3, the men looked downriver for a safer location. They searched for a place with river access above the flood plain to build the new Rio Vista.

#### Joseph Bruning



In March of 1862, they went to see Joseph Bruning, a wealthy rancher who lived a league downriver on a higher portion of the old *Los Ulpinos* Mexican grant, to ask for land to rebuild Rio Vista. Bruning had previously run a hotel business in San Francisco but, due to ill health, had purchased his land in 1858 and built a home on an upper edge of the Montezuma Hills.

Bruning gave them land on the northeastern part of his property, surveying and recording the town plat of New Rio Vista in 1862. TJ McWorthy, who then owned property bordering Bruning on the north, also surveyed and recorded an addition to the town. It was then decided that Main Street would be the dividing line between the two ranches. And so the “new” Rio Vista was born and began to grow.

#### The Beginning of the Growth of the Catholic Church in Solano County

Solano County was one of those areas that began to expand during the 1850s. With its rich soil and farm land, both prosperous and discouraged miners alike traveled to and settled in Solano County. Since there was such an immense distance between settlements, the Catholic Church began to create parishes. These parishes encompassed a number of settlements which became mission churches of these parishes.

### **Father Peter Deyaert, Early Missionary**

During this period there were some missionary priests who traveled from settlement to settlement celebrating Mass for the local people. These priests traveled on horseback over paths created by the Native Americans many decades before. The first priest to travel this extensive land was Father Peter Deyaert. Father Deyaert (1820-1876) was appointed pastor of Saint John the Baptist Church in Napa in 1859. In 1861, Suisun was established as a mission of the Napa parish which included the territory of Napa, Lake, Sonoma and Solano Counties. As pastor of this extensive area, Father Deyaert was also responsible for ministry in the small communities of Silveyville (Dixon), Rio Vista and Elmira.

A history of Saint John the Baptism Church in Napa gives an account of Father Deyaert's travels: *"He was fond of walking. The trip over the hills to Suisun was just a little jaunt for him. Lake County, the Oat Hill Mine, the region of Rio Vista, and for a time, the district of Sonoma found him a constant visitor. And to all these districts, except in emergencies, he visited by foot, stopping at ranch houses to renew old acquaintances and to make new friends."*

### **Father Lucovicus Alphonse Auger in Suisun**

The first Catholic Church in Suisun was erected in 1865. It was described as a small framed building with a single tower. It was this Suisun church in 1867 that became an official parish. Father Lucovicus Alphonsus Auger, a native of France, was appointed the first resident pastor of Saint Alphonse Turibius Church in Suisun in 1868.



Photo from the Rio Vista Museum Archives

### **Original Catholic Church in Rio Vista in 1868**

Father Auger was ordained a priest on February 16, 1856 by Archbishop Alemany and his early years in the priesthood were spent as the first pastor of Saint Vincent de Paul Church, Petaluma



from 1857-1859. At the same time, he was head of Saint Vincent Orphanage in Marin County where he lived.

During those years, Father Auger traveled by horse-back and boat to Petaluma to serve his parishioners there. When he came to the parish in Suisun, he was already a familiar face in northern Solano County. He traveled many of the same paths that his predecessor, Father Deyaert, had traveled.

His role as pastor of Suisun made it necessary for him to visit the missions in his parish which included Dixon, Vacaville, Rio Vista, Fairfield and Elmira. Saint Joseph Church in Rio Vista was formally organized in June 1868 with the construction of a church on a piece of land donated by Joseph Bruning, a local philanthropist. Saint Joseph Church had the honor of being the first church built in the town.

### **Father Michael McNaboe**

Father Auger left Suisun in December 1872 to return home to his native France. Succeeding him at Suisun in January 1873 was Father Michael McNaboe, a native of County Longford, Ireland, who was described as a bighearted Irishman. Besides Saint Alphonsus Turibius Church in Suisun, Father McNaboe was also responsible for Elmira (also known as Vaca Station), and Rio Vista.

By the early 1870s Rio Vista was growing and the modest church structure's capacity was taxed to the utmost every Sunday. A local builder by the name of S Neilsen built a cross section to the church in either 1875 or 1877 at a cost of \$2,600.

### **Saint Gertrude Academy Established in 1876**

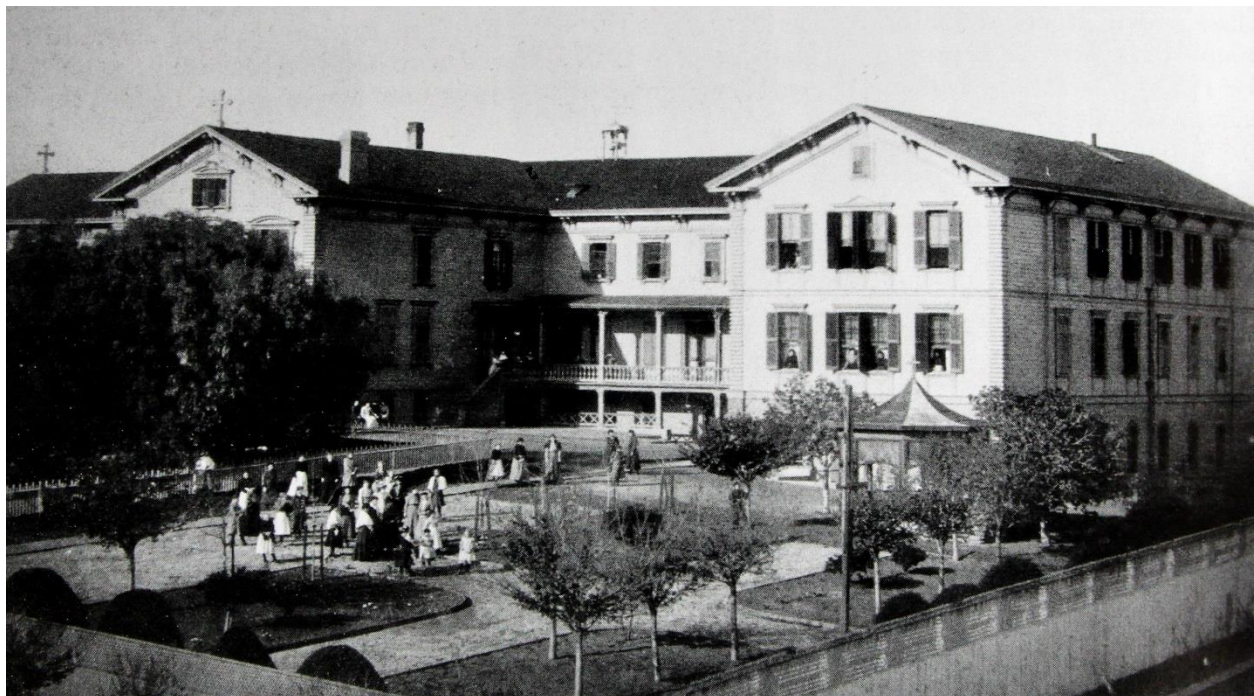
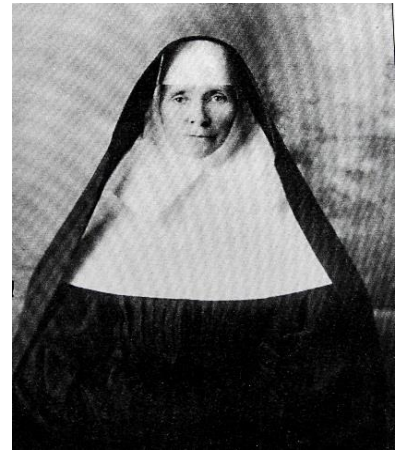


Photo from the Rio Vista Museum Archives

### **Saint Gertrude Academy, Rio Vista in the 1880s**

In 1876, Joseph Bruning wished to enhance Rio Vista's educational system and established Saint Gertrude Academy for young ladies on land to the west behind Saint Joseph Church. This new institution of education was named after his wife Gertrude. Mr Bruning petitioned Archbishop Alemany of San Francisco for help to find a religious community to teach at the academy. Unfortunately, the archbishop had no religious order with enough personnel free at that time to teach at the Rio Vista academy.

Archbishop Alemany, after years of repeated requests to Rome that he might step down as archbishop was granted his request by Pope Leo XIII on July 10, 1884. Succeeding him as archbishop of San Francisco was his coadjutor, Bishop Patrick W Riordan. It was Archbishop Riordan who invited Mercy Sisters Mother Mary Camillus McGarr to send three sisters to Rio Vista to operate the recently constructed Saint Gertrude Academy. The sisters arrived in Rio Vista in 1876 and started preparations for the first term. Mother Camillus filled the position of mother superior until her death in 1911 and was buried in the convent cemetery.



#### **Father Michael McNaboe Transferred**

Due to impaired health and the stress of covering such a large area, Father Michael McNaboe requested a transfer and was sent to the mining district in Tuolumne County where he built a church and established a school. He was then transferred to Saint Joseph Church in Alameda.

#### **Mother Mary Camillus McGarr**

#### **Father Thomas McNaboe Succeeds his Brother**

When Father Michael McNaboe left the Suisun church in 1885, his brother Father Thomas McNaboe was appointed to succeed him. From 1868-1885, the pastor of Suisun served both Suisun and Rio Vista. Father Thomas McNaboe would be the last priest to cover Suisun and Rio Vista.

#### **Saint Joseph Church, Rio Vista, Becomes a Parish in 1885**

In 1885, Saint Joseph Church in Rio Vista was raised to the rank of parish and a permanent church was constructed. The church was built on a piece of land located on Fourth Street that was donated by Joseph Bruning who also played a significant role in financing the building of this new church.

#### **Rio Vista Suffers Devastating Fire in 1892**

The 1890s saw the growth and expansion of Rio Vista, despite a devastating blow when a large portion of the downtown was destroyed by fire on July 20, 1892. That fire destroyed virtually every business form Front Street up to Third Street, and from Montezuma Avenue to Sacramento Avenue. A total of nearly 75 residences, sheds, and business buildings were destroyed. Eighteen families became homeless, many going to the homes of relatives and friends. The Sisters of Mercy at Saint Gertrude's Academy assisted as much as they could. In just three hours, \$200,000 worth of property went up in flames.





Photo from the Rio Vista Museum Collection

### **Businesses on the Gardiner block of Main Street, Rio Vista in the 1890s**

#### **A New Church is Planned and Built**

After all the devastation that the town endured, spirits were surprisingly high as evidenced by the fact that the town incorporated on December 30, 1893. In a way, it was another chance for Rio Vista to reinvent itself, just as it had done after the flood of January 1862. Merchants announced their plans to rebuild the downtown almost immediately after the fire with many of the new buildings being constructed of brick. A few of the Main Street buildings erected after the fire are still in use today.

#### **Father James J Gannon Named Pastor in 1898**



Photo courtesy of Mai Kyne

As Rio Vista grew, so too did Saint Joseph Parish. With this growth, it became clear that the small 1868 church needed to be expanded. In June 1902, the members of the parish considered the idea of remodeling the existing church but after much consideration, both the parishioners and Father James J Gannon who became pastor in 1898 felt a modern church structure should be constructed on the same site as the 1868 church.

The first fundraiser for the new church was a “Ladies Fair” which was held in October 1902. This would be the first of a number of local parish fundraisers. Father Gannon contacted E.A. Garvin, a San Francisco architect, to draw up plans for a new church under the direction of Father Gannon. When the design was approved, K.M. Nellson of Martinez was hired as the builder of the gothic style church.

Construction of the new Saint Joseph Church began in August 1904, and for the next three months, residents watched as the beautiful gothic church took shape. When completed, the exterior of the church was similar to Saint Mary Catholic in Vacaville which was erected in 1898. The interior of Saint Joseph Church was a masterpiece of the day with a ceiling of striking paneling, finished in white pine. The altars were donated as a gift by Mrs. Jane Smith of Isleton. The magnificent stained glass windows were donated by Saint Gertrude Academy for Girls, Mrs. J. Buckley of Grand Island, Mr and Mrs James Cain, Mrs P Hagan and others.

### **The 1904 Dedication of the New Saint Joseph Church**

The formal dedication of the church was held on December 11, 1904 with ceremonies presided over by Archbishop Montgomery, assisted by a variety of visiting clergy. The clergy in attendance were Reverend Thomas Comerford (Sacred Heart Church, San Francisco); Reverend P J Quinn (Saint Alphonsus, Suisun); Reverend Francis Garvey (Saint Peter, Dixon); Reverend John F Nugent (Saint Rose Church, San Francisco); Reverend B J McKinnon (Palo Alto); and Sister M Baptist.

By the time of the completion of Saint Joseph Church, there was a capital outlay between \$15,000 and \$20,000 spent to build and furnish the church.

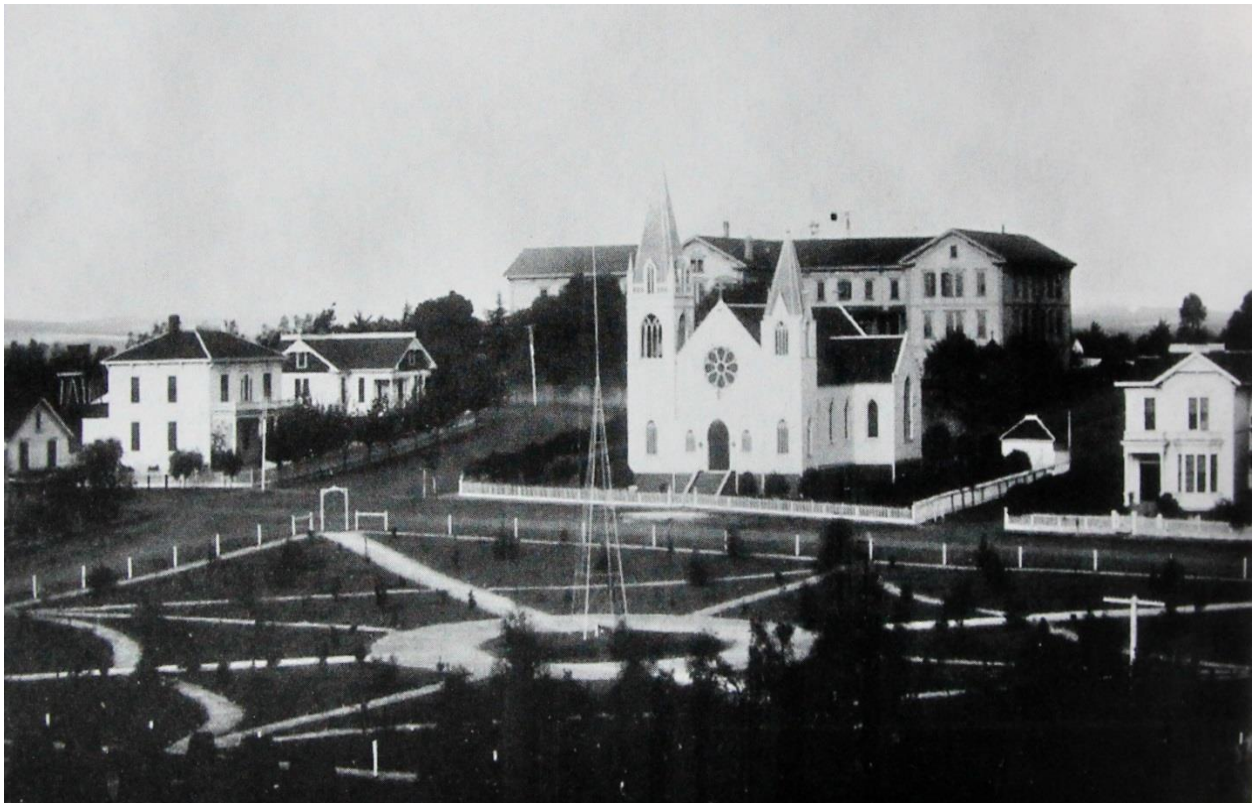
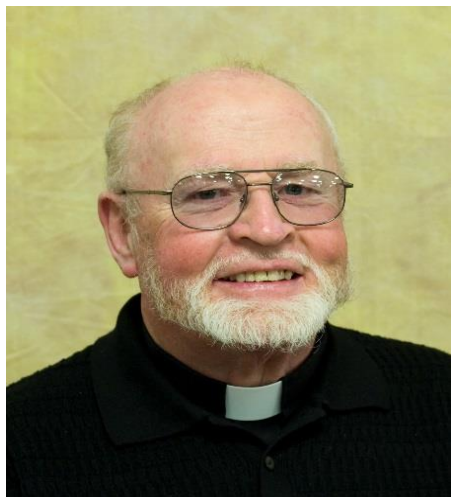


Photo from the Rio Vista Museum Archives

**The Gothic Saint Joseph Church surrounded by Saint Gertrude Academy  
circa 1905**



### Preparing for the 1985 Parish Centennial



As the centennial of Saint Joseph Church approached, **Father Thomas Maguire** was serving as pastor of the Rio Vista Parish. To mark the 1985 centennial, Father Maguire and the parishioners of Saint Joseph Parish embarked on a renovation of the church at a cost of \$220,000. The renovation and remodeling of the church began in 1984. One of the two exterior steeples, damaged by a storm some 30 years prior, was replaced. The stained glass windows were releaded. The sanctuary area was expanded by removing the two old sacristies and an altar from the chapel of Saint Pius X Seminary in Galt was installed to replace the old altar. The remodeling was planned so that the existing works of art could be retained; a tabernacle designed and crafted in Dublin; Stations of the Cross crafted in Italy; a carved replica of the Pietà by Michelangelo.

### Bishop Quinn Rededicates Saint Joseph Church

Bishop Francis Quinn celebrated a Mass of Rededication of the renovated Saint Joseph Church on December 9, 1984 as the parish celebrated the centennial of this Delta parish. During the reception after the Mass, the parish council honored Father Maguire for his leadership in heading the renovation project. Father Maguire thanked the parish council and all who worked together to get the job done.

### Further Parish Renovation in 2006

Father Manuel Soria was appointed pastor of Saint Joseph Parish and arrived in the parish on February 2, 2006. He held parish listening sessions to hear parishioners' concerns and dreams for the parish community. As a result of those sessions, he and the parish council developed a two phase plan to address additional needed repairs and improvements.

#### Phase I

The wind, fog and rain of the Delta area produced new leaks in the steeples which continued to plague the church. These were successfully addressed in Phase I. Needed repairs and painting of the priest's residence were also done.



**Father Manuel Soria**

Because of the support and generosity of the parishioners, the parish was able to complete Phase I without the burden of lingering debt. Since parishioners were so generous in Phase I, many began to consider other projects that would improve the parish's ability to serve the community.



### **Phase II Renovation – The Parish Hall**

The top priority of Phase II involved the repair and upgrading of the parish hall including the kitchen, restrooms and all classrooms. The entire building was renovated with new kitchen facilities and a new HVAC system in the hall. Safety features were added to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The original church stained glass windows were repaired and reinstalled in the church.

### **Father Soria Appointed Pastor of Saint Anthony Parish, Sacramento**

Father Soria had hoped to begin Phase III to increase the office workspace by moving the parish office out of the priest's residence to an existing facility behind the priest's residence, but before he could begin that last phase, Bishop Jaime Soto appointed him pastor of Saint Anthony Parish in the Pocket Area of South Sacramento, succeeding Father John Boll who retired as pastor of Saint Anthony Parish on June 30, 2010.



Photo by John E Boll 2011

**The Renovated Saint Joseph Church**



Photo by John E Boll 2011

### The Renovated Parish Hall

#### Father Sherwin Colaste Appointed Pastor

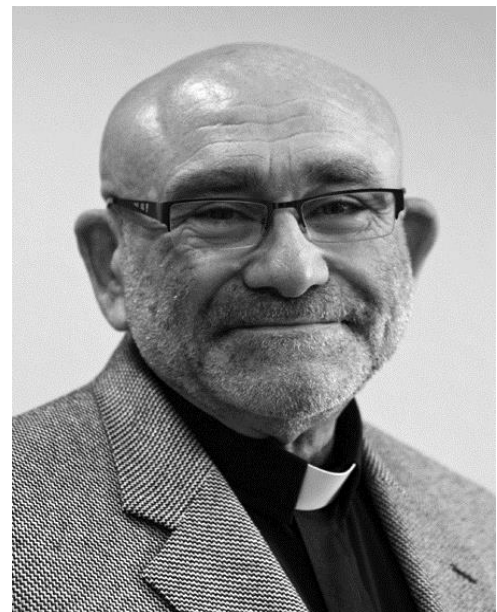


The next pastor of Saint Joseph Parish was Father Sherwin Colaste. Father Sherwin is a native of the Philippines and received his theological education at Mount Angel Seminary in Oregon. He began his pastorate on July 1, 2010. With his friendly and outgoing personality, he was popular with both the adult members of the parish as well as the children and youth. He served as pastor until 2014.

#### Saint Joseph Parish in 2015

Succeeding Father Colaste as parish administrator of the Rio Vista Catholic community is **Father Richard M Boyle, OSM**. Father Richard is a member of Order of the Servants of Mary or the Servites. This 13<sup>th</sup> century order is one of the five mendicant orders that began in the 1200s, namely, the Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, Servites and Augustinians.

Prior to his ministry in Rio Vista, Father Richard served as Catholic chaplain of the Solano State Prison in Vacaville.



**Father Richard Boyle, OSM**





Window of the Baptism of the Lord in Saint Joseph Church





Photo by John E Boll 2011

The Rose Window in Saint Joseph Church



Father Manuel Soria Presides at the Sunday Eucharist in Saint Joseph Church





Photo by John E Boll 2011

**Interior of Saint Joseph Church**



Photo by John E Boll 2011

**Priest's Residence**

# **PRIESTS WHO SERVED SAINT JOSEPH CHURCH**

## **Rio Vista**

<b>Father Peter Deyaert (Suisun-Rio Vista)</b>	<b>1861-1868</b>
<b>Father Lucovicus Alphonsus Auger (Suisun-Rio Vista)</b>	<b>1868-1872</b>
<b>Father Michael F McNaboe (Suisun-Rio Vista)</b>	<b>1872-1885</b>
<b>Father Thomas McNaboe, Rio Vista</b>	<b>1885-1893</b>
<b>Father William D McKinnon</b>	<b>1893-1898</b>
<b>Father James J Gannon</b>	<b>1898-1906</b>
<b>Father Bernard Praught</b>	<b>1906-1913</b>
<b>Father Bernabas Cantillon</b>	<b>1913-1913</b>
<b>Father William J Butler</b>	<b>1913-1915</b>
<b>Father Denis Bailey</b>	<b>1915-1921</b>
<b>Father James Donohue</b>	<b>1921-1925</b>
<b>Father Robert J O'Conner</b>	<b>1925-1928</b>
<b>Father Arthur O'Connell</b>	<b>1928-1929</b>
<b>Father Emmet O'Connor</b>	<b>1929-1931</b>
<b>Father Arthur A Walsh</b>	<b>1931-1934</b>
<b>Father Harry A Smith</b>	<b>1934-1940</b>
<b>Father James J McLaughlin</b>	<b>1940-1941</b>
<b>Father John J O'Brien</b>	<b>1941-1946</b>
<b>Father Patrick J Morris</b>	<b>1946-1947</b>
<b>Father Erwin J Becker</b>	<b>1947-1950</b>
<b>Father Joseph F Kenney</b>	<b>1950-1954</b>
<b>Father Glen A Kelley</b>	<b>1954-1960</b>
<b>Father Robert F Coffey</b>	<b>1960-1964</b>
<b>Father Thomas Phelan</b>	<b>1965-1980</b>
<b>Father William Spring</b>	<b>1981-1983</b>
<b>Father Thomas J Maguire</b>	<b>1983-1987</b>
<b>Father William K Walsh</b>	<b>1987-1994</b>
<b>Father Eugene G Lucas</b>	<b>1994-1996</b>
<b>Father Patrick J McGrath</b>	<b>1996-1999</b>
<b>Father John Hannan</b>	<b>1999-2000</b>
<b>Father Julian Medina</b>	<b>2000-2006</b>
<b>Father Manuel B Soria</b>	<b>2006-2010</b>
<b>Father Sherwin Colaste</b>	<b>2010-2014</b>
<b>Father Richard M Boyle, OSM</b>	<b>2014-</b>