

# SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 4

Father John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist

No 46

## HISTORY OF SAINT ELIZABETH PORTUGUESE PARISH

Sacramento, California

Established October 24, 1909

July 2016



Picture from the Diocesan Archives

### **Converted Crocker Coach House becomes Saint Stephen Church in Sacramento**

The religious life of the Sacramento Portuguese community in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries began before Saint Elizabeth Portuguese Church existed. Portuguese Catholics in Sacramento attended either the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament on 11<sup>th</sup> and K Streets, Saint Rose Church on 7<sup>th</sup> and K Streets, or Saint Stephen Church on 3<sup>rd</sup> and O Streets.

### **BISHOP MANOGUE ESTABLISHES A PORTUGUESE PARISH IN CLARKSBURG**

In 1893, Bishop Patrick Manogue sanctioned the formation of Saint Joseph Church in Clarksburg for the Portuguese on land donated by John Soto. Father Guilherme S. Gloria celebrated the first Mass there and Father Seraphim Soares became the church's first pastor. Father Gloria, described by one author as "the greatest intellectual in the Portuguese community", was an acclaimed poet and journalist. He left the priesthood in 1899, married, and from 1900 to 1937 published the Portuguese-language newspaper *A Liberdade*. After the sudden deaths of his wife and son in 1937, Father Gloria made his way back to the priesthood and ended his days in ministry until his death in 1943.

### **CROCKER COACH HOUSE DONATED TO DIOCESE**

In 1900, Mary Ellen Bowden, a wealthy Catholic woman, purchased the old coach house of the Crocker family on Third and O Streets in the multi-ethnic West End area of Sacramento and gifted it to Bishop Thomas Grace for use by the diocese. The carriage building was reconditioned and made into a chapel named Saint Stephen for the patron saint of Bowden's deceased younger brother. This building would remain in Catholic hands until 1969, with an interlude in the 1920s-30s when it was sold to a Japanese man who turned it into a Japanese theater.

Saint Stephen Church was the closest church to the "Arizona" neighborhood where many Portuguese immigrants lived. Many of the Portuguese came from the mainland of Portugal or '*Continente*', but the Arizona area also had residents from other Catholic ethnic groups, principally the Slavs, Italians and Mexicans.

### **SAINT STEPHEN CHURCH BEGINS SERVICES IN 1900**

Saint Stephen Church began services in December 1900 and was an instant success. Hundreds crammed into the small church which was served by the cathedral clergy as a 'mission'. To the happiness of city fathers who were anxious about the assimilation of foreigners, Bishop Grace used the facility to help Americanize the immigrants.



**Bishop Thomas Grace**

### **COMPLAINT MADE TO BISHOP GRACE OF INDIFFERENCE TO ETHNIC GROUPS**

In 1904, Father Michael Gualco, pastor of Chico, complained to both Bishop Grace and to Apostolic Delegate Diomedeo Falconio in Washington, DC, that pastors in Sacramento and Reno were neglecting Italian Catholics. He accused Bishop Grace of indifference to the plight of other Catholic ethnic groups as well. Bishop Grace insisted that most of the immigrants spoke English and did not need special attention. However, under pressure from the apostolic delegate, Bishop Grace agreed to recruit some Italian priests to serve the growing number of Italians living in Sacramento and Amador Counties.

### **TWO ITALIAN PRIESTS COME TO SACRAMENTO**

In 1905, Bishop Grace and Father Gualco traveled to Italy and found two priests, Fathers Temistocle Eugenio Mela and Dominic Taverna. Father Mela was appointed to Sacramento while multilingual Father Taverna went to serve Italian and Spanish speaking Catholics in Amador County.

Father Mela's task was to split off a new parish for Italians and Portuguese from Saint Stephen Church. He took up a collection among the Italians and purchased land at Eighth and N Streets, right next to the Catholic orphanage in the Stanford Mansion. Here, Father Mela built a small frame church named in honor of Saint Mary which opened in 1906. The parish grew, becoming a haven not only for Italians and Portuguese but also for an increasing number of Spanish-speaking Sacramentans.

#### **FRANCISCAN SISTERS STAFF THE SCHOOL AT SAINT STEPHEN CHURCH**

In 1906 the Franciscan Sisters at Saint Francis Parish agreed to staff a school at Saint Stephen Church and a host of Portuguese, Italian, Croatian, and Latino youngsters crowded into the upstairs of the church to attend the school. Here they were taught to speak English, learned American history and patriotic customs, and found in team sports (especially baseball) the crucible that made them 'good Americans'. Today, the only vestige of Saint Stephen Church is the name on the auditorium adjacent to Our Lady of Guadalupe Church on Seventh and T Streets. Some of the furnishings from the closed Saint Rose of Lima Church on K Street were put to use at Saint Stephen Church in 1908.

#### **PORTUGUESE WANT THEIR OWN CHURCH**

The growing Portuguese Catholic population wanted their own church. In 1902, Joao V. Azevedo, a native of Pico, Azores, came to California to complete his studies at Saint Patrick Seminary in Menlo Park. He was ordained a priest in 1904 for the Diocese of Sacramento and appointed associate pastor of Saint Joseph Parish in Yreka and in 1905, was named pastor of Sacred Heart Parish, Fort Jones, until 1908.

#### **CONFLICT ERUPTS**

Traveling Bishop Enrique da Silva encouraged Sacramento's expanding Portuguese community to form their own church. Discontent with Father Mela erupted in 1909 when a group of Portuguese protested the firing of a Portuguese priest by walking out of the Italian Saint Mary Church. They presented Bishop Grace with a petition demanding a separate facility.

#### **PORTUGUESE COMMUNITY ASK FOR FATHER AZEVEDO TO BE PASTOR**

On October 24, 1909, Bishop Grace established Saint Elizabeth as a parish for the Portuguese and appointed Father Joao Azevedo the founding pastor. Mass would be held in Saint Stephen Church until the new Saint Elizabeth Church was constructed.

#### **LAND DONATED FOR A PORTUGUESE CHURCH**

Land for the new church was generously donated by Mr. and Mrs. J.S. Williams, owners of the Williams Market on 11<sup>th</sup> and Q Streets. Plans were made and the well-known San Francisco architects Frank Shea and John Lofquist were hired to design the new church to resemble a church in Angra do Heroismo on the island of Terceira. The new church was one of the first reinforced concrete buildings in Sacramento. Many local Portuguese contractors and individuals donated their time and skills to help build the church.

#### **SACRAMENTAL CELEBRATIONS BEGIN AT SAINT STEPHEN CHURCH**

Between October 24, 1909 and January 1, 1913, Father Azevedo celebrated 150 baptisms, 46 marriages and 8 funerals in Saint Stephen Church. The first marriage celebrated in the church was on November 28, 1909 between Joseph Vincent Costa of Sacramento and a Miss Silva, with George and Frances Davis as witnesses.



The first person to be buried from Saint Stephen Church was Joseph Pereira Beirao on October 26, 1909. He died on the 24 of October at the age of 74. Seven others were buried from the church.

From the parents of children baptized at Saint Stephen Church, 82 were from Pico, 52 from Piedade, 3 from Ribeirinha, 9 from Santo Amaro, 9 from Sao Roque, and others from Ribeiros, Lages, Santo Antonio, Candelaria, Prainha, Caes do Pico and unspecified villages.

Sixteen parents were from Sao Jorge, 15 from Terceira, 15 from Faial, 6 from Sao Miguel, 5 from Flores, and 4 from Santa Maria. Madeira was represented by 11 parents, and Cabo Verde, which at the time was still part of Portugal, by 16. Only one child was from Continental Portugal.



Photo by John E Boll 2012

### **Saint Elizabeth Portuguese Church, Sacramento**

#### **SAINT ELIZABETH CHURCH DEDICATED IN 1913**

Saint Elizabeth Church, located on Twelfth and S Streets in Sacramento, was dedicated on February 2, 1913 and the first baptism in the new church was that of Joseph Veiga, born on July 30, 1913, the son of Martin Veiga of Cabo Verde and Luiza Roza of Honolulu. Although Saint Elizabeth Church was officially

dedicated in February 1913, Portuguese involvement in activities at Saint Stephen Church continued after that date, according to news accounts.



Photo by John E Boll 2016

### **The Interior of Saint Elizabeth Portuguese Church, Sacramento**

#### **BASEMENT OF THE CHURCH ENLARGED IN 1926**

In 1926, the basement of the church was dug out in order to construct a parish hall. The hall has been used continually through the years as a meeting place for Portuguese organizations, Portuguese language classes, receptions and dinners.

#### **FATHER JOHN AZEVEDO NAMED A MONSIGNOR**

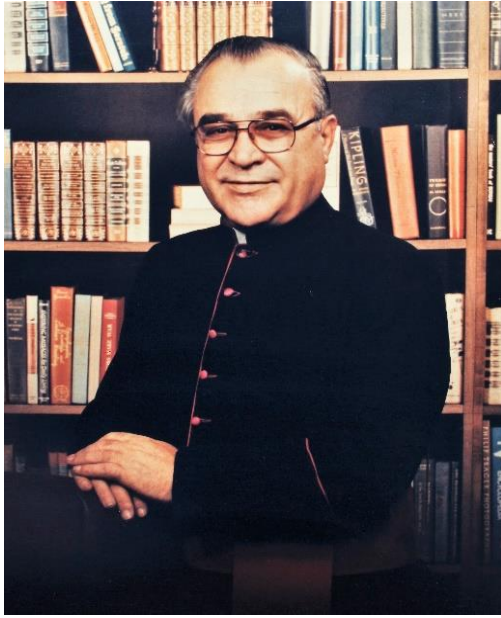
In 1947, Bishop Robert J Armstrong asked the Pope Pius XII to name Father Azevedo a monsignor. In 1949, a young man from Terceira named Valdemiro M Fagundes entered Saint Patrick seminary in Menlo Park, CA. Val Fagundes was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Sacramento in 1951 and was assigned as associate to Monsignor Azevedo until he retired in 1955. Monsignor Azevedo died in 1957 after only two years of retirement.

Father Fagundes, now administrator of Saint Elizabeth parish, took on the task of building a new rectory next to the church which completed the original 1909 design for the parish.



**Monsignor John Azevedo**

### **FATHER FEGUNDES NAMED PASTOR**



**Monsignor Valdemiro Fagundes**

Succeeding Monsignor Azevedo as administrator of Saint Elizabeth Parish in 1955, Father Fagundes was named pastor of the parish in 1963 or 64 and served the parish in that roll until he retired in 1985.

In 1977, Bishop Alden J Bell requested Pope Paul VI to confer the title of monsignor on Father Fagundes.

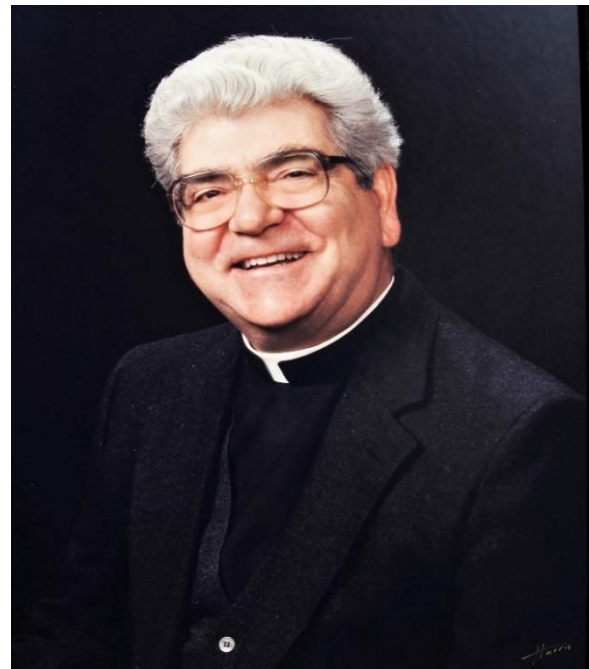
Monsignor Fagundes was already fighting health problems in 1982 when he underwent heart bypass surgery at the age of 55. Even so, he decided to undertake the task of renovating and restoring the interior of Saint Elizabeth church. In September 1984, he had a heart attack and the doctors discovered one of the bypass arteries had clogged again.

The doctors had been after Monsignor Fagundes to retire for a long time and after his last heart attack he decided it was time to turn the parish over to a younger and healthier priest. On January 1, 1985, he retired. For more than 75 years, Saint Elizabeth Church had only two pastors: Monsignors Joao V Azevedo and Valdemiro M Fagundes. It was the end of an era for the Portuguese community.

### **FATHER JOSE RIBEIRO, SJ, NAMED ADMINISTRATOR**

Succeeding Monsignor Fagundes was Father Jose F Ribeiro, SJ who was appointed administrator of Saint Elizabeth Church in 1985 and served for seven years. Previously, he had ministered to the Portuguese immigrants in Santa Clara, California. In 1986, property adjacent to the church was purchased by the parish and made into a parish parking lot.

In 1988, the Portuguese parish celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the dedication of the church. Highlighted at that celebration were all the priests who had served as pastors and associate pastors or who had resided in the rectory while engaged in a diocesan ministry elsewhere.



**Father Jose Ribeiro, SJ**



## FATHER EDUINO SILVEIRA SUCCEEDS FATHER RIBEIRO



Continuing ministry to the Portuguese community, Bishop Francis Quinn appointed Father Eduino Silveira as administrator of Saint Elizabeth Parish on January 18, 1991. Two years later, Father Eduino was named pastor of the parish.

During Father Eduino's fourteen years as pastor of Saint Elizabeth Church, he oversaw the renovation of the church and the parish hall located in the lower level of the church. An elevator was installed between the church and the hall enabling parishioners with disabilities to more easily move from the church level to the hall below.

Father Eduino was always in great demand to celebrate the annual Holy Spirit Mass and Festas throughout the diocese, keeping alive the tradition of Saint Elizabeth of Portugal. After fourteen years of ministry at Portuguese parish, Bishop William Weigand appointed Father Silveira pastor of Saint Joseph Parish in Redding.

## THE STIGMATINE FATHERS COME TO SAINT ELIZABETH PARISH



With the appointment of Father Silveira to the pastorate of Saint Philomene Parish, Bishop Weigand invited the Stigmatine Fathers to take on the leadership of Holy Cross Parish in West Sacramento and Saint Elizabeth Parish in Sacramento.

### **Father Giancarlo Mittempergher, C.S.S., Pastor**

Three Stigmatine priests were assigned to these two parishes. Father Giancarlo Mittempergher, C.S.S. was named pastor of both parishes and his two parochial vicars were Fathers Edwin Limpiado and Antonio dos Santos.

Father Edwin is a native of the Philippines and Father Antonio of Brazil. Portuguese was Father Antonio's native language. He often celebrated Mass in Portuguese at Saint Elizabeth Church on Sundays although all three priests rotated between the two churches. In the rotation, one priest stayed the week at Saint Elizabeth rectory, celebrated the daily morning Mass and did parish ministry there during the week.

## **STIGMATINE FATHERS WITHDRAW FROM THE DIOCESE**

After eight years in the parish, the Stigmatine Fathers were called back to their home provinces and withdraw from their ministry in Sacramento. Once again, the bishop had to find two priest to take over leadership in both Saint Elizabeth Parish in Sacramento and Holy Cross Parish in West Sacramento.

Father Giancarlo Mittempergher returned to Rome for one year and then was assigned to the Stigmatine National Seminary in Verona, Italy where he still serves.

Father Antonio dos Santos returned to Brazil to work for a year in a Stigmatine parish and then returned to the US to work in the diocese of Saint Augustine in Florida where he ministers to Portuguese and Spanish speaking communities in three parishes.



**Father Antonio Dos Santos, C.S.S.**

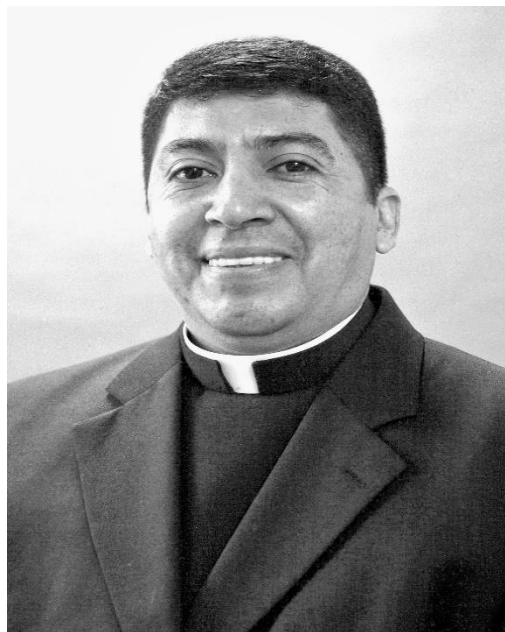


**Father Edwin Limpiado**

Father Edwin Limpiado decided to leave the Stigmatine community and petitioned the Diocese of Monterey for acceptance. Bishop Richard Garcia accepted him for ministry and he became director of youth ministry for the diocese of Monterey. Recently, Father Edwin was appointed pastor of Saint William parish in Atascadero, California.



## **FATHER JACOBO CACERES APPOINTED PARISH ADMINISTRATOR**



In 2013, Bishop Jaime Soto appointed Father Jacobo Cáceres as parish administrator of Saint Elizabeth parish in Sacramento. Father Jacobo was born in Honduras and Spanish is his native language. In his youth he joined the Verbum Dei community in Mexico but eventually left that community and came to Sacramento where he knew priests from the Verbum Dei community who joined the Sacramento diocese. He petitioned the diocese of Sacramento to be accepted and then spent two years at Saint Patrick Seminary in Menlo Park where he completed his theological studies. He was ordained a priest by Bishop Weigand for Sacramento on November 21, 2008.

After arriving at Saint Elizabeth parish on July 1, 2013, Father Jacobo began studying Portuguese. He wrote his homilies in English and a parishioner translated them into Portuguese for him. He was able to celebrate Mass and preach in Portuguese and was well accepted by the Portuguese community.

While serving as administrator of Saint Elizabeth parish, Father Jacobo also served as a part-time parochial vicar at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church just five blocks away. He celebrated Mass at Our Lady of Guadalupe church and took on other pastoral duties.

His ministry at Saint Elizabeth Parish was for only one year. Bishop Soto appointed Father Jacobo pastor of Holy Cross Parish in West Sacramento effective on July 1, 2014.

## **THE NEXT ADMINISTRATOR, FATHER EFREN FERGUS GARCIA-FLORES**

Father Efrén García-Flores succeeded Father Mittempergher as the administrator of Holy Cross Parish, West Sacramento in 2013. In 2014, Bishop Soto made a lateral transfer of Fathers Efrén and Jacobo. Father Efrén was assigned to Saint Elizabeth Church and Father Jacobo to Holy Cross Church. At the end of 2015, Father García-Flores stepped down as administrator of Saint Elizabeth Church.



**Father Efrén García-Flores**

## **FATHER FRANCISCO VELAZQUEZ SUCCEEDS FATHER GARCIA**



**Father Francisco Velazquez**

After the departure of Father Garcia from Saint Elizabeth Church, Bishop Soto appointed Father Frank Velazquez administrator of Saint Elizabeth Parish.

Father Frank is fluent in English and Spanish and also speaks some Portuguese. He served Saint Elizabeth Parish for one year and on July 1, 2016 was appointed parochial vicar of Holy Spirit Parish in Fairfield where he serves a large Spanish speaking community.

## **THE NEW PASTOR OF SAINT ELIZABETH PARISH**



**Father Mark R Richards**

For a number of years, Father Mark Richards has served as Judicial Vicar of the Diocesan Tribunal with residence at Saint Robert Parish in Sacramento. On July 1, 2016, Bishop Soto appointed Father Mark pastor of Saint Elizabeth parish while he continues his work at the Diocesan Tribunal and serves as the new pastor of Saint Elizabeth Portuguese parish.

### **THANKS TO OUR PRIESTS**

The Church of Sacramento is grateful to the priests of the diocese who have faithfully served the Portuguese community of Sacramento for more than a century. May the Lord bless them for the good work they have done to build up the Kingdom of God!



**Our Lady of Fatima Shrine, Saint Elizabeth Church**



# Priests who have served Saint Elizabeth Parish

## Pastors and Administrators

Monsignor John V Azevedo, Pastor	1909 – 1957
Monsignor Valdemiro M Fagundes, Pastor	1957 – 1985
Father Jose F Ribeiro, SJ, Pastor	1985 – 1991
Father Eduino Silveira, Pastor	1991 – 2005
Father Giancarlo Mittempergher, C.S.S., Pastor	2005 – 2013
Father Jacobo A Cáceres, Administrator	2013 – 2014
Father Efrén Fergus García-Flores, Administrator	2014 – 2015
Father Francisco Velazquez, Administrator	2015 – 2016
Father Mark R Richards, Pastor	2016 – Present

## Parochial Vicar or Priest in Residence

Monsignor James T Murphy, in residence	1971 – 1972
Father Daniel Casey, in residence	1972 – 1977
Father Thomas Batch, in residence	1990 – 1991
Father Edwin S Limpiado, C.S.S., Parochial Vicar	2005 – 2008
Father Antonio L dos Santos, C.S.S. Parochial Vicar	2005 – 2013

Material for this article came in part from documents in the diocesan archival box for Saint Elizabeth Parish, personal conversations by the diocesan archivist with priests who served at Saint Elizabeth Church and from the historical work done by Church Historian Father Steven M Avella who wrote the text of the 2006 volume of the history of the Diocese of Sacramento entitled *The Diocese of Sacramento, A Journey of Faith*.