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History of Our Lady of the Sierra Chapel *Camp Sacramento, California*

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In the 1930s, Catholics, many of whom came from Saint Francis Parish in Sacramento and other Sacramento parishes, vacationed at Camp Sacramento in the Sierras near Echo Summit on Highway 50. They very much desired to have Sunday Mass celebrated at the camp during the summer months. Father Bernardine Laumeister, OFM, an assistant at Saint Francis Church, arranged with Bishop Robert Armstrong for the Franciscans to go to Camp Sacramento on Sundays during the summer months to celebrate Mass in the camp dining hall.

THE IDEA OF A CHAPEL BEGAN TO DEVELOP

From this arrangement, the idea came from the people and spearheaded by Father Bernardine to build a chapel off the camp property as a permanent facility. The proposal, no doubt, was taken to Bishop Armstrong for his approval.

US FOREST SERVICE LEASES SOME LAND

Father Laumeister and Maurice Bambery, a master carpenter, spearheaded a plan to provide a permanent facility where Catholics who came to Camp Sacramento during the summer could attend Sunday Mass. A lease was negotiated with the US Forest Service for a parcel of land across the road from the camp. Architect Harry Devine designed the chapel and in May 1935, excavation at the site began.

A CHAPEL BUILT IN 1935

Dave Cippa and John Steinman, working with contractor Maurice Bambery, spent the next three months living in tents which they erected on the site. By the middle of June 1935, with the help of volunteers, they built the chapel and prepared it for use. On June 23, the first Mass was celebrated in the chapel. The name of forty-seven people who attended the Mass that day appear in the church register.

BISHOP ARMSTRONG DEDICATES THE CHAPEL

On August 4, 1935, Bishop Robert J Armstrong, assisted by Monsignor Thomas Horgan, former pastor of Our Lady of the Assumption parish in Truckee, dedicated the church to the Blessed Virgin under the title of *Our Lady of the Sierra*. Bishop Armstrong's comment about the chapel on the day of the dedication was, "There is nothing missing and nothing extravagant."

COST OF THE CHAPEL

The cost to construct the chapel was \$4,000 dollars and the project was financed by camper donations. When the campers' support for the chapel proved inadequate during that depression era, Bishop Armstrong sought and received some assistance from the Catholic Extension Society which gave financial assistance to the home missions.

An organ was donated by William Boderfelt; the stained glass window behind the altar by the builder, Maurice Bambery, and several years later a locomotive bell was installed over the entrance of the chapel by Carl Nissel.



Photo by John E Boll 2016

Our Lady of the Sierra Chapel

FRANCISCAN FRIARS

The Franciscan friars assigned to Saint Francis parish in Sacramento during the pastorates of Fathers Samuel Goggins, OFM, Gregory Wooler, OFM, and Gilbert Zlatar, OFM, loved to celebrate Mass at Camp Sacramento during the summer months. The priests would stay in a small room near the sacristy where they bunked down for the night. These Franciscan priests came to Camp Sacramento every weekend during the summer months from 1935 to 1951 when Saint Theresa Parish in South Lake Tahoe was established.

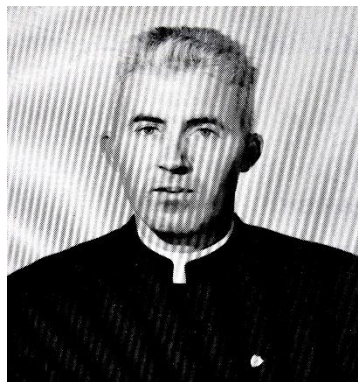
FIRST WEEKEND RETREAT HELD IN 1938

Beginning in 1938, the first weekend retreat for laymen held in the Diocese of Sacramento was conducted by the Franciscan friars from Saint Francis parish in Sacramento at the camp chapel.

These yearly retreats continued until 1951 when Saint Theresa Parish in South Lake Tahoe was established and the parish took over coverage of the camp.

The church register records sixty-nine names of men who attended a retreat June 29 – July 1, 1945. Some of the friars who served the summer community at Camp Sacramento were Fathers Michael Egan, OFM, Gilbert Zlatar, OFM, Samuel Goggin, OFM, Gregory Wooler, OFM, and Luke Powleson, OFM.

FATHER PATRICK LYONS TAKES OVER THE MASS AT CAMP SACRAMENTO



Father Patrick Lyons

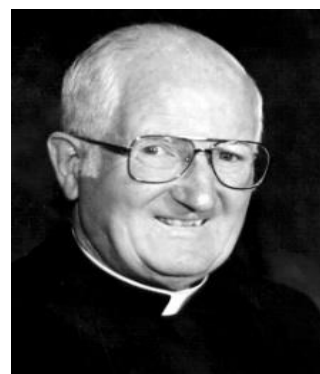
According to Father John Grace, pastor emeritus of Saint Theresa Parish in South Lake Tahoe, Father Patrick Lyons, founding pastor of Saint Theresa parish at Al Tahoe, was happy to take over the Sunday Mass at Camp Sacramento because that collection was the main support for the newly established parish. Camp Sacramento had the only ski resort in the Tahoe area at that time and there was a lodge at Camp Sacramento operated by Harry Cotton and his wife. The camp director always invited both Father Lyons and Father Grace to have lunch at the lodge after the Sunday Mass.

FATHER FRASINETTI REMODELED SANCTUARY

In 1959, Bishop McGucken assigned Father Henry Frasinetti to assist Father Grace at Saint Theresa Parish. Father Frasinetti supervised a remodel of the sanctuary of the camp chapel in 1961.

SALVATORIANS OVERSEE CAMP SACRAMENTO

As Saint Theresa parish grew in size, parish demands made it difficult for the parish priests to celebrate the summer Mass at Camp Sacramento. Father Grace invited the Salvatorian Fathers from Saint Pius X Seminary in Galt to take over the summer Mass at the camp. It was Father Cletus LaMere, SDS, who introduced Father Victor McEvoy, SDS, both to Saint Theresa Parish and to *Our Lady of the Sierra* chapel.



Father John Grace

In those early years, there was a small travel trailer parked on the property to allow the priest to stay overnight until the Forest Service decided that the trailer violated some regulation. Other Salvatorians served the chapel on occasion but for the most part the responsibility fell to Father Vic. His last Mass at the camp was celebrated on Labor Day weekend in 1983. He says *Our Lady of the Sierra* experience was a highlight of his many years in ministry.

THOSE WHO ATTEND MASS AT CAMP SACRAMENTO TODAY

Catholics who attend Sunday Mass at *Our Lady of the Sierra* chapel today are owners of summer cabins in the Echo Lakes area. These Catholics are mainly from the San Francisco Bay Area. The

maintenance of the chapel once headed by Bob Benefield is now organized by Alan and Sylvia Hugo who reside in the Palm Springs area and have a cabin at Echo Summit.

INVOLVEMENT OF TODAY'S YOUNGER GENERATION

A younger generation of Catholics have now become involved at the chapel and they too are from the Sacramento area. The chapel has stood strong through eighty-one winters and many feet of snow, yet it continues to be a shining star in the hats of the many faithful people from the Sacramento area who gave so many hours of volunteer time and labor to build this simple but elegant chapel in the 1930s.

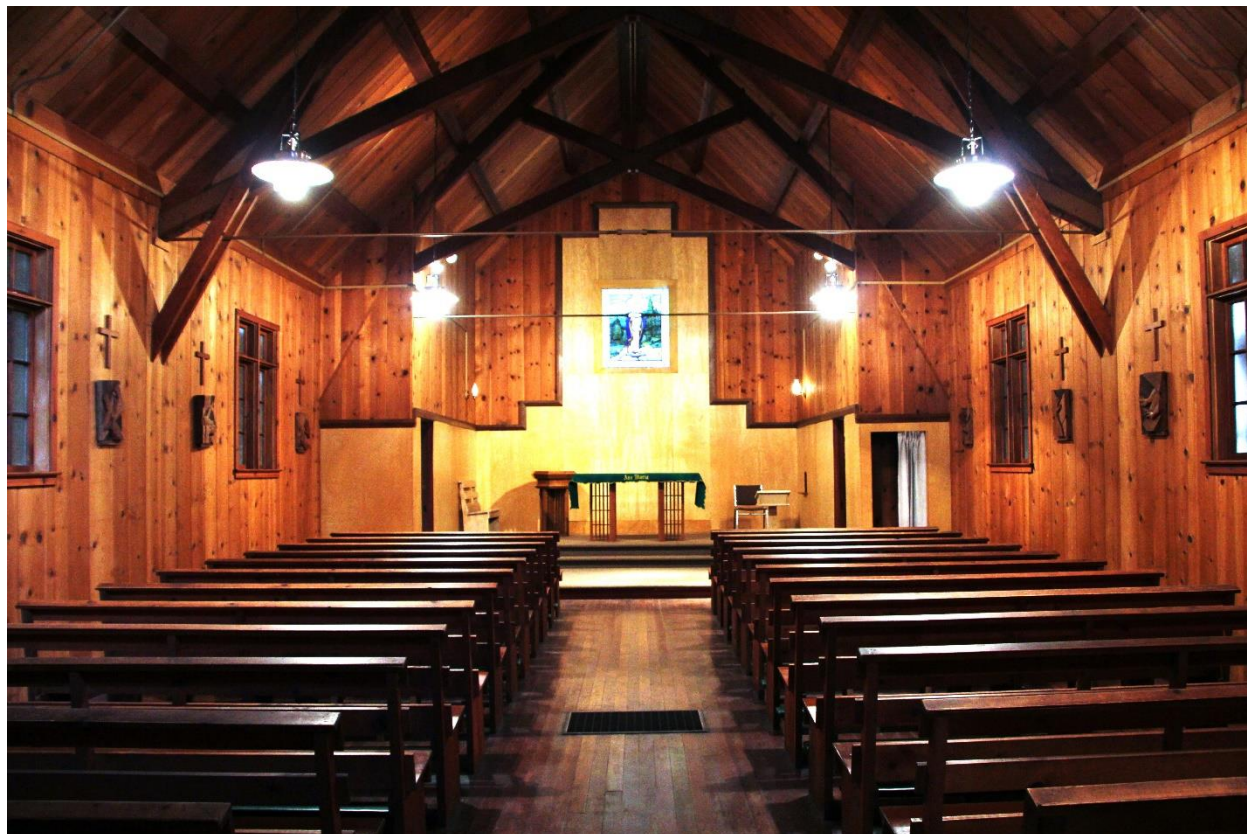
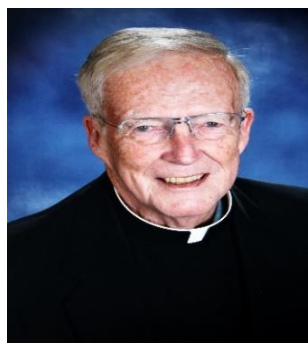


Photo by John E Boll 2016

Interior of Our Lady of the Sierra Chapel Today

RENOVATION OF THE CHAPEL IN THE 1990s



Monsignor Wallace

The sanctuary of *Our Lady of the Sierra Chapel* was renovated by Monsignor Murrough Wallace in the mid-1990s. The present altar was once a side altar in the old Saint Theresa church in South Lake Tahoe which was torn down to make way for the new church that was dedicated by Bishop Weigand in 2000.

SUMMER SUNDAY MASS CONTINUES AT CAMP SACRAMENTO

Mass continues to be celebrated at *Our Lady of the Sierra Chapel* at Camp Sacramento from July to Labor Day. Father Mauricio Hurtado, administrator of Saint Theresa Parish, and pastor emeritus Monsignor Wallace, take turns celebrating the 10 AM Sunday Mass at Camp Sacramento from July to Labor Day.

SIMPLE BUT ADEQUATE

The chapel is simple but provides a pleasant atmosphere for the celebration of the Eucharist. There is space for about 150 people in the chapel. Recently, a tree fell on the chapel roof and cracked one of the rafters. Father Mauricio is working with a roofing company to repair the damage before the winter snows begin to fall.



*Father Mauricio Hurtado
Administrator of Saint Theresa Parish in South Lake Tahoe*



Stations of the Cross in the chapel were carved from local trees by one of the campers

Special thanks to Father John Grace, Monsignor Murrough Wallace, Father Mauricio Hurtado and Vic McEvoy for providing information on the history of this chapel.