

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 4

Father John E Boll, Archivist

No 22

HISTORY OF SAINT JAMES PARISH, DAVIS

Taken from Material Gathered from the Saint James Parish Archives

The first Mass in Davis (then called Davisville) was offered in 1869 in the parlor of Maurice Reardon's Hotel, on the northeast corner of Third and C Streets, by a priest who came from Sacramento. The hotel burned in 1890. Father Patrick Scanlon, who commuted from Sacramento, became the first resident priest in Yolo County in 1870. Father Scanlon and other priests offered Mass intermittently for the next several years, primarily in the Yolo schoolhouse in Davis.

The First Catholic Church in Davis

The first Catholic Church in Davis was built in 1875 on the north-east corner of Third and I Streets. At that time, the ***Pontifical Annual*** reported there were 12 Catholic families living in Davis. Father Peter J Kaiser of Woodland was pastor when the Davisville church was constructed.

Archbishop Joseph Alemany Dedicates Saint James Church

The Diocese of Sacramento would not be created until 1886. The Vicariate of Marysville, established in 1860, included the north-eastern counties of California, all of Nevada, Utah and part of Colorado. Davisville in Yolo County was part of the Archdiocese of San Francisco and as such, on June 10, 1881, Archbishop Joseph Sadoc Alemany of San Francisco dedicated the church in Davisville to the honor of Saint James the Greater as a mission of Holy Rosary parish in Woodland.

Mrs. Isaac Chiles, member of the pioneer Chiles family, donated an acre of land for a cemetery. Tommy Dee, a relative of the Chiles family, volunteered to keep the pot-bellied stove in the church supplied and stoked with wood, and to keep the church clean. Mrs. Annie Grieve taught catechism for all grades.



First St James Church Erected in 1875

Mrs. Annie Grieve taught catechism for all grades.

Bishop Patrick Manogue Presses for the Creation of the Diocese of Sacramento

With the retirement of Bishop Eugene O'Connell in 1886, his coadjutor Bishop Patrick Manogue automatically became bishop of Grass Valley. The new bishop pressed Rome to change the See City from Grass Valley to Sacramento. The territorial lines were eventually redrawn making Sacramento the See City. At that point, all the parishes and missions of Yolo County became part of the Diocese of Sacramento.

Creation of the Parish of Winters

It was either December of 1912 or January of 1913 when the Winters-Davis parish was established with headquarters in Winters. Prior to that time, both Winters and Davis were the responsibility of Holy Rosary Parish in Woodland and Mass was celebrated on alternate Sundays in Winters and in Davis. The first pastor of this new parish was Father John F Quinn and the first wedding in the new Davis church was that of June Rose Plant and Valente Francis Dolcini in 1916.

Davis Established as a Parish

In the spring of 1931, after the decision was made that a new church in Davis was necessary, a brick church was constructed on the northeast corner of Fifth and C Streets for a cost of \$12,000. This church was dedicated in December of 1931 by Bishop Robert Armstrong, the fourth bishop of the Diocese of Sacramento. Father James Grealy was pastor of Davis when the new church was dedicated. The celebrant of that Mass was Father John Tumulty.



Served as Parish Church 1931 - 1964; Now Newman Chapel.

Newman Club Established in 1935

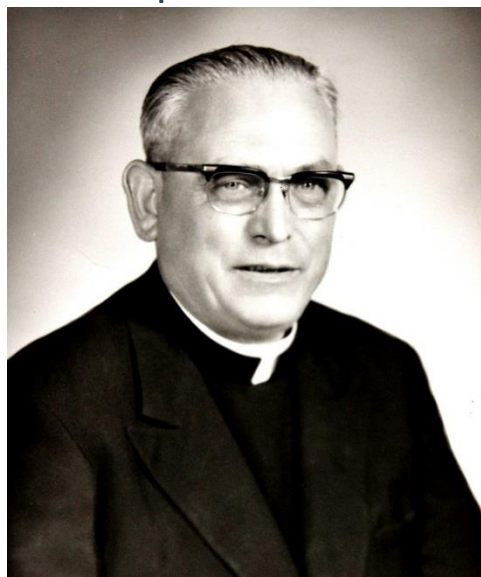
Bishop Armstrong established the *California Aggie Newman Club* in 1935. The ceremony at which the bishop presented the charter establishing the Newman Club was held in the green wooden

campus gymnasium. With a growing Catholic presence at the new college, the pastor of Saint James Church, Father Michael Hogan, was also named the Newman chaplain.



Interior of Saint James Church in the 1930s

Father Joseph Madden



In 1938, with the Davis population growing more rapidly than in Winters, the pastoral center of the parish was moved from Winters to Davis and a new rectory was built in Davis next to the brick church. Father Joseph Madden was pastor when the new rectory was built.

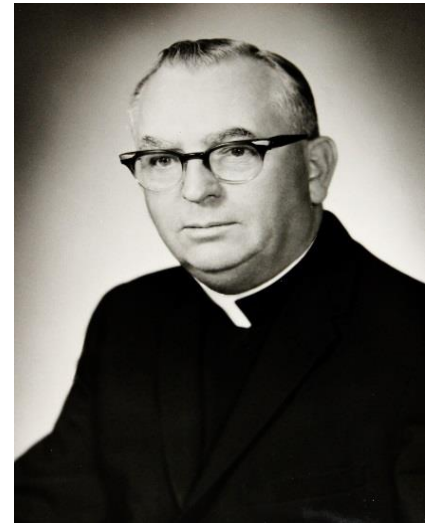
With Father Madden's help the Holy Name Society was organized in 1939. Val Dolcini, Sr. was the first president. It became a very strong organization with a sizable membership, and regular retreats were a part of the spiritual program. Popular social events were held that raised money for the church. There was an annual Roast Beef and spaghetti Dinner and the Mothers' Day Breakfast. Both affairs were held in the dining hall at Slatters Court on Olive Drive.

After the hall was built, the Spanish Pit Barbecue Dinner became an annual affair with the last one held in 1962. For a number of years the men entered a landscaped garden booth in the Yolo County Fair competition, and the prize money was added to the sizable amount they raised to help pay for parish expenses.

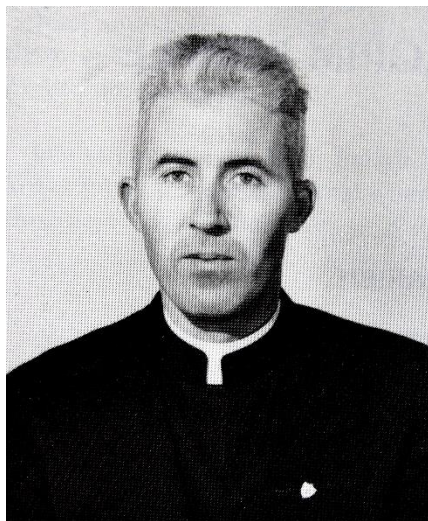
Father Madden was a native of Ballylongford, County Kerry, Ireland where he was born in 1906. He came to the United States and served in Susanville, Redding, Weaverville, Grass Valley and Scotia before becoming pastor of Winters-Davis in 1937. He was pastor for eleven years before he was transferred to Saint Anthony Parish in Walnut Grove. He died September 27, 1969 while visiting in Ireland.

Father Bernard McElwee Succeeds Father Madden as Pastor 1949-1952

1949 Father Bernard McElwee came to Davis as pastor. He was born in Slieve Gallion, South Derry, Ireland and ordained a priest in 1934. He was assistant pastor at Saint Joseph Parish in Marysville and pastor of Saint Anthony Parish in Walnut Grove before coming to Davis as pastor.



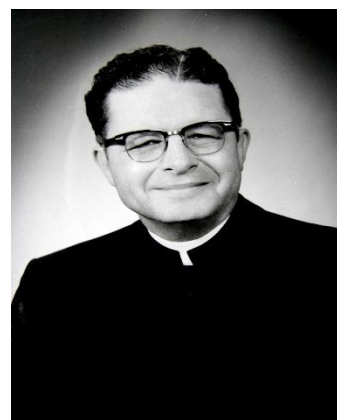
Realizing the need for a meeting place for the very active organizations in the parish, he worked with the Holy Name men to build a parish hall. In 1950 land on the west side of B Street at 12th was deeded to the parish by John and Mary Lillard. Two war surplus barracks from Camp Beale were purchased and put together as one building. All the work was done by volunteer labor; dozens of parishioners arrived each Saturday with their own hammers and saws ready to work. The women served lunch at noon and also helped with building and painting. It was the largest single project the parish had ever attempted and it was a good exercise in “togetherness.”



Father Patrick Lyons was assistant pastor at the time the hall was built. He was more at ease celebrating Mass and teaching CCD in the Winters and Esparto missions, but every weekend he helped build the parish hall, learning to hit the nail instead of his thumb. The building was dedicated on October 7, 1951.

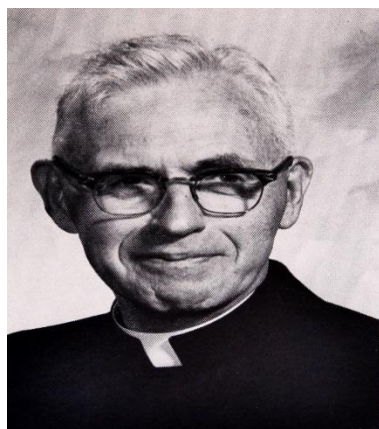
The Mr. and Mrs. Club was formed that year and dances, card parties and various social events were held. All the money raising events of the Holy Name Society and the Catholic Ladies were held in the parish hall.

Father Eymard Gallagher (right) was appointed assistant pastor of Davis from 1951 to 1953. He would later become the editor of the *Catholic Herald*, a post he would hold for many years.



Father Paul Degnan Named Pastor of Davis

With the 1952 appointment of Father McElwee to Yuba City, Father Paul Degnan was named the next pastor of Davis. Father Degnan was born in 1907 in County Leitrim, Ireland, and was ordained a priest in 1932 in Saint Mary Cathedral, San Francisco. He had been pastor of Saint Paul Parish in Knights Landing before his appointment to Saint James Parish in Davis on November 14, 1952.



This was a time of growth for Saint James Parish as well as the town of Davis. A new organization was added to those already active in the parish. The CYO was formed during Father Sylvester Thomas' time as assistant pastor and for a number of years a very active group met at the hall regularly. Trips to the snow, dances, and car washes combined with religious discussions, speakers and Communion breakfasts were held.

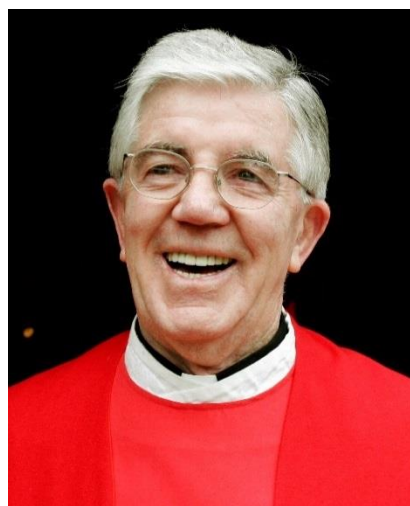
Father Paul Degnan

In 1959, during the pastorate of Father Degnan, additional land was purchased to provide for expansion of parish facilities. Surveys at that time showed about 500 Catholic families in the parish. A Master Planning Committee was established in 1962 including S.L. Barovetto, John W. Brinley, Michael O'Brien, Paul Roberts and A.L. Tappel. Serving on the Finance Committee were J.M. Campbell, J.E. DeVay, Harold P. Olmo, L.H. Pleau and M. A. Jorgenson. Spear-heading fund raising were A.J. Bill, Harry Brenner, Don H. Gale, James A. Kennedy, C.R. Kovacic, C.C. Lewis, J.M. Lucas, Victor Rendig, Mark A. Stefani and C.L. Stetson, Jr.

Confraternity of Christian Doctrine Established in Davis

Religious education for the children of Saint James Parish began in the original church under the direction of Annie Grieve. On February 1, 1959, Bishop Joseph T. McGucken came to Davis to establish the official Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. Among those who coordinated the CCD program were Molly Mustard, Stephen Warnock, David Lewis and Kathleen Murphy. In 1974, Mrs. Margaret Bryte was employed as a full time coordinator of faith formation. The faith formation program is indebted to many lay teachers who served throughout the years, as well as the Holy Cross Sisters from Woodland, the Carmelite Sisters from Winters, and the faculty of Saint James School.

In 1962, **Father T Brendan O'Sullivan** was assigned as assistant pastor of Saint James Parish. One of his focuses was working with the student community at the University of California in Davis which he enjoyed very much.

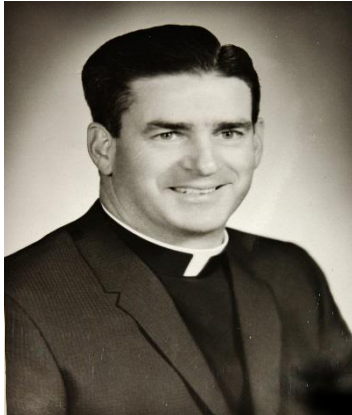


Father Brendan O'Sullivan

Father Andrew Coffey Appointed Pastor of Davis

On May 14, 1963, in the midst of this planning, Father Andrew Coffey was assigned as pastor of Saint James Parish. He would serve the Davis community for nearly fifty years and continued living in Davis after his retirement until just before his death on August 12, 2010.

Father Coffey was born in County Meath, Ireland. He studied theology at Saint Patrick College, Maynooth from 1943-1947 and was ordained a priest for the diocese of Meath, Ireland.



In 1948 he came to the Sacramento diocese on a “five year loan.” For eight years he was assistant pastor of Saint John the Baptist Church in Chico and then in 1956 became the first pastor of the newly-formed Saint Anthony Parish in Winters which included supervision of Saint Martin mission church in Esparto.

The Parish Moves to the 14th and B Street Site

By 1964, the brick church on 5th and C Streets was deemed inadequate for worship needs of the parish. The parish hall on the new site was remodeled and used for Sunday Mass until a new church could be built. Social and other events were still held in the hall by screening off the sanctuary. By 1968, as the new Vatican II liturgy was introduced in the Universal Church, the hall was used only for Sunday worship. Six Masses on the weekend were necessary to accommodate the parishioners attending Mass.

Father Andy Coffey

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Photo by John E Boll

Saint James Church Built in 1931

New Rectory Built for the Priests and a new School for Parish Children

Parishioners began pressing for a Catholic school for their children. The parish moved forward with plans to build a new rectory and a parish school with a convent to be constructed a bit later. The architectural plans for all three buildings were designed by Barovetto and Thomas of Sacramento. Construction of the rectory and the school was done by Griffin Construction Company in 1964-65 at a cost of \$300,000.

At the same time, the overall master plan of surface drainage, water, sewer, streets and power supply lines were installed in preparation for the convent and for the future church. A convent to accommodate ten sisters was built next to the school in 1968 by Miller construction Company at a cost of \$60,000. Before moving to the new convent, the sisters lived in the former brick rectory at 5th and C Streets.

Saint James Parish School Opens

The new Saint James Parish School opened on September 7, 1965 with six classrooms including an office, a multipurpose room, a nurse's office, teachers' room, and a CCD office.



St James Archives

Saint James Parish School in the Early 1970s

The school began with three grades taught by three religious sisters from the Daughter of the Holy Spirit community in Putnam, Connecticut. Each year thereafter, a grade was added until the sixth grade in 1968. Prior to building the parish school, Davis Catholic students were bussed to Holy Rosary School in Woodland.

Enrollment at Saint James School increased steadily and the decision was made to make the parish school a six-grade school to be compatible with the 6-3-3 public school system in Davis.

In September 1975, a kindergarten classroom was added in the north end of the parish hall. The work of renovating and furnishing this classroom was done by the parents of the prospective kindergarten children.

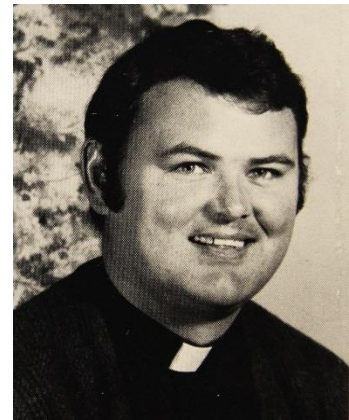
The Diocese Purchases the old Church and Converts it into the Newman Center

When the brick church was no longer used as the “main church,” Bishop Bell purchased it to serve as the Newman Center for the UC Davis student community. Priests who served as Newman chaplains during this era were Fathers Charles Bencken, Charles Barrett, C.S.C. and John Boll. In the fall of 1974, Sister Constance Charette, DHS, joined Father Boll in the Newman Apostolate and in 1975, Father Thomas Pinkel, O Carm joined the Newman staff.

Residents at the New Rectory

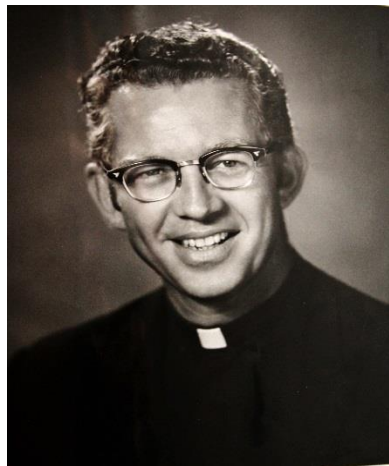
For its time, the new Saint James Rectory looked elegant and it was given the nickname by some clergy as “The Coffey Hilton.” Because of its spaciousness, Father Coffey often welcomed priests studying at UC Davis to live at the rectory. The house was often filled with priests from all over the world.

Father Thomas Prendergast (right), a native of Cork City, Ireland, became an assistant at Saint James Parish after his arrival from Ireland on October 8, 1971. He served Saint James Parish from 1971-74 and then was assigned to Presentation Parish in Sacramento.



Monsignor John S Cummins

In 1971, Monsignor John Cummins, chancellor of the diocese of Oakland from 1962-1971, was chosen by the California bishops to be Executive Director of the California Conference of Catholic in Sacramento. His new job made it necessary for him to move to from Oakland to Sacramento and Father Coffey invited John to live in residence at the parish rectory in Davis and he accepted.



In March 1974 while serving the Catholic Conference of Bishops in Sacramento, Pope Paul VI named Monsignor Cummins Bishop of Lambesi and Auxiliary of Sacramento. The venue for his episcopal ordination was the Sacramento Memorial Auditorium on May 16, 1974.

In 1973, Father John Boll was appointed director of the campus ministry at the Davis Newman Center with residence at Saint James rectory. He served as director and chaplain of the Newman Center for the next seven years. At the end of the 1980 academic year, he began a semester of sabbatical studies in Scripture in Ein Karem, the birthplace of John the Baptist, near Jerusalem.

The Parish builds a new Church

As the parish continued to grow it became necessary to expand the parish plant to meet the needs of the congregation. A tithing program began in the early 1960s, each family being asked to give 10% of its annual income to the church, one half to support the parish and the other half to build a new church.

In 1971, Russ Magill and Michael O’Brien were chairmen for the fund drive which collected \$320,000, the amount thought to be enough to cover construction costs. Because of skyrocketing inflation after the original estimates were given, a second fund drive was initiated in 1975 under

the leadership of Clarence Barry and Val Dolcini. Pledges in the amount of almost \$300,000 were made.

Important to the progress of the church construction was the 1972 Parish Council's appointment of a Church Building Committee under the chairmanship of Constant Delwiche who later acted as building supervisor. This committee exhaustively researched every phase of church construction and design, supervised the selection of an architect and oversaw the construction.

In 1973, plans were made to build a new parish church. Construction began in 1975 and was completed the following year. The church was dedicated on February 15, 1976 by Bishop Alden Bell. With a church capacity of 580, the Catholic population in Davis was served by six Sunday Masses, five in English and one in Spanish.



Photo by John E Boll 2010

Father Dan Looney Succeeds Monsignor Coffey as Pastor

After 31 years as pastor of Davis, Monsignor Andrew Coffey retired as Pastor Emeritus of Saint James Parish. Succeeding him in the pastoral role was Father Dan Looney who began his pastorate on June 1, 1994. The rest of the Davis story will be printed in a future article.

Pastors of Saint James Parish

Reverend John F Quinn	1913
Reverend Christopher Tevlin	1921-1922
Reverend Patrick Sears	1922-1923
Reverend James Grealy	1923-1933
Reverend Michael Hogan	1933-1937

Reverend Joseph Madden	1937-1949
Reverend Bernard McElwee	1949-1952
Reverend Paul Degnan	1952-1963
Reverend Andrew Coffey	1963-1994
Reverend Dan Looney	1994-2007
Reverend Bong Rojas	2007-2012
Reverend Peter Bosque	2012-2014
Reverend James Duggan (Administrator)	2014-

Assistant Pastors, Parochial Vicars and Priests-In-Residence

Reverend Gerard Schons	1953-1954
Reverend Sylvester Thomas	1955-1958
Reverend Patrick Kearney, CSV	1956-1957
Reverend James Gabriel	1958-1961
Reverend T Brendan O'Sullivan	1962-1965
Reverend Jerome Petri	1965*
Reverend James B Walsh	1965
Reverend Daniel Madigan	1966
Reverend Charles F Bencken – Newman Ct	1966-1970*
Reverend Michael J Dillon	1966-1971
Reverend Thomas Prendergast	1971-1974*
Reverend Paul Comiskey, SJ – in residence	1971-1972*
Monsignor John S Cummins – in residence	1971-1977
Reverend John E Boll – Newman Center	1973-1980
Reverend Carl Steinauer	1976-1981*
Reverend Robert A Copsey	1981-1982
Reverend William J Feeser	1982-1988
Reverend Michael McFadden	1984-1985
Reverend Stanley Poltorak	1985-1986
Reverend Richard J Blinn, SJ	1989-1999
Reverend Rey B. Bersabal	1999-2001
Reverend Innocent Subiza	2004
Reverend J Fernando Meza (quarter time)	2005-2007
Reverend Dariusz T Malczuk	2008-2009
Reverend Tim Nondorf (in residence)	2009
Reverend Philip Wells (half-time)	2009
Reverend Innocent Subiza (half-time)	2009-2011
Reverend Martin G Brusato (half-time)	2010-2011
Reverend Richard R Boyle, OSM (part time)	2011
Reverend Restituto O Galang, MSP	2012
Reverend Hector Coria	2012-2014*
Reverend Joseph Huyen V Nguyen (res)	2014
Reverend Mauricio Hurtado	2014-2015
Reverend Salvador B Briagas	2015-

* Indicates left ministry



Photo by John E Boll 2011

Saint James Church, Davis



Photo by John E Boll 2011