

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 5

Father John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist

No 17

Father John Wencil Kouba, S.D.S.

Native Son of Hillsboro, Wisconsin

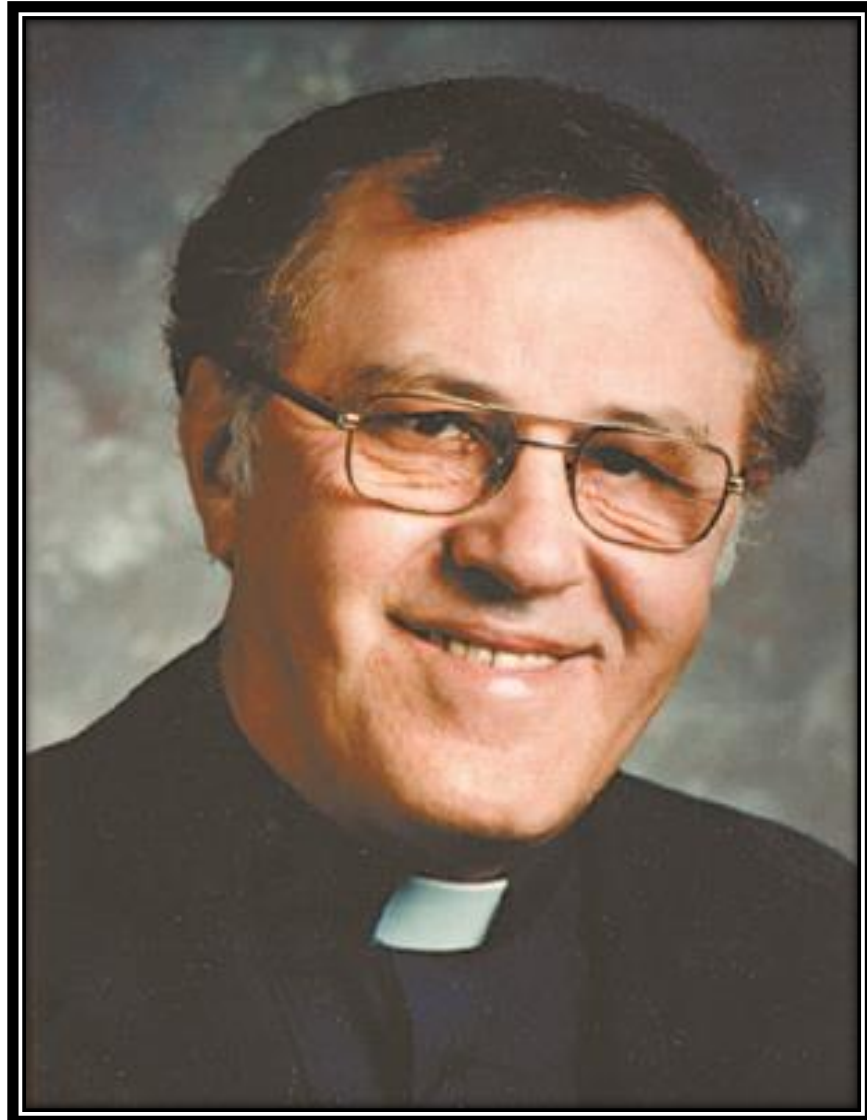
Priest of the Society of the Divine Savior

Pastor of Holy Cross Parish, West Sacramento

Director of Spanish-Speaking Diaconate Program

Director of the Hispanic Ministry, Diocese of Sacramento

March 27, 1925 – March 20, 2009



John Wencil Kouba was born on March 27, 1925, in Hillsboro, Wisconsin, the eldest of six children. After completing eighth grade, he attended the Salvatorian Seminary in St Nazians, Wisconsin for high school and the first two years of college. He then entered the Salvatorian novitiate in St Nazians in 1945 and made his profession of vows on October 18, 1946.

JOHN'S SEMINARY TRAINING

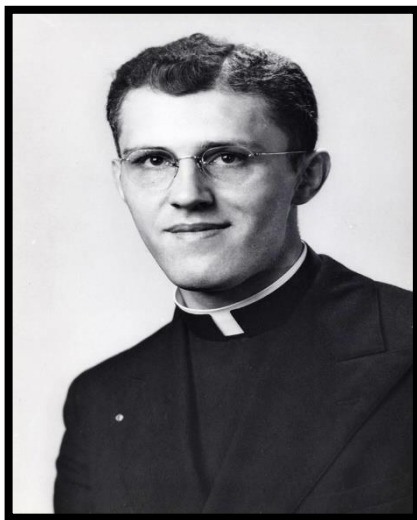
He completed his studies for the priesthood at Divine Savior Seminary in Lanham, Maryland, and at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. He was ordained a priest in the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on June 9, 1952. He received his master's degree in Latin from the Catholic University of America in 1956.

FATHER KOUBA BEGINS HIS TEACHING CAREER

In the first two decades of his priesthood, Father Kouba taught at Jordan Seminary in Menominee, Michigan; Mount St Paul College in Waukesha, Wisconsin; Divine Savior Seminary in Lanham, Maryland; and the Salvatorian House of studies in Washington, DC. For four years he managed to guide the school through a difficult time in the late 1960s with the ever-decreasing enrollment of seminarians and a financial crisis which threatened the existence of the school despite the efforts of local citizens who tried to keep the seminary open.

After the school was forced to close, Father John remained in Washington, DC, as the Prefect of the Scholastics who lived in various places around the city.

WHILE PASTOR IN PHOENIX, HE DISCOVERS HIS SECOND CALLING



Father Kouba

Father Kouba was appointed pastor of Saint Mark Parish in Phoenix, Arizona from 1971 to 1975. It was there that he discovered his “second calling” – ministering to the Spanish speaking Catholic community. Because he loved Hispanic ministry, Father John took a year’s sabbatical in 1975 to study Spanish in Cuernavaca, Mexico.

Returning to the United States, he ministered for three years to Spanish-speaking parishioners at Saints Peter and Paul Parish in Wisconsin Rapids, and Saint Andrew Parish in Delavan, Wisconsin. He then left the United States again, this time for Colombia where he was associate pastor of the international Divine Savior Parish in Bucaramanga from 1980 to 1982.

MINISTRY IN THE DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO

Father Kouba loved his time with the people of Colombia and spoke of it frequently, as his friend of 39 years, Steve Palmer said. Steve said that Father John was “very pastoral, very comforting.” Father Kouba ministered to the Spanish-speaking community in the Diocese of Sacramento for

more than twenty years. He first served Holy Cross Parish in West Sacramento as a parochial vicar, 1982 to 1992, and then as pastor from 1992 to 1998.



Photo by John E Boll 2015

Holy Cross Church, West Sacramento

DIRECTOR OF SPANISH-SPEAKING DIACONATE

During those years, Father Kouba also served as director of the diocese's permanent diaconate program for the Spanish-speaking from 1983-1992 and as director of the Hispanic Apostolate from 1985 to 1989. He served as associate director of vocations for Spanish speakers from 1999-2004.

When Father John left Holy Cross Parish in 1998, he took up residence at Saint John Vianney House for Spanish-speaking seminarians, continued his vocation work with Spanish speakers, and served as director of vocational discernment from 1998-2004.

SPANISH HOMILIES BROADCAST IN DIOCESE

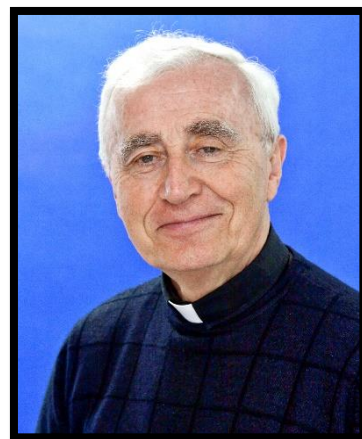
Many of Father Kouba's homilies in Spanish were published in *El Heraldo Católico*, the diocese's Spanish language newspaper, and he recorded his homilies for local Spanish-language television and radio programs. "He was at heart a teacher," said Salvatorian Father Michael Newman, a friend of Father Kouba for 59 years. "He wanted to teach the non-Spanish speaking priests how to work with the Hispanic community, and teach the Spanish speaking seminarians how to

acculturate into this society. "He absolutely loved the Hispanic people and cultures," Father Newman said.

Steve Palmer stated that "Father John's parish work in Colombia changed him from a 'college professor' to a pastor. He was very humble, very compassionate, totally devoted to the poor, and able to give people a sense of community."

COMMENTS BY MONSIGNOR MURPHY

Monsignor James Murphy who worked with Father Kouba in Hispanic ministry for more than 20 years, traveled with him in Latin America and speaks Spanish fluently. He admired Father Kouba's facility with Spanish and his gift of languages, including Latin. He recalled Father Kouba's consistent kindness and openness, his dedication to being a priest and his highly verbal sense of humor.



Monsignor James Murphy

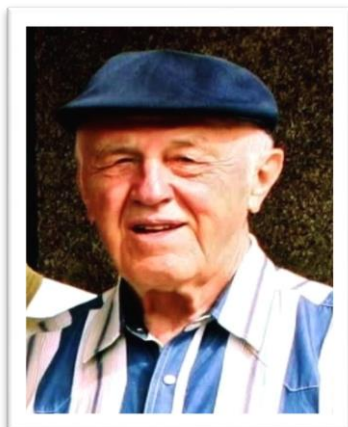
But for Monsignor Murphy, it was Father Kouba's golf game that illustrated his character. "He had an unorthodox swing that drove the ball straight down the middle, every time. It was a metaphor for his life: consistent, straight, totally reliable."

FATHER JOHN RETIRES IN 2005

In 2005, Father Kouba retired from full-time ministry and moved to Saint Joseph Parish in Huntsville, Alabama, where it became apparent to his Salvatorian community that his memory was beginning to fail and he needed more care than the parish could give him.

DEATH COME TO FATHER KOUBA

In 2008, Father John moved to Alexian Village in Milwaukee, Wisconsin where he lived until his unexpected death on March 20, 2009, exactly one week before his 84th birthday. His surviving family members were three sisters, Marie Graiziger of Tinley Park, Illinois, Cecile Haugh of Hillsboro, Wisconsin, and Benedictine Sister Christine Kouba of Lisle, Illinois; two sisters-in-law, Lois Kouba and Barbara Beres of Hillsboro, and members of his Salvatorian religious family.



A Memorial Mass was celebrated for Father Kouba at Holy Cross Church in West Sacramento. Salvatorian Father Tom Perrin, parochial vicar of Divine Savior Parish in Orangevale, presided at the Mass with many priests, permanent deacons, parishioners and friends of Father John in attendance.

A SALVATORIAN REMEMBRANCE OF FATHER JOHN

A tall and broad-shouldered man with a hearty laugh and a quirky sense of humor, Father John is remembered as a dedicated priest with a passion for ministering to all people. He was always willing

to move outside his comfort zone to try something new and challenging. Though Father John had returned to his baptismal name in the 1960s, he was known for many years by his religious name “Hilary.”

Father Kouba was buried in the Salvatorian community cemetery on Loretto Hill in St Nazianz, Wisconsin.

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVIST’S COMMENT

Father Kouba believed in higher education for Hispanic priests, deacons and laity of the Diocese of Sacramento. He invited his summer school professor, Father Jesús Hernández, professor of theology at the Pontifical University in Mexico City, to come to Sacramento to teach summer classes on Sacred Scripture and Sacramental Theology to priests, deacons and parish communities. Father Hernández, using theological works he had authored, taught classes for five summers in the Hispanic Apostolate Center at Saint Francis Parish, Sacramento; Saint Isidore Parish in Yuba City; Saint Joseph Parish in Lincoln; and Holy Rosary Parish in Woodland.

As a result of Father Hernández’s classes, some Hispanic laymen decided to petition the Diocese of Sacramento for acceptance into the permanent diaconate program and were later ordained deacons. Lay Hispanic men and women who attended Father Hernández’s classes continued their studies and became skilled teachers on the diocesan level. All this was due to Father Kouba who wisely brought Father Hernández to Sacramento so he could teach summer theology courses to the Spanish speaking community.

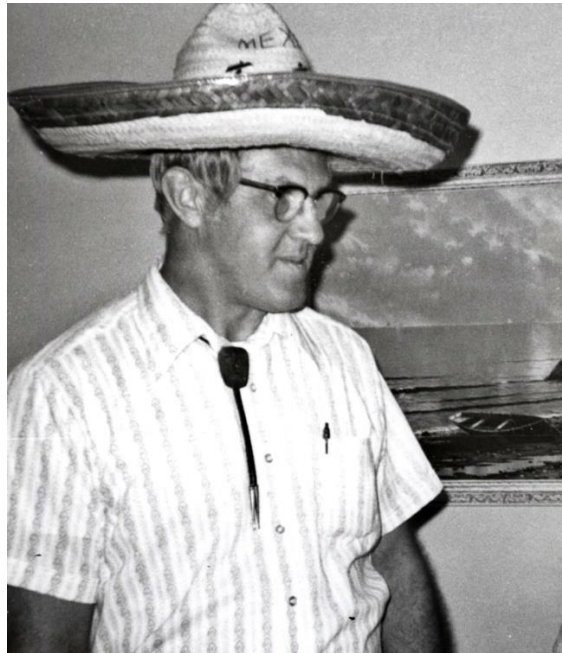
Father Kouba made a big impact on the lives of the Spanish speaking people of the Sacramento diocese. The Church of Sacramento is deeply grateful for Father John’s two decades of dedicated ministry in this diocese and for the way he touched the lives of thousands of Spanish-speaking Catholics through his ministry and example.

The Church of Sacramento is indeed grateful to all the Salvatorian priests and brothers who came to this diocese in 1955 to serve as teachers and formators at Saint Pius X Seminary and for their ministry to the parishes of the diocese, especially Holy Cross Parish, West Sacramento and Divine Savior Parish in Orangevale.

*May Father John Kouba
Who loved and served the Hispanic
Community of the Diocese of Sacramento
Be fully alive in the love and mercy of God.*

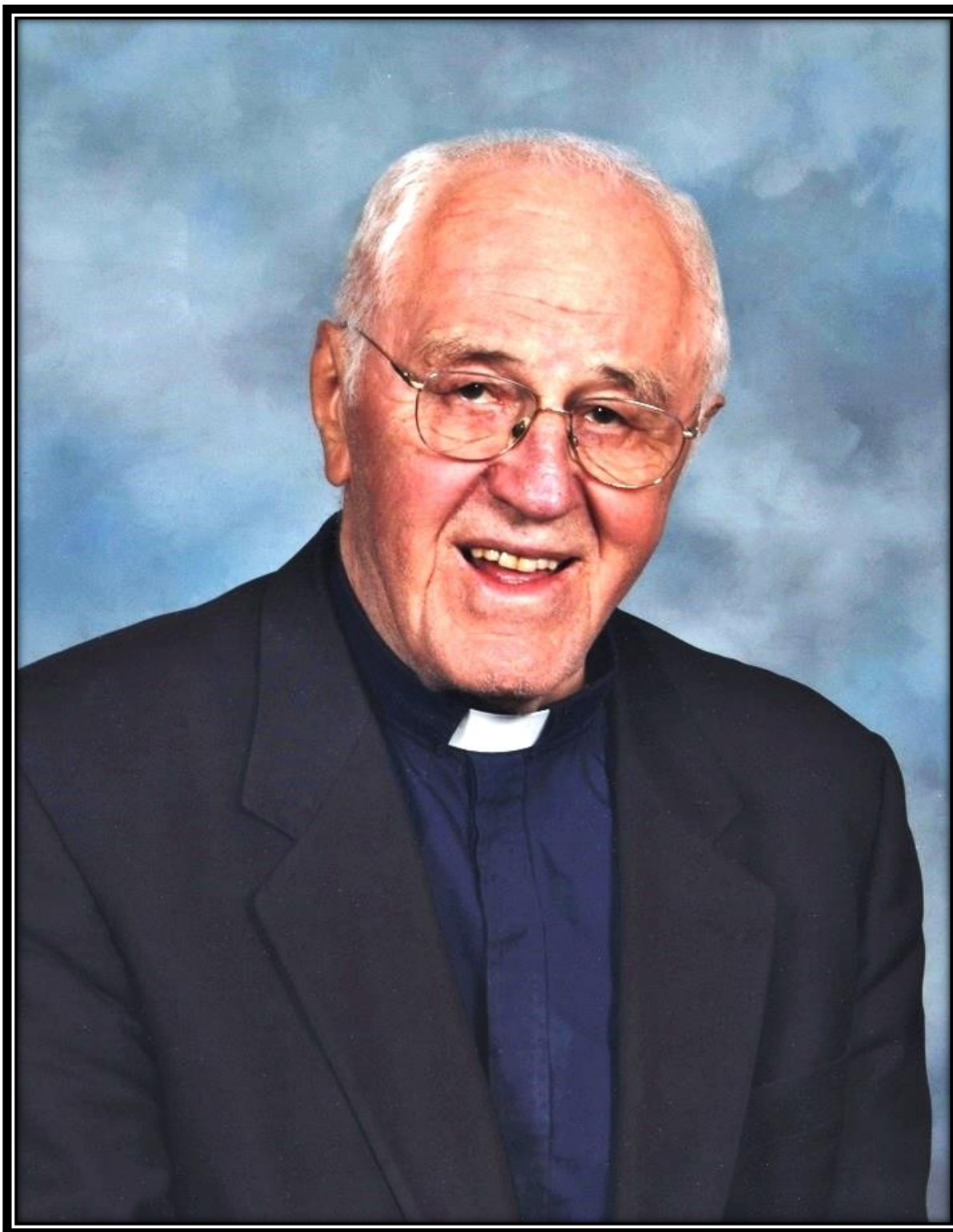


Father Kouba used local television to preach the Gospel



Father John at Saint Mark Parish in Phoenix

Special thanks to Salvatorian Province Archivist Father Michael Hoffman, SDS, for his assistance with this article.



Father John W Kouba, SDS
In his Senior Years