

# SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 5

Father John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist

No 20

## *Father John Joseph Folmer*

Native Son of Sacramento  
Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento  
1942 – 2013



**John Joseph Folmer**, a native son of Sacramento, was born in Mercy General Hospital on June 15, 1942, the only child of Harry and Agnes Folmer. His father was a civilian Air Force employee at McClelland AFB and his mother was a nurse at Mercy General Hospital in charge of the nursery.

Jack was baptized in Sacred Heart Church in 1942 and in later years attended Sacred Heart parish school on 39<sup>th</sup> and H Streets for his primary education.

#### **JACK BEGINS HIS SEMINARY STUDIES IN RIO DELL**

After graduating from the eighth grade, Jack, as he was known to his family and friends, entered the newly established diocesan minor seminary named St Pius X in Rio Dell, Humboldt County, as a freshman in the fall of 1956. After graduating from high school seminary in 1960, Jack and his classmates transferred to St Joseph College in Mount View where they spent their first year of college, only to return to St Pius X in Galt the next academic year because St Pius X opened its college department that year.



Photo by John E Boll 1958

**Saint Pius X Seminary, Rio Dell**  
**Diocesan Minor Seminary of Sacramento in 1958**



### **JACK ENTERS SAINT PATRICK SEMINARY, MENLO PARK**

In the fall of 1962, Jack and his classmates entered St Patrick Seminary in Menlo Park for their final two years of college. After graduating from college, Jack began his theological studies at St Patrick Seminary's theologate. However, after his first year of theology, he decided to spend a year in Europe studying at the University of Tübingen in Germany. He attended some classes taught by theologian Father Joseph Ratzinger who years later was elected pope.



Photo by John E Boll 2011

### **Saint Patrick Seminary, Menlo Park**

#### **ORDAINED A PRIEST IN 1969**

After his year at Tübingen, Jack returned to Saint Patrick Seminary to complete his theological studies and was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Sacramento by Bishop Alden J Bell in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament on May 31, 1969.

After his ordination, Bishop Bell assigned Father Folmer to Christian Brothers High School as chaplain, a post he held from August 1969 to February 1971. He lived in residence at St Robert Parish.

Father Jack was then assigned to Saint Basil Parish in Vallejo as parochial vicar for a year. In the fall of 1972 he began studies in canon law at the Catholic University in Washington, DC and was awarded a licentiate degree in canon law.

### **ACCEPTED INTO UC DAVIS SCHOOL OF LAW**

Upon returning to Sacramento, he was accepted by the Martin Luther King School of Law at UC Davis to study civil law for three years, graduating in 1978 with a doctorate degree in *Juris Prudence*. He passed the California State Bar exam the first time he took it and was certified as a civil lawyer in California.

Among his classmates at the UC Davis Law School were two Jesuit priests, Father Paul Comiskey, SJ and Father Robert Curran, SJ and Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, all who became civil lawyers. Paul became legal counsel for state prisoners through the legal arm of the Prisoners' Union; Bob served as legal counsel for the Jesuit owned University of San Francisco and served there until his early death; Simon serves as Executive Director of NETWORK in Washington, D.C.

One of Father Jack's priest friends had this to say about him: "Father Jack was bright and had an amazingly curious mind. He could hold forth on any number of subjects – from films to railroads to cooking to vast periods of history. He was a fascinating person to have a conversation with or just listen to."

### **CANON LAWYER, CIVIL LAWYER AND PROFESSOR**

For thirty years Father Folmer served on diocesan and regional Marriage Tribunals. He was a canon lawyer for the Archdiocese of San Francisco and taught canon law at his Alma Mater, Saint Patrick Seminary, Menlo Park where he also served as treasurer of the seminary. Part of this time he lived in residence at Saint Agnes Parish in the Haight Ashbury District of San Francisco. In 1985 he was elected president of the Canon Law Society of America.

For a while he and two of his seminary classmates who were never ordained priests opened a law practice together in San Francisco. Father Jack's cousin Deborah Doyle says Jack successfully defended the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in a suit brought by relatives of a woman who had left her estate to the organization in San Francisco.

### **FORMIDABLE ADVOCATE FOR PRIESTS**

During his years as a civil and canon lawyer, Father Folmer served as advisor to and an advocate for priests who were accused of some wrong-doing. He was known as a tough and formidable lawyer which brought him into an adversarial role with bishops throughout the United States. These bishops soon discovered that Father Folmer was a tough and formidable defender of the rights under the law of his priest clients. At the same time, he was a compassionate defender of the rights of his clients and anyone who was in trouble.

### **RECTOR OF THE CATHEDRAL**

In 1991, Father Folmer returned to Sacramento from San Francisco and Bishop Francis Quinn asked him to be rector of the cathedral. He served in that role until March 1993.

### **CAMPUS MINISTER AT SACRAMENTO NEWMAN CENTER**

His next appointment was director of campus ministry at the Sacramento Newman Center which served the Catholic student community who attended Sacramento State University. He held that position for one year.

Father Jack also worked in the Sacramento Marriage Tribunal for about a year in an attempt to help clear the backlog of marriage cases.

### **CHAPLAIN TO SAINT FRANCIS HIGH SCHOOL**

One of his longer assignments in the diocese was as chaplain to Saint Francis High School for girls. He served in that role from 1999 to 2005 and enjoyed working with the students and the staff. He was chaplain, teacher and faculty advisor to the young ladies' Culinary/Cooking Club. Through his involvement with this cooking club, he became interested in cooking and developed a personal library of cookbooks.

With his health beginning to wane, Father Jack lived in his family home in the River Park area which he inherited after his parents died. His last years of ministry were spent at Saint Mel Parish, Fair Oaks where he served as parochial vicar. He thoroughly enjoyed this experience of parish ministry but his declining health forced him to retired.

As you can see, Jack Folmer had many interests and served in many places over his 44 years of priestly service. He had hoped to move into the St John Vianney Retirement Village for retired priests of the diocese but his declining health prevented him from making that move.

### **FATHER FOLMER SUCCUMBS TO A STROKE**

Father James Sheets brought Father Jack to a meeting for retired priests at the Diocesan Pastoral Center on October 10, 2013. After the meeting, Jack suddenly collapsed in the reception area of the Pastoral Center. He was not hurt from the fall and asked to be taken home. However, once home, he could not get out of the car and the fire department was called. He was taken by ambulance to Mercy General Hospital in Sacramento and slipped into a coma from which he never recovered.

### **HIS FINAL HOURS**

The day before his death, classmates Monsignor James Kidder and Father Gerald Ryle anointed Jack with the sacrament of the sick and said their good-byes to their dear friend and life-long companion.

Bishop Francis Quinn, who lives at Mercy McMahon Terrace across the street from Mercy Hospital, went to Jack's side as he lay unconscious in the same hospital where Jack had been born 71 years before. The bishop also anointed Father Jack and gently told him he was free to go home to God. Within minutes, John Joseph Folmer breathed his last breath and departed from this world on his final journey home to God. He lived 71 years and 4 months.

### **FATHER FOLMER'S VIGIL AND FUNERAL MASS**

A Vigil was held for Father Folmer on Tuesday evening, October 22, in Sacred Heart Church, the parish of his youth. Monsignor James Kidder presided at this liturgy. Father Folmer's Funeral Mass was held the next day, Wednesday, October 23, 2013, in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. Diocesan Bishop Jaime Soto was the main celebrant at the Eucharist, with con-celebrants Bishops William K Weigand and Francis A Quinn, Bishops Emeriti of Sacramento, and many priests from the Diocese of Sacramento and Archdiocese of San Francisco. There was a large turnout of family and friends from far and near. Monsignor James Kidder, pastor of Holy Trinity Parish in El Dorado Hills/Cameron Park, was the homilist.

### **FAREWELL**

Father Jack was gifted with a keen intelligence, was an avid reader and film lover. He was a champion of those in need, spiritual advisor and a friend to many, rich and poor alike. His wisdom, insight, laughter, sense of humor, hyperbole, compassion and friendship will be greatly missed by many. Jack, your earthly sojourn is now completed; may you enjoy eternal life and God's gift of peace forever.

**Eternal Rest Grant unto Him, O Lord,  
And let Perpetual Light Shine upon Him.  
May His Soul and the Souls of all the Faithful Departed  
Rest in Peace.**

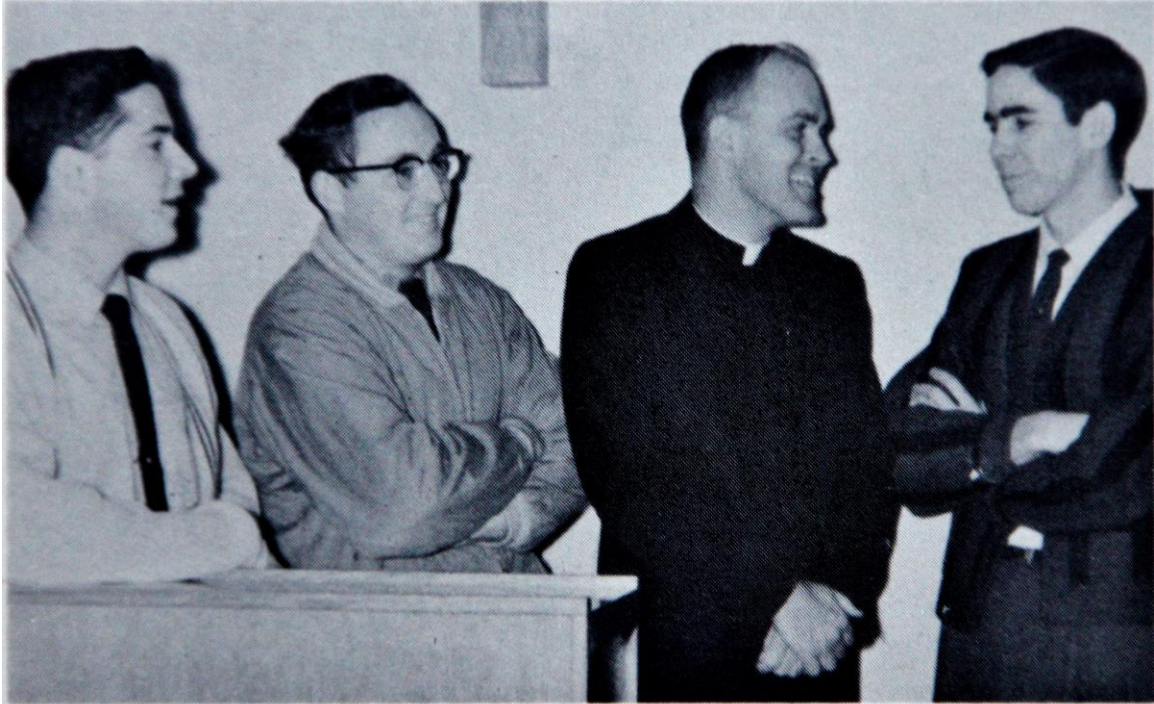


Photo by John E Boll 1962

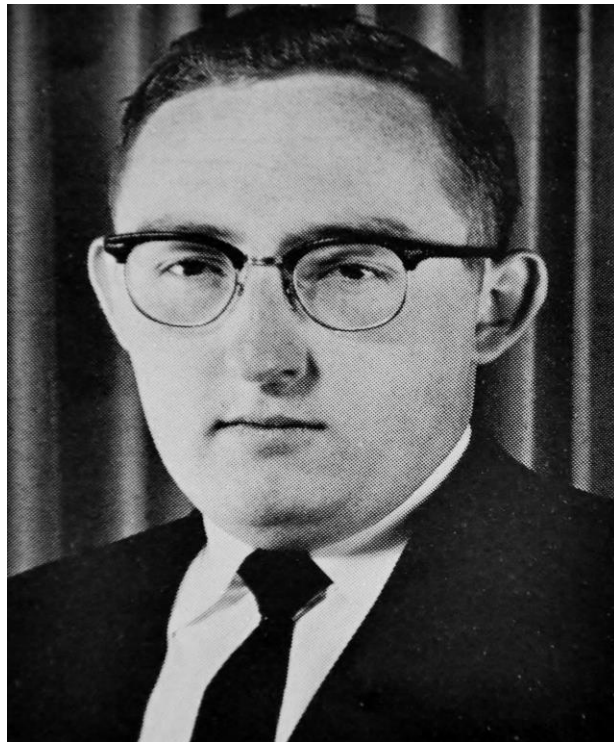
**Jack Offers Bishop Joseph McGucken a Spiritual Bouquet on Behalf of the  
Seminarians of St Pius X as the Bishop Prepares to Leave Sacramento  
To Become Archbishop of San Francisco in 1962**



1959



Father Diebels with C.S.M.C. officers, l. to r., Dennis Ruzir,  
John Folmer and Jerry Ryle.



Graduation from Saint Pius X Seminary College in 1962





**1962 Graduates of St Pius X Seminary College Department**  
**Back Row: Ray Krause, John Ziaja, Gerald Ryle**  
**Front Row: Richard Sinigiani and John Folmer**