

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 5

Father John E Boll

No 34

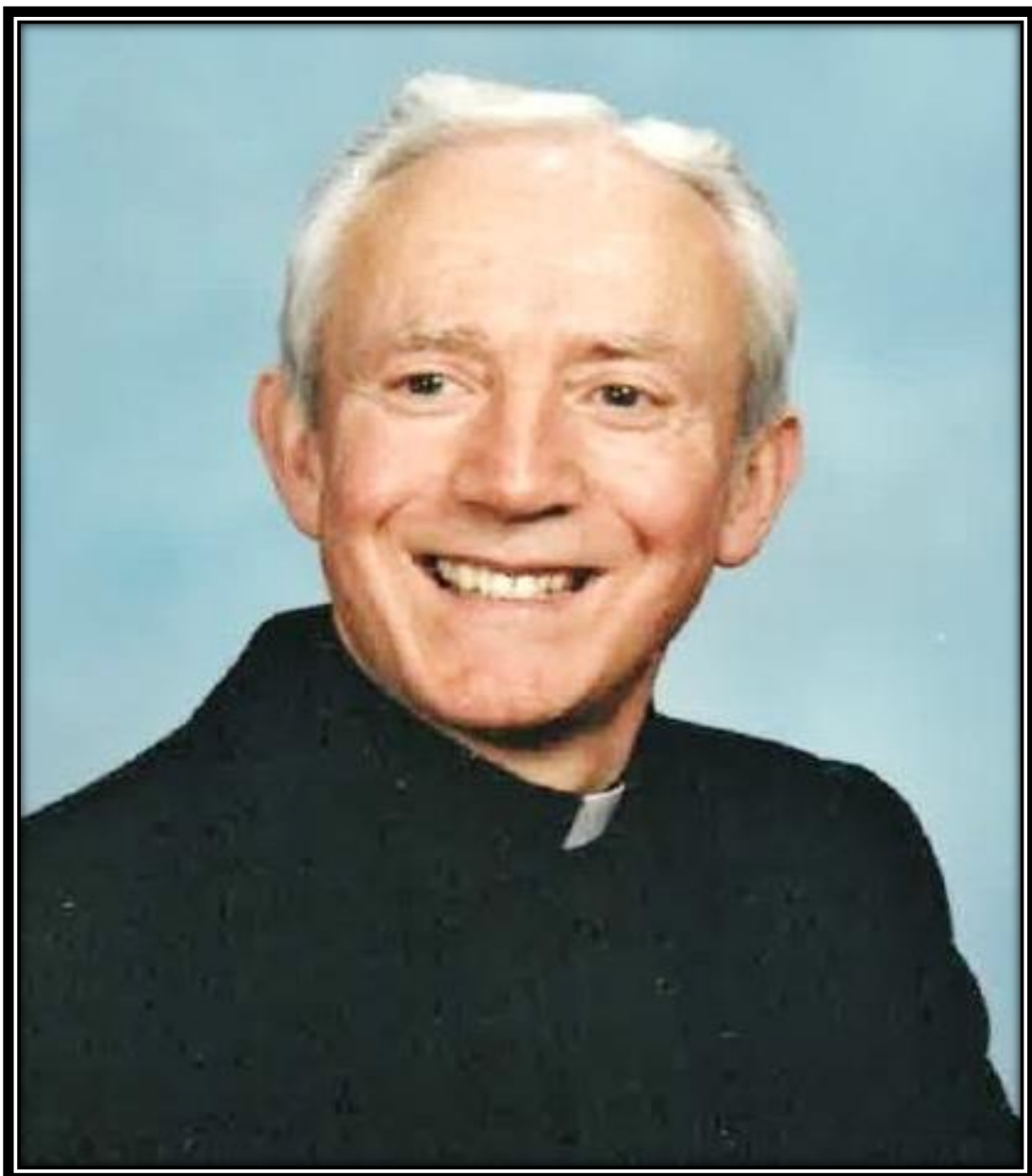
Father Anthony Gurnell

Native Son of Glanmire, County Cork, Ireland

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor Emeritus of Saint Patrick Church, Placerville, California

June 11, 1929 – July 6, 2007



Anthony Gurnell was born on June 11, 1929 in Glanmire, County Cork, Ireland, the son of Leslie J Gurnell and Helena Kennedy. He was baptized only days later at Glauntane Church, County Cork.

BEGINS HIS EDUCATION

As Tony began his education, he first attended Mayfield National School in County Cork and upon completing grammar school, he entered Christian Brothers College at Saint Patrick's Place, Cork, Ireland from 1943 to 1947.

BEGINS HIS CAREER IN BANKING AND THEN ENTERS THE SEMINARY

Although he felt a calling to the priesthood in his youth, Tony decided to go into banking and worked as a banker for eleven years. But the call to priesthood kept returning to his mind and heart. He felt priesthood was as an opportunity "to make the world a better place by bringing God's peace, compassion, love and hope for a world that is hurting."

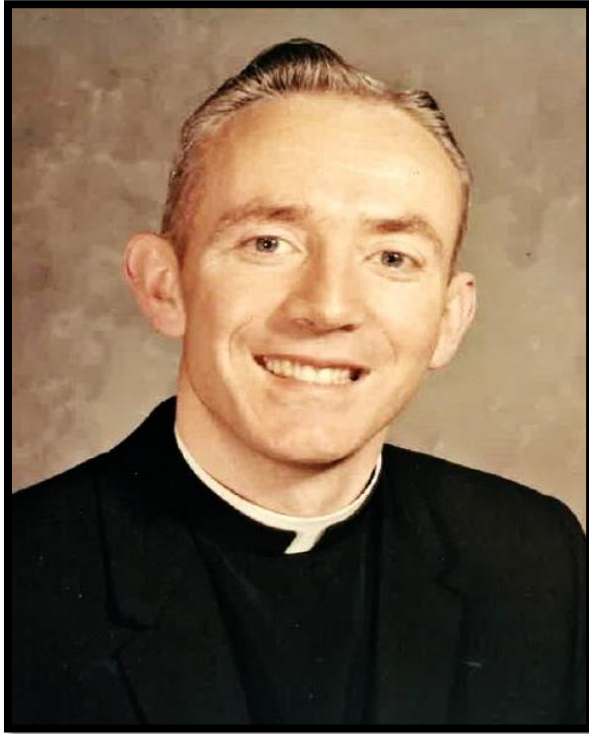
Tony decided to abandon his banking career and entered Saint Patrick's College, Thurles, Ireland where he began his studies in October 1958 to June 1964. Given the choice to serve either in Hawaii or California, he chose California because there were more Irish priests living there.



Photo from Diocesan Archives

Saint Patrick's Seminary, Thurles, Ireland

ORDAINED A PRIEST FOR THE DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO



Father Anthony Gurnell

Anthony Gurnell was ordained a priest in the Cathedral of the Assumption, Thurles, Ireland on June 14, 1964 by the Most Reverend Thomas Morris, Archbishop of Cashel in Ireland.

After spending some time with his family after ordination, he left Ireland to begin his life of ministry in the Diocese of Sacramento, arriving in Sacramento on September 8, 1964

FATHER TONY'S FIRST ASSIGNMENT

The newly arrived Father Gurnell received his first priestly assignment to Saint Mel Parish in Fair Oaks with Father William Horgan who was pastor. Father Tony served at Saint Mel Parish from September 15, 1964 to September 15, 1967.

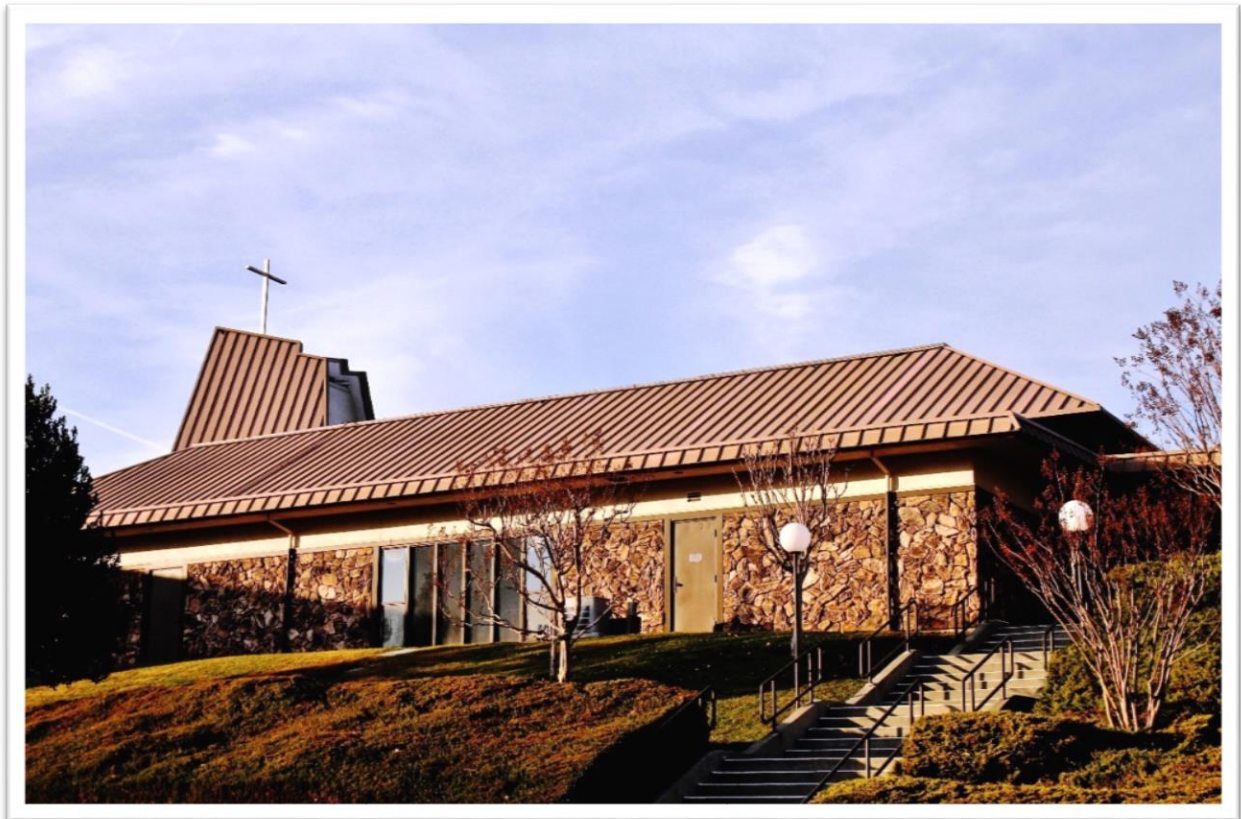


Photo by John E Boll

Saint Mel Church, Fair Oaks

NEXT ASSIGNMENT, PRESENTATION PARISH

The second assignment for Father Tony was Presentation Parish in Sacramento with Monsignor Cornelius Higgins who was pastor. He began this assignment on September 15, 1967 and served for four years until March 11, 1971. During his first two years at this parish, Father Tony was one of two assistants who did the daily parish work since Monsignor Higgins served as the chancellor of the diocese during the episcopacy of Bishop Alden Bell. Father Tony became involved with the Right to Life movement at this period and gave time and energy to this ministry.

In 1969, Father Patrick Nolan was appointed pastor of Presentation Parish and Father Tony worked with him for two years until he was appointed to his first pastorate in 1971.



Photo by John E Boll

Presentation Church, Sacramento

APPOINTED PASTOR OF FORT JONES

Father Tony was appointed to his first pastorate at Sacred Heart Parish in Fort Jones on March 11, 1971. This parish had three mission churches, Saint Mary Church in Etna, Saint Joseph Church in Sawyer's Bar and All Saints Church in Happy Camp. In the winter months, driving to these various churches for Sunday Mass was always dangerous because of snow and black ice on the roads. Almost every pastor who served this mountain parish had an accident or near accident during his tenure as pastor of the parish.

Father John Sullivan who succeeded Father Gurnell as pastor of Fort Jones recalls a story told to him by Father Ed Mello who was pastor of Weed. A parishioner from Etna died during the winter and the family made arrangements with Father Tony to do the committal service at Saint Joseph Cemetery in Sawyer's Bar. Because a winter storm was passing through the area at the time, the funeral director in Yreka told Father Tony that the burial would have to be postponed until after the storm passed.

Father Tony had made arrangements with the family to do the committal and he intended to keep his commitment. When the funeral director refused to take the body to Sawyer's Bar for burial until the storm had passed, Father Tony borrowed a pickup, went to the funeral home and loaded the casket into the back of the truck and headed off to Sawyer's Bar for the burial.

As he reached the six thousand-foot Salmon Mountain summit, the snow began to pile up and the pickup bogged down and became stuck in the snow. Undeterred by this challenge, Father Tony walked a half mile to a roadside emergency phone on the road to Sawyer's Bar and called for a tow truck.



Photo by John E Boll

Sacred Heart Church, Fort Jones

When the tow truck arrived, the pickup was pulled out of the snow and towed over the summit to a lower level where the snow turned to rain. Father Tony jumped into the pickup and headed on to Sawyer's Bar for the burial. Needless to say, word of this incident spread far and wide throughout Siskiyou County. No winter storm would deter this priest from burying the dead. Once he made up his mind, there was no turning back!

After three years as pastor of the Fort Jones parish, Father Tony received a new assignment on October 22, 1974 and headed back to Sacramento.

PASTOR OF SAINT PETER PARISH, SACRAMENTO

Father Gurnell's second pastorate was Saint Peter Parish in Sacramento where he served from October 22, 1974 to April 11, 1983. He led the way in building a church for the parish and so inspired a building engineer and architect who worked on the project to donate their time in order to cut costs.

Father Tony purchased the old church at All Hallows Parish, had the building cut in half and moved to the Saint Peter's Parish site and reassembled. That church was renovated and served as the parish church until Saint Peter and All Hallows Parishes were merged in recent years.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Peter's Church, Sacramento

LAST PARISH ASSIGNMENT

On April 11, 1983, Bishop Francis Quinn appointed Father Tony to his last pastorate, the Sierra foothills parish of Saint Patrick Church in Placerville. As the population of the Placerville area grew, Father Tony began to investigate the possibility of enlarging the parish church and building a parish hall and education center.

Over the years, previous pastors purchased the homes built around the area of the church in the hope of expanding parish facilities someday. The existing church was built in the 1960s on the same spot where the old church had stood. To make room for a new and larger church, the cemetery in back of the old church was filled with dirt. The new church was built during the pastorate of Father Cornelius O'Connor and the sanctuary of the new church sits over the grave of Monsignor Thomas Hayes who died on February 18, 1952 and was buried in the church cemetery.

Father Tony worked with architects to enlarge the church and to build a new parish hall/education center on the Sacramento Street parish site. After receiving diocesan approval for the project, the parish did a capital campaign to raise the money for the project. To Father Tony's credit, with the support of the people of the parish, he completed the building project.



Photo by John E Boll

The Old Saint Patrick Church, Placerville in the 1950s



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Patrick Church, Placerville today



Photo by John E Boll

The new Parish Hall and Education Center

COMMENTS BY PARISHIONERS

Carole Ann Miller met Father Gurnell in 1990 when she became a parishioner of Saint Patrick Parish which then served some 2,500 households. She said Father Tony was “an eloquent speaker and parish leader who was prescient of his ability to serve such a large parish single-handedly. He understood he needed trained, competent help from the congregation.”

Father Gurnell led the way by starting the Stephen Ministry program, providing training and organizing laity to provide caregiving to the bereaved, hospitalized and others experiencing life crises. This program was “answer to prayer.” It was the beginning of a long and successful ministry at Saint Patrick Parish which continues to this day.

Father John Hannan who served Saint Patrick Parish as parochial vicar in 1991, said of Father Tony, “He was a tremendously hard worker who had a great dedication to his parish and his people.”

RETIREMENT

Father Gurnell retired from active ministry on May 1, 1995 while pastor of Saint Patrick Parish and was named pastor emeritus of the parish. He decided to move to the Monterey Bay Area and contacted Bishop Sylvester Ryan to see if there was a parish available where he could live in residence. Bishop Ryan invited Father Tony to Saint Joseph Parish in Cayucos where he lived in the rectory and celebrated the Masses while a business manager took care of parish administration.



Photo from the Diocesan Archives

Father Tony was one of the priests of the class of 1964 who served the Diocese of Sacramento

DEATH OF FATHER GURNELL

For some years, Father Tony suffered from cancer. As the cancer continued its advance, he returned to Sacramento to be closer to his good friends Deacon Michael and Ann Donovan who were parishioners of Presentation Parish. Father Andrzej Koziczuk, pastor of Presentation Parish, invited Father Tony to live in the parish rectory where he died on July 6, 2007.

FUNERAL MASS

On July 12, 2007, Bishop Richard Garcia, former auxiliary bishop of Sacramento and bishop of the Diocese of Monterey presided at the Funeral Mass for Father Tony at Saint Philomene Parish in Sacramento. More than 500 priests, religious sisters, parishioners and friends of Father Tony attended the Funeral Mass.

The homilist was Father Gerald Ryle, pastor of Saint Philomene Parish. Father Jerry described Father Tony as a man “of profound faith who felt blessed to always serve in parishes with wonderful people. Father Tony was a patient and kind man who touched many lives. He lived for the Eucharist and was really a man of the sacraments.”

BURIAL OF FATHER GURNELL

After the Funeral Mass, the body of Father Tony was laid to rest in the Priests’ Section at Calvary Cemetery in Sacramento to await the Lord’s return and the resurrection of the dead.



Photo by John E Boll

Father Tony’s Headstone at Calvary Cemetery

IN MEMORIAM

Father Anthony Gurnell was a Shakespearean-trained actor whose passion for the theater inspired him to found the Cork Film Festival in Ireland.

After eleven years as a banker, he decided to leave the banking profession to pursue his childhood dream of being a priest to serve God's people. He was ordained at the age of 35 and for the next 43 years served as a priest of the Diocese of Sacramento and at the end of his ministry, helped in the Diocese of Monterey. He was active in the pro-life movement, instrumental in the founding of the Sacramento Life Center, and served as a chaplain at the former Mercy American River Hospital in Sacramento.

Father Tony was an intense person who had great energy in doing his work as a priest. During his ministry as a priest, he was involved in two major building projects, one at Saint Peter Parish, Sacramento and the other at Saint Patrick Parish, Placerville. His tenacity to finish a job begun enabled him to leave a legacy of active parish communities and good facilities for the priests who succeeded him. We are grateful to Father Tony for his 43 years of priestly ministry in the people of the Diocese of Sacramento.

In his will, Father Tony left \$200,000 to Cristo Rey High School which, at the time of his death, was still using the facilities of Saint Peter Parish grammar school. He wanted to help the youth of his former parish with this gift from his estate. God called Father Tony home to Himself and has blessed him for his life of service and generosity to the People of God.

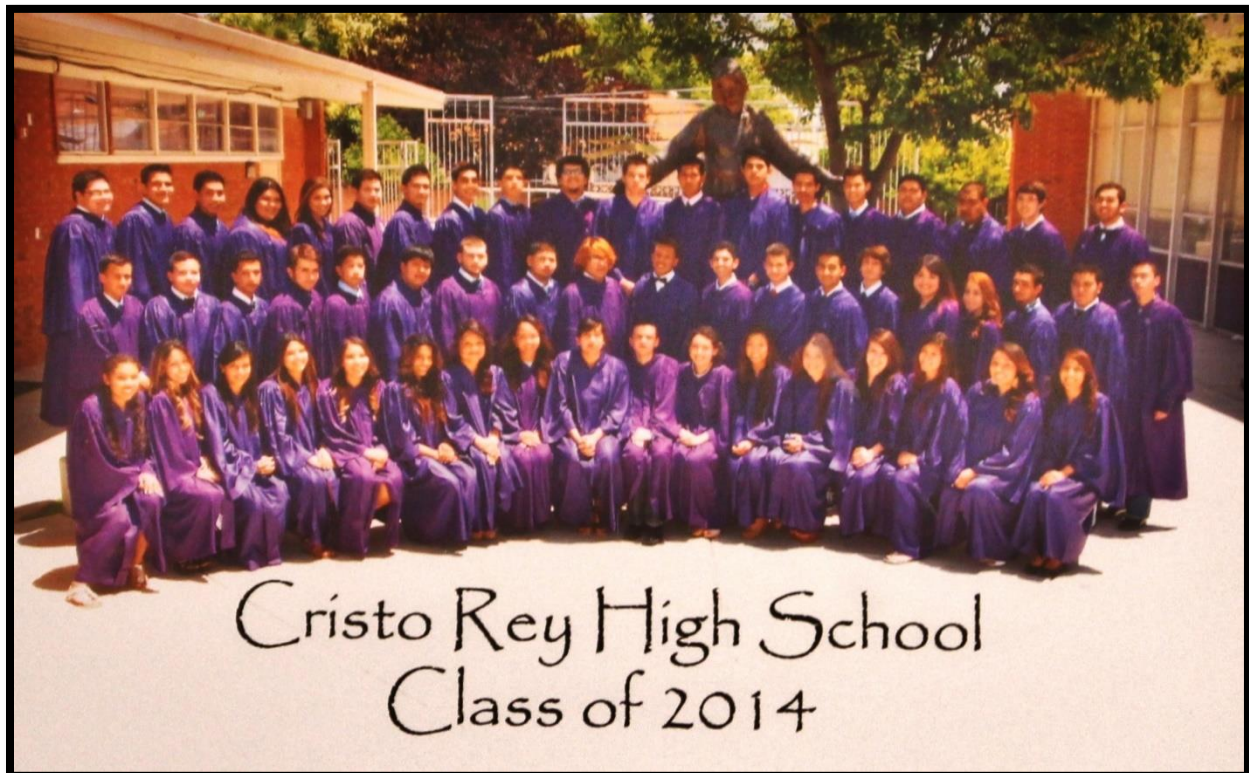


Photo courtesy of Cristo Rey High School

The 2014 Graduates of Cristo Rey High School



Photo by John E Boll

The New Facilities of Cristo Rey High School in East Sacramento

*Eternal rest grant unto Father Tony, O Lord,
And let perpetual light shine upon him.
May he rest in peace.*

*May his soul and the souls
Of all the faithful departed
Through the Mercy of God
Rest in peace.
Amen*