

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

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No 1

Sister Bridget Mary Flynn, RSM

Member of the Sisters of Mercy of Auburn

First Woman Chancellor of the Diocese of Sacramento

Interviewed June 2015



Bridget Mary Flynn was born on January 6, 1936 in Mallow, Ireland, the youngest of six children born to James Flynn and Bridget Hassett. Her brothers and sisters are Charlie, Elsie, Johnny, Jimmy and Jerry.

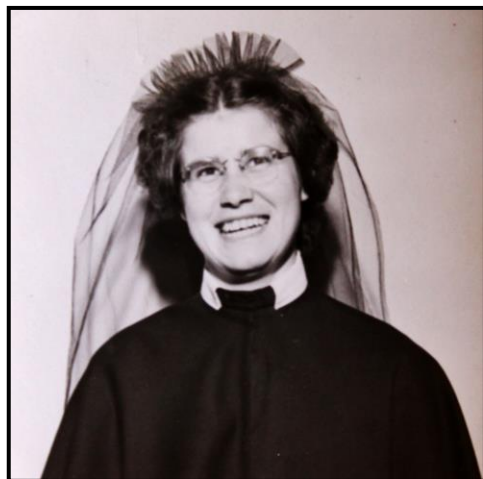
BRIDGET BEGINS HER EDUCATION IN MALLOW

As she began her primary years of school, Bridget attended the school run by the Sisters of Mercy in Mallow, County Cork. She then transferred to Saint Mary Secondary School in Mallow. During this time, Father Patrick Kennedy, vocation director for the diocese of Sacramento, came to Ireland to recruit priests. He was given permission to speak at some of the schools in Ireland. He also met with young women who were interested in entering religious life. Bridget spoke with him and he suggested that she contact the Auburn Sisters of Mercy who had a house in Abbeylands.

PRE-POSTULANT WITH THE SISTERS OF MERCY

Bridget followed through with the suggestion made by Father Kennedy and contacted the Mercy Sisters. The sisters checked her background and in 1953 accepted Bridget as a candidate. She went to Abbeylands outside Tralee in County Kerry where the pre-postulancy was held. Bridget remained in Abbeylands for seven months as she waited for an American visa to travel to Auburn, California. During her time as a pre-postulant she took classes on American History, Latin and an introduction to religious life.

SISTER BRIDGET, A POSTULANT AT THE AUBURN MOTHER HOUSE



In May 1954, at the age of 18, Bridget arrived in Auburn where she began her journey in religious life as a postulant. Her postulancy was for six months and then she received the religious habit on November 11, 1954, taking the name of Sister Mary de Sales as she began her two year novitiate.

The first year of novitiate was her canonical year when she focused on prayer and religious life. The second year continued with a focus on living the religious life but also included classes in American History taught by Sister Mary Clement, English Literature taught by Sister Mary Evangelist, Ethics with Father Cornelius Higgins and Apologetics with Father Charles O'Leary. This second year was a full course of college studies.



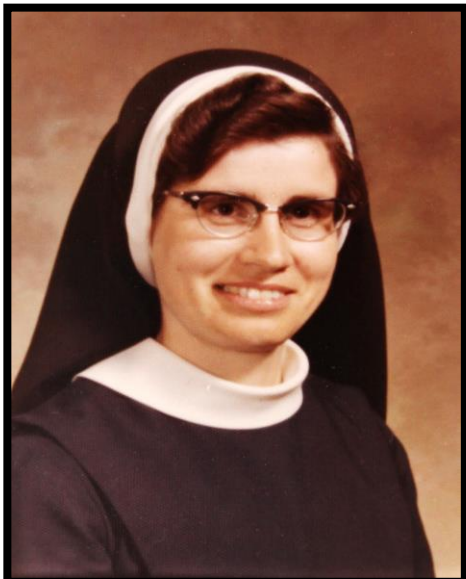
Photo by John E Boll 2014

Sisters of Mercy Mother House, Auburn

FIRST VOWS

On November 20, 1956, Bridget made her first vows as a Sister of Mercy in the Auburn convent chapel during the 6:30 am Mass. She remained in Auburn another year to continue her studies. She joined with the other sisters in doing manual labor around the convent. Six years later in 1962, Sister Mary de Sales took her final vows as a Sister of Mercy. With the changes initiated by the Second Vatican Council, she resumed using her baptismal name of Bridget Mary.

SISTER BRIDGET'S TEACHING CAREER



In August 1957, Sister Bridget began teaching at Saint Joseph Primary School on Seventh and G Streets in Sacramento, followed by a year teaching mathematics and French at Saint Joseph Academy. She taught one year at Holy Spirit School in Sacramento and then began her high school teaching career at Bishop Armstrong High School, Saint Francis High School, Mercy High School and Manogue High School. Sister Bridget served as a teacher, vice principal and principal of Mercy High School, Carmichael for almost 15 years.

Sister Bridget

ON-GOING EDUCATION

Sister Bridget was a student at the University of San Francisco from 1959-1961 and received her BA degree in 1961. In 1968 she earned her master's degree in history from USF. For her master's thesis, she translated *The Role of Religion in the French Revolution up to 1792* from the original French into the English language. By attending summer school classes at California State University, Sacramento she earned a Secondary School Administration Credential in 1974.

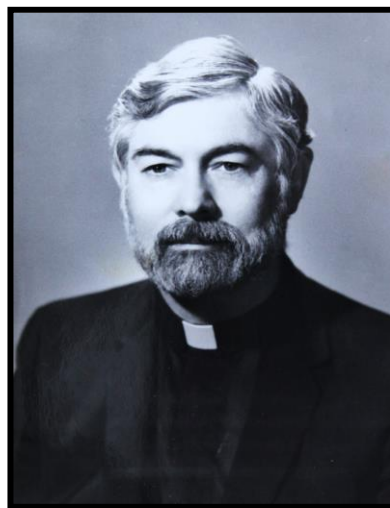
AWARDED A FULBRIGHT SCHOLARSHIP TO STUDY IN PARIS

Because of her sharp mind, Sister Bridget was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship in 1980-81 to study in Paris. During that year of study she also taught American History to French secondary students in the French language. While in Paris she took classes at the Ecole Biblique and the Sorbonne University. She had become proficient in the French language during her years of study with the Mercy Sisters at Mallow.

FUND DEVELOPER FOR THE SISTERS OF MERCY

After returning from studies in Paris, Sister Bridget was given the task to develop a strategic plan to raise funds for the ongoing work of the Sisters of Mercy in the Sacramento diocese. She worked out of the Development Office at the Motherhouse in Auburn from 1981-83. Sister Bridget took on this task with great focus and energy and was very successful in raising money for the works of the Mercy Sisters.

While working in the Mercy Development Office, Sister Bridget offered to help Father Keith Kenny who was appointed by Bishop Quinn to develop a pastoral plan for the diocese of Sacramento. Sister Bridget helped with this project but before it was completed, Father Kenny died unexpectedly on December 20, 1983. This was a great shock to Sister Bridget and a serious loss to Bishop Quinn and to the whole Church of Sacramento.



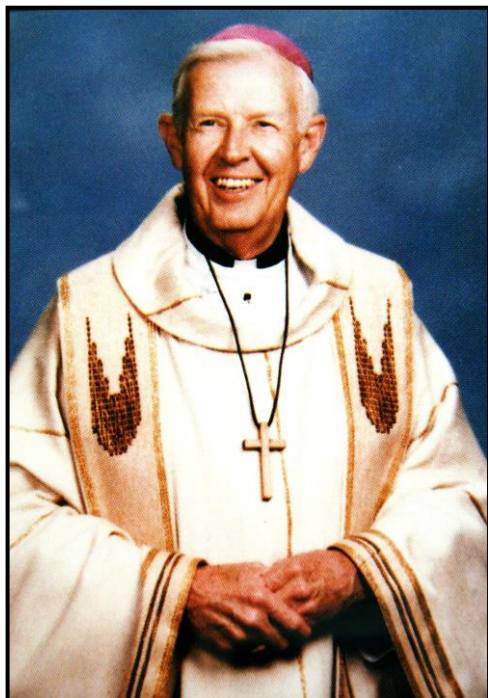
Father Keith Kenny

Sister Bridget was appointed principal of Manogue High School in 1983, succeeding Sister Katherine Doyle, RSM who had served as principal for a number of years.

BISHOP QUINN ASKS SISTER BRIDGET TO BECOME DIOCESAN CHANCELLOR

In 1986, Bishop Francis Quinn, impressed with Sister Bridget's abilities as school principal and administrator, contacted Sister Maura Power who was the Major Superior of the Auburn Mercy Sisters to discuss the possibility of asking Sister Bridget to become chancellor of the diocese. Sister Maura believed that Sister Bridget would choose not to leave her teaching career, but if

she did accept the bishop's offer, who could Sister Maura send to replace Sister Bridget as principal?



Bishop Francis A Quinn

Sister Maura contacted Sister Bridget and told her of Bishop Quinn's inquiry. To Sister Maura's great surprise, Sister Bridget said she was willing to accept the position of Diocesan Chancellor because the possibilities of that new challenge were exciting to her.

SISTER BRIDGET NAMED DIOCESAN CHANCELLOR

After serving as vice-chancellor for a year, Bishop Quinn appointed Sister Bridget chancellor of the diocese in 1987. She was the first woman to serve in that post in the history of the Diocese of Sacramento.

Sister Bridget began a trend in the diocese because succeeding her as chancellor was Sister Eileen Enright, RSM who served as Bishop Weigand's chancellor and now laywoman Kathy Conner serves as Bishop Soto's chancellor.

As Sister Bridget began her work as chancellor, she found Bishop Quinn easy to work with and very considerate. She was involved with diocesan finances and was a member of the team that interviewed candidates for the position of Chief Financial Officer of the diocese. Tom McNamara was selected and hired to direct the Diocesan Finance Department in 1993, a position he has held for the past 22 years.

A SUDDEN LIFE-ALTERING MOMENT

Sister Bridget continued working on diocesan planning with Monsignor Robert Walton and Mr Tom McNamara. It was in the afternoon of June 29, 1993 as Sister Bridget was about to begin a meeting at the Chancery Office, then located in the building behind the Cathedral, that she was stricken with an inner-cranial hemorrhage deep within her brain. She was rushed to Mercy General Hospital and remained in a coma for weeks. Her doctors did not expect her to survive. It was a miracle that she finally regained consciousness and slowly began to speak again.

A LONG WAY TO RECOVERY

After months of rehabilitation, Sister Bridget recovered some of her mobility although she never regained her energy and independence. She returned to the Mercy Mother House in Auburn where she now lives.

THE CHURCH OF SACRAMENTO THANKS SISTER BRIDGET FOR HER YEARS OF SERVICE

Sister Bridget became chancellor of the diocese at a very important time of diocesan development. Working with Father Keith Kenny to create a diocesan strategic plan and developing job descriptions for diocesan and parish personnel and ministries were important contributions she made to the diocesan church. The only regret was that her years of leadership as chancellor were cut short by her medical crisis.

SISTER BRIDGET TODAY

At the present time, Sister Bridget lives life, though now limited, with her religious community of sisters at the Auburn convent where she began her spiritual journey as a Sister of Mercy in 1954. She participates in daily Eucharist with the sisters and prays for the well-being of her former students and the people of the Church of Sacramento that she served so faithfully for the past 61 years.

We thank Sister Bridget for her generosity, service and love. We wish her God's gift of peace as she awaits the glory to come for all who love God and serve God's people.

Pictures of Sister Bridget Mary Flynn over the Years



L - R: Sisters Maura Power, Kathleen Horgan, Margret Herbert & Bridget Mary Flynn



Photos Courtesy of Sister Bridget Flynn, RSM



Sister Bridget Mary Flynn, RSM



Sister Bridget Mary and Sister Mary Celestine



Left: Bridget Hassett Flynn, Mother of Sister Bridget Mary Flynn



L – R: Mrs Joan Haan, Mercy Sisters Nancy Daniels, Bridget Flynn, Michelle Gorman, Maria Campos

Photo taken at the Manogue High School Senior Ball circa 1985