

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 5

Father John E Boll

No 41

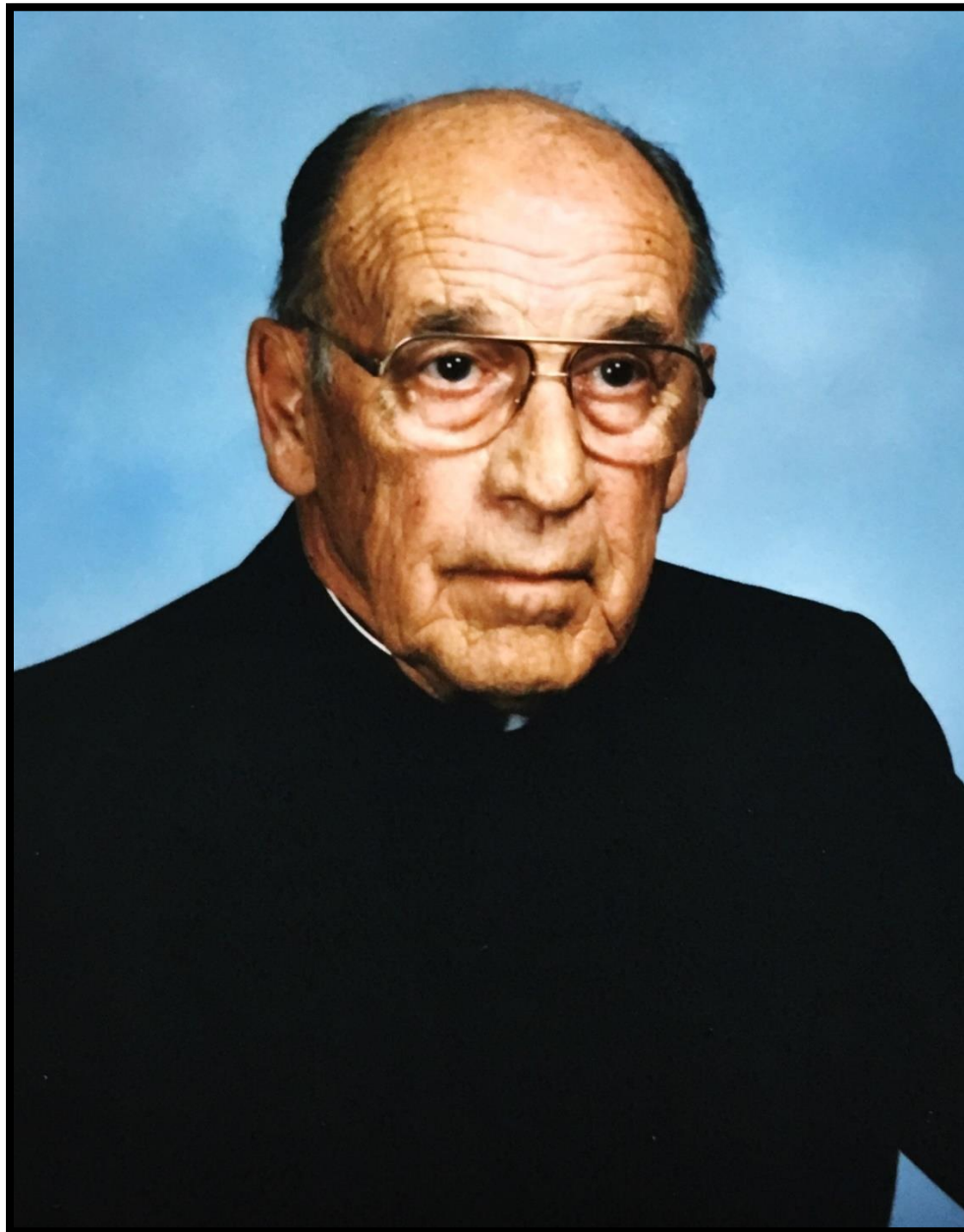
Monsignor Richard Collins Dwyer

Native Son of San Francisco, California

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor Emeritus of Saint John Vianney Parish, Rancho Cordova

August 14, 1915 – October 31, 1994



Richard Collins Dwyer was born in San Francisco on August 14, 1915, the son of William Patrick Dwyer and Ethel Clare. He was baptized in Saint Monica Church in San Francisco.

THE DWYER FAMILY'S EARLY CONNECTION TO THE DIOCESE

The Dwyer family has been part of the greater Sacramento community since the 1800s. Richard's grandfather, Captain Thomas Dwyer, was part owner of the Delta King and Delta Queen river boats which transported people and goods from San Francisco to Sacramento during the California Gold Rush boom and beyond. The Dwyer family would later establish the Delta Freight Line in Northern California that transported goods by truck throughout California.

In the spring of 1885, a year before the Diocese of Grass Valley became the Diocese of Sacramento, Captain Dwyer purchased a parcel of land in his own name on 11th and K Streets for Bishop Manogue as the future site of a new cathedral for Sacramento.

RICHARD BEGINS SCHOOL

The Dwyer family settled in Sacramento and young Richard began his primary education at David Lubin School for his first and second grades. His parents then sent him to Christian Brothers School on 12th and K Streets across the street from the Cathedral and after graduating from the eighth grade, he continued his education at the new Christian Brothers High School on 21st and Broadway for the next four years.



Photo courtesy of Christian Brothers High School

Christian Brothers High School, 21st and Broadway, Sacramento

RICHARD ENTERS SAINT JOSEPH COLLEGE, MOUNTAIN VIEW

During his high school years at Christian Brothers, Richard told his Presbyterian mother he was thinking of becoming a Christian Brother. She responded, “They lived too shabbily. If you want to become a priest that might be alright.” In 1932 he was accepted to Saint Joseph College Seminary in Mountain View and after completing two years of college, he moved to Saint Patrick Seminary in Menlo Park where he completed college and began his four years of theological studies.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Patrick Seminary, Menlo Park, CA

ORDAINED A PRIEST

Richard was ordained a priest by Bishop Robert J Armstrong for service to the Diocese of Sacramento on May 18, 1940 in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. Eleven years earlier, he had served as an acolyte at the installation of Bishop Armstrong as the fourth bishop of the Diocese of Sacramento.

BEGINNING HIS PRIESTLY MINISTRY

After his ordination to the priesthood, Father Dwyer was first appointed as assistant pastor of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Sacramento. He served at the Cathedral parish for eight years, 1940 to 1948, under the leadership of Monsignors Thomas Horgan and Gerald O’Driscoll who were rectors of the Cathedral during those years.

While serving as assistant at the Cathedral, Father Dwyer enlisted Cathedral parishioners to help transform the basement of the Cathedral into a U.S.O Club for soldiers during World War II. After the war, he was instrumental in reaching out to young Catholics in the greater Sacramento area by creating the John Carroll Guild at the Cathedral where young single Catholics could meet and socialize. Through this social ministry, many young Catholics met their future spouses and enjoyed happy and successful marriages as a result of this ministry.

Father Dwyer helped found the Saint Thomas Aquinas Library and the Sacramento Serra Club. His name was also associated with Catholic Action, Family Life Bureau and Industrial and Labor Relations.

ASSIGNED AS EDITOR OF THE *CATHOLIC HERALD*

After an active and fruitful eight years at the Cathedral, in 1947 Bishop Armstrong appointed Father Dwyer as editor of the *Superior California Catholic Register* which was part of the *Register* chain of Catholic newspapers. Two years later, he helped return the paper back to the *Catholic Herald*, the original name of the paper when it was founded in 1908 and now owned and published entirely by the Diocese of Sacramento.

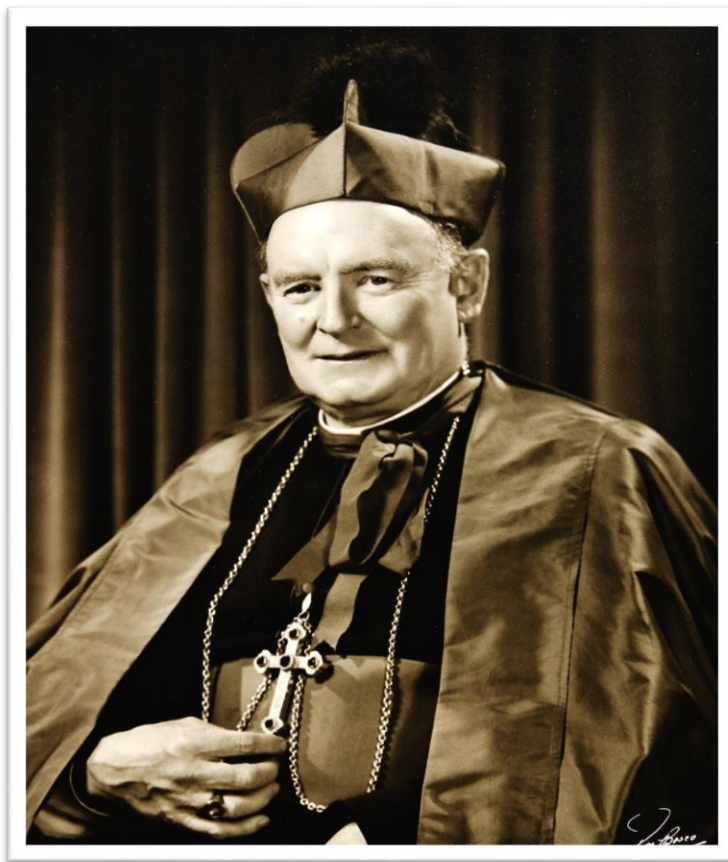


Photo from the Diocesan Archives

Bishop Robert J Armstrong

Bishop Armstrong also appointed Father John Terwilliger as associate editor of the diocesan newspaper. Father Terwilliger was ordained two years after Father Dwyer and these two were friends from seminary days. They worked closely together at the paper from November 1947 to November 1952.

During this time at the *Catholic Herald*, Fathers Dwyer and Terwilliger co-authored a weekly column in the newspaper called "***Just between the two of us.***" It was a popular feature printed on the opinion-editorial page. In this column, the two priests shared their views on the news of

the day as well as discussed political and religious issues. The first column appeared in the March 14, 1948 issue of the paper.

In the last column by these two priests on November 13, 1952, Father Dwyer called the joint venture “a happy arrangement of shared ideas and cooperative effort,” praising the “ability, diligence and industry” of Father Terwilliger. Even though the two writers had a difference of “political affiliation,” Father Dwyer noted “there has been a unity of opinion and expression that would be found in any conversation between two people who were friends.” He credited many changes and improvements in *The Catholic Herald* to the “zeal and industry” of Father Terwilliger.



Photo from the Diocesan Archives

**Father Dwyer at a Serra Club Luncheon with Bishops Bell, McGucken and Governor Pat Brown
1962**

FATHER DWYER BUILDS THE SACRAMENTO NEWMAN CENTER

One day while at the Cathedral, Father Dwyer read in the Sacramento Bee that the State of California was planning to build a state college by the American River on J Street. Without delay, he identified a piece of property across the street from the proposed college entrance and purchased it. He built a center there and gave it to the Diocese of Sacramento. This became the

Sacramento Catholic Newman Center that has served the student community at Sacramento State University ever since.



Photo by John E Boll

Sacramento Newman Center, a gift from Father Dwyer

APPOINTED FOUNDING PASTOR OF RANCHO CORDOVA

On January 15, 1958, Bishop Joseph T McGucken, then bishop of Sacramento, appointed Father Dwyer as founding pastor of the new parish of Saint John Vianney in Rancho Cordova. The establishment of this parish was in response to the growing population in the area due to the rapid growth of the Aero Jet General Aerospace plant just northeast of Mather Air Force Base in the Rancho Cordova area. At the height its growth, Aero Jet employed 20,000 workers at the Rancho Cordova plant.

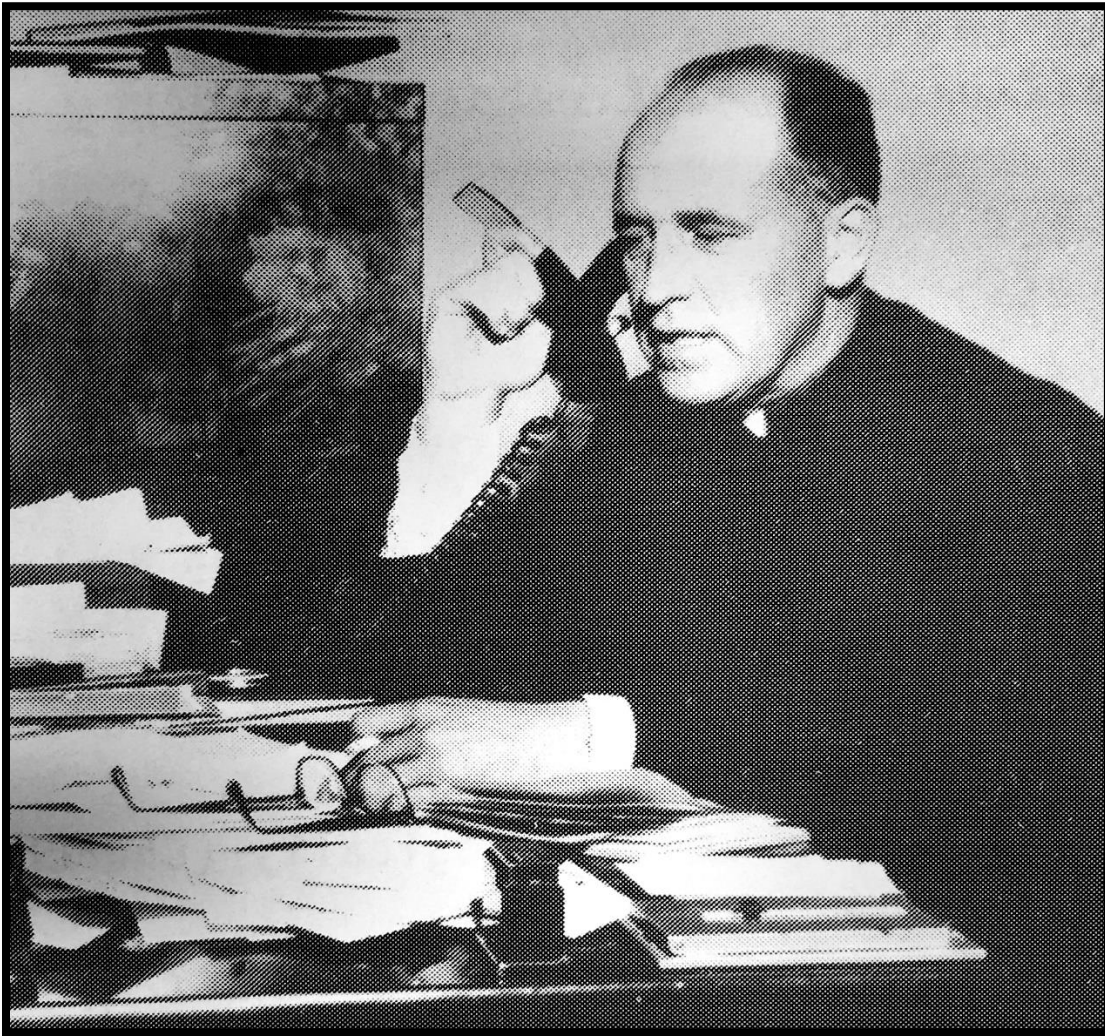
CREATING THE NEW PARISH

To begin the new parish in Rancho Cordova, 17 acres of land were secured on Coloma Way and Father Dwyer purchased a surplus barracks from Mather AFB which became the temporary church. He then began raising money to construct permanent facilities on the parish site.

The first permanent buildings were a rectory for the priests, a school and convent. After completing this first phase of construction, the next task was building a permanent church.

CREATION OF THE MR & MRS CLUB

It became quickly evident to Father Dwyer that many of his new parishioners came from many places outside of the Sacramento area and had no extended family close by, so he created the Mr and Mrs Club at the parish to provide a way for parishioners to become part of a new family.



“Sounds Good,” says Father Dwyer



Photo from the St John Vianney Parish Archives

This barracks, purchased from Mather AFB, became the first church



Photos from the St John Vianney Parish Archives

The first church is readied for liturgical use



Photo from St John Vianney Parish Archives

Father Dwyer celebrates the first Mass in the temporary church in 1958



*Left to right: SISTER M. NORAH, SISTER M. WALTER, SISTER M. BEDE, SISTER M. JEANNETTE,
SISTER M. GERVAISE, SISTER M. MARJORY*

Photo from St John Vianney Parish Archives

Dominican Sisters of San Rafael were the first teachers at the parish school

CONSTRUCTION OF THE PARISH CHURCH

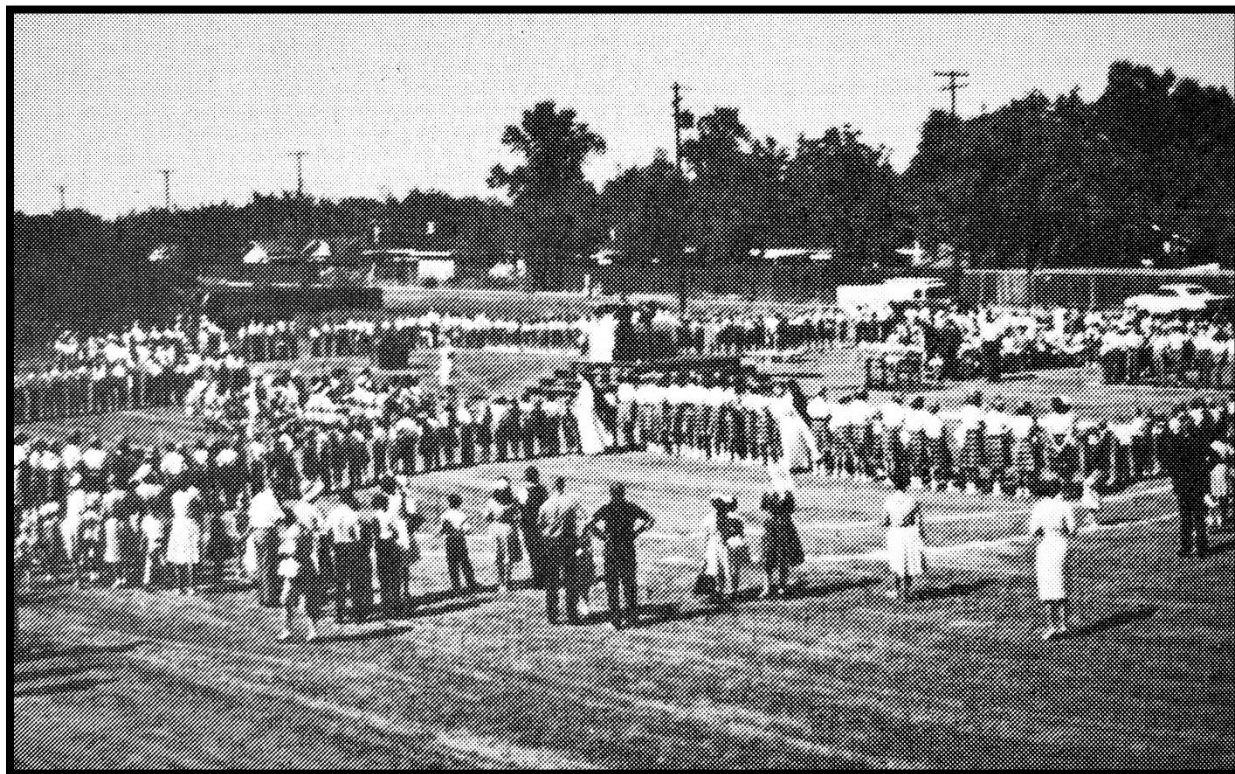


Photo from St John Vianney Parish Archives

Groundbreaking ceremony for the new church on September 14, 1963

The next phase in the life of Saint John Vianney Parish was the planning, financing and construction of the new church. Today, as we look at how quickly the parish developed, it is amazing to see how Father Dwyer and the community were able to build so many facilities in such a short time. In just five years, after first building a school, convent and rectory, the community was able to build the permanent church.

In the photograph above of the groundbreaking ceremony, students of the parish school and parishioners outlined the floor plan of the new church. This enabled everyone to get a sense of what their new church would look like when it was built.

A BOULDER FROM THE DWYER RANCH BECOMES THE BASE OF THE NEW ALTAR

Father Dwyer made the decision to bring a boulder from his ranch in the Mount Akum – Plymouth area to be the base of the new altar in the church.

After selecting the rock, it was transported by truck to the church site where it was set and cemented in place. The Saint John Vianney Parish community would celebrate the Eucharist daily on that large rock and be reminded of Psalm 18:2 which says, “The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer.”



Photo by John E Boll

Saint John Vianney Church, Rancho Cordova



Photo by John E Boll

Sanctuary of Saint John Vianney Church

FATHER DWYER NAMED A MONSIGNOR

Succeeding Bishop McGucken as bishop of Sacramento was Bishop Alden J Bell who was an auxiliary bishop in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. After his arrival in Sacramento, Bishop Bell became quickly aware that Father Dwyer was a creative, skilled and talented priest in the diocese. In 1965, he requested Pope Paul VI to name Father Dwyer a monsignor. Pope Paul made the appointment to acknowledge and thank Father Dwyer for his outstanding work in the diocese.



*You are cordially invited to attend the
Ceremony of Investiture
of
Domestic Prelates and Papal Chamberlains
in the
Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament
Sacramento, California
on Sunday, the nineteenth of December
nineteen hundred and sixty-five
at three o'clock in the afternoon
Most Reverend Alden J. Bell, D. D.
Bishop of Sacramento
Officiating
Reception: Empire Room Hotel Senator
at four o'clock in the afternoon
12th and L Streets*

Invitation to the Ceremony of Investiture

ECUMENICAL WORK

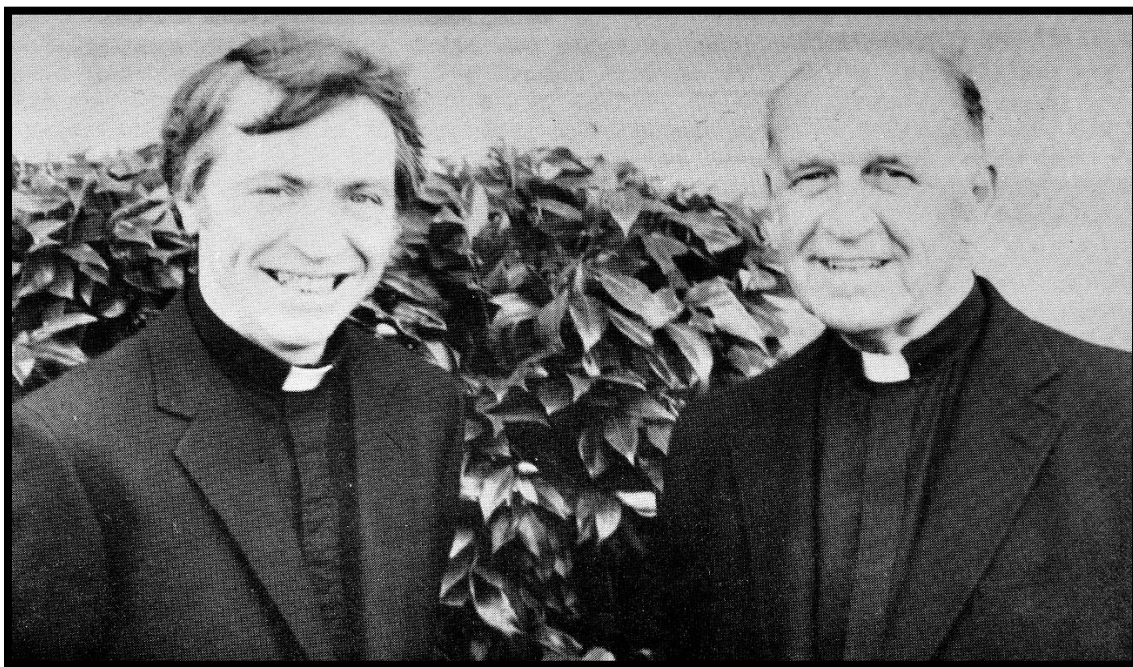
One of Monsignor Dwyer's life-long interests was ecumenism. Perhaps it came from his experience of growing up in a family where his father was Catholic and his mother Presbyterian. He provided the Sacramento community with a vision of ecumenism many years before it was a national and global focus for diverse religious faiths. He devoted himself to building a greater understanding between differing faith traditions and established a spirit of oneness and cooperation through working together for the common good of the community. All the things he did was done with a sense of commitment and zeal, fueled by his faith, love, humor and friendship which he shared with all.

In 1972, he was elected the first president of the newly established Church Service Bureau in Sacramento. Monsignor Dwyer said, "I am very proud. Originally I declined the nomination but they seemed so anxious to have a Roman Catholic in the position that I had to accept." He added that "this is what Christ prayed for at the Last Supper, and if someone doesn't start doing something, it will never be done."

As time passed, the leaders of the *Church Service Bureau* decided to change the name and vision of the Bureau to be more inclusive of all religious traditions. The new name of this organization became the *Interfaith Service Bureau*.

RETIRES AS PASTOR

At the age of 65, after forty years as a priest and twenty-two years as pastor of Saint John Vianney Parish, Monsignor Dwyer decided it was time to turn over leadership of the parish to someone else who could bring fresh ideas to the parish he established in 1958. Succeeding Monsignor Dwyer as pastor was Father Michael McKeon who would lead the parish for the next ten years, 1980 to 1990.



Monsignor Dwyer turns over parish leadership to Father Michael McKeon

DIRECTOR OF THE DIACONATE PROGRAM

Monsignor Dwyer insisted that he was not retiring but would involve himself in other areas of ministry. Just as soon as he concluded his pastorate in Rancho Cordova, he became full-time director of the Permanent Diaconate in the Diocese of Sacramento. He said, "The permanent diaconate holds all sorts of promise. Not only because it restores the third order of ordained ministry, but because I think it really illustrates very forcefully the role of lay ministry. Wherever the diaconate becomes established, lay ministries start popping up." He went on to say that "there are lots of areas where lay people can be much more involved like catechetics, liturgy, music, and care of the sick. The role is still being explored."

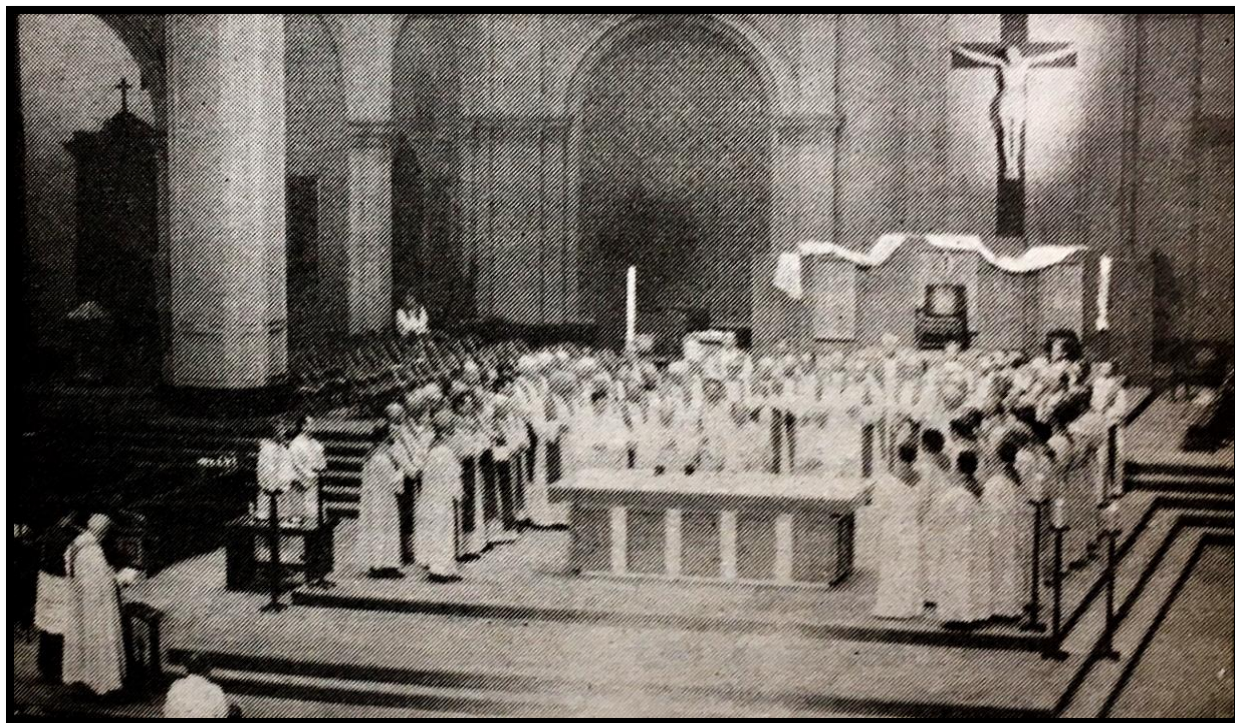
Working with Monsignor Dwyer in the diaconate program as associate director was Franciscan Sister Sheryl Marshall who was a good team member in the program. Succeeding Sister Sheryl was Dominican Sister Patricia Simpson, OP who served as associate director for three years until Monsignor Dwyer decided to step down after serving as director for ten years.

Sister Patricia became director of the Diaconate Program in 1988 with Father Michael Cormack who was involved in the program for many years and was appointed Vicar for Deacons.

DIRECTOR OF DIOCESAN OFFICE OF ECUMENISM

As soon as Monsignor Dwyer concluded his work as director of the Diocesan Diaconate Program, he became director of the Diocesan Office of Ecumenism.

MONSIGNOR DWYER CELEBRATES HIS GOLDEN JUBILEE OF ORDINATION



Catholic Herald Photo by Fr George Schuster, SDS

Monsignor Dwyer celebrates his 50th Anniversary of Priesthood with priests of the diocese

On May 16, 1990, Monsignor Dwyer observed his 50th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood in a concelebrated Mass at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament where he was ordained fifty years before on May 18, 1940. To this celebration was invited the bishops and all the priests of the diocese. He was joined at the Eucharistic celebration by Bishops Francis Quinn and Alphonse Gallegos, several classmates from the Archdiocese of San Francisco, and approximately 70 fellow priests of the Diocese of Sacramento.

Lectors at the Mass were Father Aidan O'Reilly, pastor of Saint Francis of Assisi Parish, Burney, and Father Liam McSweeney, chaplain to the California Youth Authorities, who were former assistants of Monsignor Dwyer in Rancho Cordova. Deacon James Adams, formerly principal of Saint John Vianney School, served as deacon and proclaimed the Gospel. The homilist at the Mass was Monsignor James Kidder, pastor of the Cathedral.

After the Mass, all the priests and bishops were invited to dinner on the Delta King riverboat in Old Sacramento followed by an evening of laughter as Monsignor John Terwilliger who served as MC entertained the priests with many funny stories with his great sense of humor. It was a memorable evening for the clergy of the diocese as they celebrated Monsignor Dwyer's 50 years of ministry.

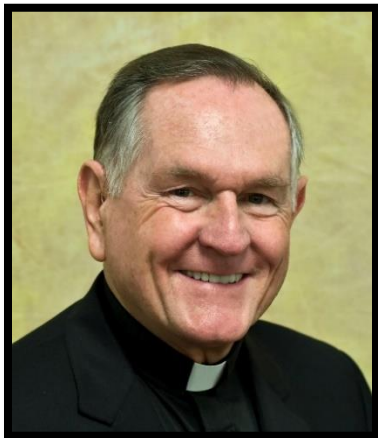
END OF THE JOURNEY

Not long after Monsignor Dwyer celebrated his Golden Jubilee, his health began to fail. He had struggled with diabetes for some years before and then was diagnosed with cancer and emphysema and suffered with during the next four years. The end of his earthly journey came on the Eve of All Hallows, October 31, 1994, at the age of 79.

MASS OF CHRISTIAN BURIAL

The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated for Monsignor Dwyer on November 4, 1994 at Saint John Vianney Church in Rancho Cordova with Bishop William Weigand as main celebrant together with the priests of the diocese, the Dwyer family, parishioners of Saint John Vianney parish, and his many friends. Monsignor James Kidder was the homilist at the Mass.

SUMMARY OF MONSIGNOR KIDDER'S HOMILY



Monsignor Kidder grew up in Woodland and was part of the first freshman class in 1955 at the newly established diocesan minor seminary named Saint Pius X, located in Humboldt County near the small town of Rio Dell, along the Eel River.

Jim Kidder first met Father Dwyer at nine years of age and remembers him coming to the parish school in Woodland to encourage the students to sell subscriptions to the *Catholic Herald*. Jim recalled that "Father Dwyer as an inspirational speaker, a noted retreat master, especially for sisters. If he could be summed up in one word, it would be 'enthusiasm.' He never wavered in his enthusiasm for the priesthood to the day he died."

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Monsignor Dwyer served on the diocesan Liturgical Commission from 1963 to 1970 and was diocesan clergy representative on the Administrative Board of the U.S. Catholic Conference. For twenty-two years, he served as pastor of Saint John Vianney Parish in Rancho Cordova, starting with a 17 acre piece of vacant land and creating the parish it is today. He was also the first director of the diocese's Permanent Diaconate Program.

Monsignor Dwyer had a wide range of interests. He was a member of the Sonoma County Trailblazers and the Sutter Club in Sacramento. Each year when the Trailblazers had their trek, he celebrated a Mass for all the members, memorializing the empty saddles. He belonged to many organizations but was always a priest first. He acted as a good-will ambassador not only to other churches but to society at large.

Throughout Monsignor Dwyer's life, "the common thread was his creativity to bring people together. He was director of the diocesan Office for Ecumenism and Interreligious Affairs. He was known in the diocese as *Father Ecumenism*. He was the founding president of the Interfaith Service Bureau in Sacramento.

"The priests of his age group had to make enormous adjustments to a new Church in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. Monsignor Dwyer made those adjustments early. I remember when he went back to Saint Patrick Seminary for update study days. When he was leaving he said, "My Presbyterian mother just surprised me by becoming Catholic, and now I learn that I am becoming a 'presbyter.'"

"Monsignor gave his life for his friends and we are his friends. How he touched our lives! He wore his celibacy well. People could come to him and be able to say, "There is no one in this man's life who is more important than I am. He had the great ability to connect with people with his full attention and support.

"He was made of three equal parts: prayer, work and fun with a great sense of humor. He was faithful to his breviary, the Liturgy of the Hours, and to meditation. How well he was able to take the details of the events of Christ's life and translate them into our present-day circumstances with that vivid imagination of his! He excelled in preaching because he excelled at prayer.

"In his work he could multi-task and spread himself thin, but not so thin that he failed to fulfill his commitments. And his sense of humor – we will miss the quips, the jokes, the asides.

"The fun he enjoyed most was being the host. There were the priest gatherings on Sunday evenings at Saint John Vianney, the gatherings of his lay friends at what he called his 'little cabin on the ranch.' There was his 50th anniversary party for the priests of the diocese on the Delta King on which he loved to play as a kid when his grandfather owned the boat. He hosted that party because he felt priests had gotten away from having social events together and he wanted to remind us how important they are. He succeeded that night in making that event memorable.

"For all his priesthood, whatever he touched turned to gold. Then after his 50th anniversary as a priest, disease hit. He began to suffer from cancer, diabetes and emphysema. And like Job of old,

he yearned to see the Lord no longer through the eyes of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John but with his own eyes, for he knew that his Redeemer lives. The pain and suffering he endured was greater than I've seen in most others.

“When the end came very near, he told me he thought he needed a spiritual director for the last part of the journey and that “I was it.” It was my privilege to accompany him on that last trek.

“I remember a line from a sermon of his when I was a kid – so many of his lines were memorable – “Those who fear death experience it a thousand times; those who face death experience it but once.” We all know that what he preached he put into his living. What he preached he put into his dying. The pattern of Christ’s dying and rising began in him at baptism, remained and developed throughout his life on this earth.

“Each of us has our own particular memories of those special qualities that we saw in Richard Dwyer. I have told you a few of mine. Cherish your memories. As we commend him now to be alive in God, having produced lasting fruit and having given his life for us friends, let us take those qualities and have him live in us by the way we live.”

BURIAL AT SAINT MARY CEMETERY

After the Funeral Mass, the body of Monsignor Dwyer was taken in procession to Saint Mary Cemetery in Sacramento and laid to rest in the Priests’ Circle by the large crucifix. There, he joined the priests of the diocese who had labored in the vineyard before him as they await the day of the final return of the Risen Christ.



Headstone of Monsignor Dwyer at Saint Mary Cemetery

IN MEMORIUM

Monsignor Richard Collins Dwyer was an amazing man and priest and a giant in our midst. He was a man for all seasons. He was intelligent, charismatic, enthusiastic, ecumenical, gregarious, generous and humorous. He had the Midas touch to turn every situation into gold. He was a great ambassador of Christ and the Catholic faith to the Sacramento community and the world.

Before campus ministry and Newman Centers near college and university campuses became common in the United States, Father Dwyer saw an opportunity to purchase land across the street from Sacramento State College and built the first Newman Center in the Diocese of Sacramento. Seeing the need, he took action and used his own financial resources. What a farsighted and amazing man he was!

After his death, the priests of the diocese learned that Monsignor Dwyer left his 556 acre ranch near Mount Akum in the Sierra foothills east of Plymouth to the diocese for the use of the priests. He had a great love for his brother priests and wanted them to have use of the ranch that he enjoyed so much over the years.

The Diocese of Sacramento is grateful to God for the life and ministry of Monsignor Dwyer in the Church of Sacramento. We also thank the Dwyer family for sharing their son and brother with us as a priest. Monsignor Dwyer was a larger than life priest. He fulfilled the words of the saying, "Give me men to match my mountains!" Richard Collins Dwyer has more than matched majestic Mount Shasta that overlooks all of Northern California.



Majestic Mount Shasta