

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

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Father John E Boll

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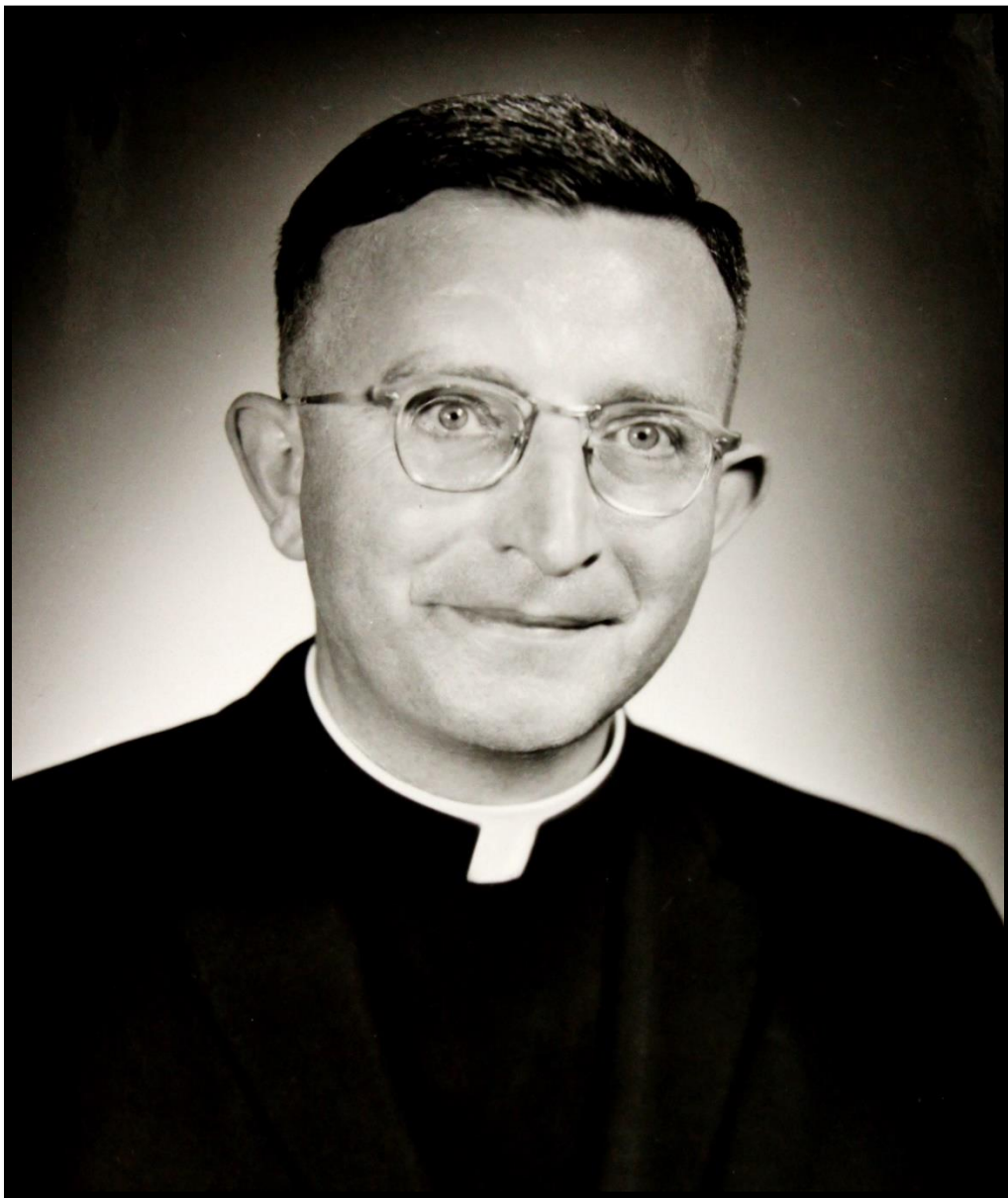
Father James Kieran O'Dea

Native of Kilconly, Tuam, County Galway, Ireland

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento in California

Pastor of Saint Philomene Parish, Sacramento

December 20, 1926 – December 3, 1982



James Kieran O’Dea, son of Thomas St John O’Dea and Marie Blake, was born on December 20, 1926 in Kilconly, Tuam, County Galway, Ireland. He was baptized six days later on December 26 at Saint Conleth Church, Kilconly, County Galway. He was blessed to be part of a family of three brothers and three sisters.

BEGINNING OF HIS EDUCATION

James began his education in 1932 at Kilconly National School and graduated from there in 1940. He then transferred to Saint Jarlath’s College in Tuam and graduated in 1945. He says that his vocation to the priesthood began to take root from the sermons he heard while attending Saint Jarlath’s College.

After his graduation from Saint Jarlath’s College in 1945, Jim was accepted for studies by All Hallows College in Dublin for the priesthood. During his six years of studies at All Hallows from 1945 to 1951, Jim was accepted by the Diocese of Sacramento on April 29, 1947 during his second year of philosophy and incardinated into the diocese in 1948. He completed his theological studies for the priesthood in 1951.



Photo from the book *The Missionary College of All Hallows 1848 – 1891*

All Hallows College, Dublin, Ireland

ORDAINED A PRIEST FOR SACRAMENTO

James O’Dea was ordained a priest for service in the Diocese of Sacramento on June 17, 1951 by Bishop Austin Quinn, DD, Bishop of Kilmore, in the All Hallows Seminary chapel.

TRANSIT TO SACRAMENTO

In a letter to Deacon James O’Dea dated April 17, 1951, Monsignor Thomas Kirby, Vice-Chancellor and Secretary to Bishop Armstrong, stated that after Jim arrived in New York, he could pick up a railroad ticket to Sacramento from either Western Pacific Railroad or Southern Pacific. If Jim wished to delay a little longer in New York and preferred to fly to Sacramento, the amount of his rail passage would be refunded to Jim upon his arrival. Monsignor Kirby went on to say, “Whether you come by plane or train, make sure that you arrive in Sacramento at a reasonable hour.”

BEGINNING OF PRIESTLY MINISTRY

Newly ordained Father O’Dea arrived in Sacramento in the fall of 1951. His first assignment was to Sacred Heart Parish in Red Bluff as assistant priest where he served for 12 years, 1951 to 1963.



Photo by John E Boll

Sacred Heart Church, Red Bluff, California

ADMINISTRATOR OF FAIRFIELD

After his twelve year assignment in Red Bluff, Bishop Alden J Bell appointed Father O’Dea administrator of Holy Spirit Parish in Fairfield for a year, September 24, 1963 to September 24, 1964, while Father Carney, the pastor, was on an extended vacation. Bishop Bell told Father O’Dea that he would have two assistant priests, Father Charles Grovijahn and Father Hugh Bannon.



Photo by John E Boll

Holy Spirit Church, Fairfield

On October 11, 1964, Father O’Dea wrote to Monsignor Cornelius Higgins requesting permission from the bishop to recite the Divine Office in English. Father O’Dea stated, “Having now seen the English translation, I am convinced that the recitation of the Office in English would be much more meaningful to me as a prayer and inspiration than in Latin version. At present, I do not understand most of what I read in Latin.” Permission was granted.

NAMED PASTOR OF McCLOUD

Father O’Dea was named to his first pastorate at Saint Joseph Parish in McCloud, effective September 24, 1964. He was dispensed from the Ceremony of Installation by Bishop Bell.

McCloud is nestled in the southern base of Mount Shasta and at that time was a company town with a large sawmill that employed most of the residents of the town. In good weather, McCloud had an ideal climate and a beautiful setting but during the winters the snow could be deep and

the temperature below freezing. After five years in McCloud, Father Jim called the bishop and expressed his interest in the West Sacramento parish since he believed he had done all he could in McCloud and felt he needed more work and a bigger challenge in a larger parish. The following year, Father Jim's request to move to a larger parish was granted.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Joseph Church, McCloud

PASTOR OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST PARISH FOLSOM

Effective on October 21, 1970, Bishop Bell appointed Father O'Dea pastor of Saint John the Baptist Parish in Folsom. In his letter of appointment, Bishop Bell stated, "As you take up your new position, may I compliment you on the wonderful service which you have heretofore rendered to the People of God in the Diocese, in Red Bluff, Fairfield, and McCloud." Once again, Father O'Dea was dispensed from the Ceremony of Installation as he took on the ministry of pastor of the Folsom Catholic community.

Father O'Dea served as pastor of Saint John Parish in Folsom for only three years, October 21, 1970 to September 20, 1973. In 1973 when the pastorate of Saint Philomene Parish in Sacramento became available, he applied for and was chosen to become the next pastor of Saint Philomene Parish.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint John the Baptist Church, Folsom

APPOINTED PASTOR OF SAINT PHILOMENE PARISH

Effective September 20 1973, Father O’Dea became pastor of Saint Philomene Parish in Sacramento. For the next nine years, he worked diligently and faithfully to minister to and build up the parish community of Saint Philomene Church. He was gentle with the people and had a genuine smile. He always had special affection for the children of the parish and a unique way of caring for his parishioners so that each felt his love and care like that of a father for his family. The parish community responded well to Father Jim’s pastoral care and always held him in great honor, love and esteem.

FATHER O’DEA’S SUDDEN DEATH

On December 3, 1982, Father O’Dea began to feel pain in his chest. Since there was no one readily available to take him to emergency care, he got in his car and drove to Kaiser Hospital on Morse Avenue in Sacramento, not far from Saint Philomene Parish. He walked into the emergency and collapsed. The emergency staff did all they could to revive his heart but to no avail. Father O’Dea died in the emergency room of Kaiser Hospital at the age of 55. News of Father O’Dea’s sudden death came as a total shock to the parishioners of the parish, the Diocese of Sacramento and Father O’Dea’s family in Ireland.



Photo by John E Boll

Sanctuary of Saint Philomene Church, Sacramento

FUNERAL MASS FOR FATHER O'DEA

Because Father O'Dea was greatly loved by so many people who knew him over the years, the Saint Philomene parish staff under the leadership of Father Gerald Ryle, parochial vicar at the time, organized a number of liturgical celebrations to accommodate the large number of people who wished to attend Father O'Dea's funeral.

On December 5, 1982, Father Ryle presided at a Funeral Mass for parishioners at 7:30 PM. Joining him at the altar were priests from the surrounding parishes.

On December 6, Bishop Alphonse Gallegos celebrated a Mass with the school children of the parish. Later that day, a rosary was prayed at 7 PM followed by the Vigil Liturgy at 8 PM in the church.

On Tuesday, December 7, Bishop Francis Quinn, Bishop of Sacramento, was the main celebrant at the Mass of Christian Burial for Father O'Dea. The *Catholic Herald* stated that 275 priests and hundreds of people participated in this Mass. Priests and people came from all over the state of California for Father O'Dea's funeral. It was one of the largest priest funeral in the history of the Sacramento diocese, a living testament to the positive impact one good priest can have on the life of a parish, a community, his fellow priests, and the whole diocese.

MONSIGNOR NOLAN WAS HOMILIST

Monsignor Patrick Nolan, pastor of Saint Patrick Parish in Placerville and a lifelong friend of Father O'Dea, was the homilist, calling Father O'Dea's life a sermon in itself. "He loved everyone – the old, the young, the sick and those who were hurting. His life was an open book."

Monsignor Nolan listed many groups and organizations Father O'Dea was involved in: Marriage Encounter, a senior citizens center, feeding the hungry, Vietnamese Resettlement, youth programs.

JAMES K. O'DEA

December 20, 1926
Ordained June 17, 1951
December 3, 1982



Well done, thou good and
faithful servant.
Come, inherit the kingdom
prepared for you from
the foundation of the world.

Matthew 25: 23, 34

A GOOD MEAL SERVED

A song Father O'Dea liked to sing with the children while using hand gestures was sung during the Mass, led by Father Ryle. At the end of the Mass, Father Ryle announced that all were invited to the parish hall "because Father O'Dea had stated in his will that everybody who participated in the funeral be given a good meal."

FATHER O'DEA'S FAMILY

Three members of Father O'Dea's family came from Ireland for the funeral in Sacramento - his sisters Sister Mary Joseph, OP and Frances Cole, and his brother Al O'Dea.

Father O'Dea was also survived by his brothers Fergus, Pearse, Albert and sister Kathleen Maran, all who lived in Ireland.

BURIAL AT CALVARY CEMETERY

After the Funeral Mass and lunch, the body of Father O'Dea was taken in procession to the priests' section at Calvary Cemetery for burial. As all departed from the burial site, they gave thanks to God for having known Father O'Dea and journeyed with him until the day God called him home to the fulness of the Kingdom of Heaven.



Photo by John E Boll

**Headstone of Father James O'Dea
Calvary Cemetery, Sacramento**

IN MEMORIAM

Father Jimmy O'Dea was a decent man and very special and beloved priest. He was friendly, gentle and kind, had a great smile, a hearty laugh, and a twinkle in his eyes. He was always welcoming and hospitable. His fellow priests in the Diocese of Sacramento held him in esteem and he was loved by the many people he served as curate, administrator and pastor. He was the kind of priest who would have been a great bishop.

Father O'Dea served as a member of the Council of Priests, the Diocesan Liturgical Commission, the Diocesan School Board and the Priests' Retirement Board of which he was chairman when he died.

His death at age 55 was a great loss to the Church of Sacramento. But one the most fundamental statements of faith is this: ***Your life is not about you. You are not in control. This is not your project. Rather, you are part of God's great design. To believe this in your bones and to act accordingly is to have faith.*** God's vision and wisdom far surpasses anything we individually or collectively can imagine. Father Jim completed his journey on earth and returned home to God. We simply thank God for the gift that Father James Kieran O'Dea was to all of us!

PHOTOS OF FATHER O'DEA'S FAMILY



Photo courtesy of Valerie Cole

L-R, Eric Cole (brother-in-law), nieces Marie and Geraldine (in pram) and Fr Jim circa 1962



Photos courtesy of Valerie Cole in Ireland

Father Jim with his nieces and nephews, R-L, Brian, Geraldine, Jim and Valerie



**Back Row, L-R, Father Jim's sister Kay, Moran brothers Fergus & Pearse, sisters-in-law Chris O'Dea & Sheila O'Dea
Front Row, L-R, sisters-in-law Margaret O'Dea, brother Al O'Dea, sister Sr Mary O'Dea, brother-in-law Eric Cole and sister Frankie Cole**



Photo provided by Valerie Cole

Thomas and Marie O'Dea
Parents of Father James K O'Dea

*Lord,
Father Jimmy O'Dea was a
kind and gentle priest who
accompanied his people in
their joys and sorrows of life.
He was a good shepherd after
your own heart.
Grant him a place of peace and joy
in your awesome presence
now and forever.*

Amen

Special thanks to Valerie Cole in Ireland for providing family photos used in
Father O'Dea's biography