

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 5

Father John E Boll

No 52

Father Michael J Fitzgerald

Native of Tralee, County Kerry, Ireland

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish, Sacramento

January 27, 1902 - January 15, 1968



Michael J Fitzgerald, son of Synan Fitzgerald and Catherine Sullivan, was born on January 27, 1902 in Tralee, County Kerry, Ireland. He was baptized three days later on January 30, in Tralee.

BEGINS HIS EDUCATION

Michael began his education in 1909 at the National School in Ballyseedy, Tralee until 1915. He then transferred to Jeffers Institute in Tralee from 1916 to 1921 and in the fall of 1921, he transferred to Christian Brothers High School where he completed his studies in 1922.



Photo from the Web

Christian Brothers High School, Tralee

ENTERS SAINT PATRICK COLLEGE, CARLOW

In 1923, Michael began his seminary training at Saint Patrick College in Carlow, Ireland and continued his theological studies there until 1930.

ORDAINED A PRIEST

Michael J Fitzgerald was ordained a priest by Bishop Matthew Cullen, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, in the Saint Patrick Seminary Chapel on June 15, 1930 for the Diocese of Sacramento. After spending time with his family, he set out on his long journey west by ship from Ireland to New York and then crossed the Continental United States by train, arriving in the Capital City of Sacramento to begin his life of ministry.



Photo from the Web

Saint Patrick Seminary, Carlow, Ireland

FIRST ASSIGNMENT, RED BLUFF

Father Fitzgerald's first assignment in the Diocese of Sacramento was as assistant pastor to Father William Coen, pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Red Bluff. Father Michael served the parish in Red Bluff from November 1930 to June 1936.



Photo by John E Boll

Sacred Heart Church, Red Bluff

NEXT ASSIGNMENT, IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CHURCH, SACRAMENTO

Father Fitzgerald's next assignment was to Immaculate Conception Church in Sacramento as assistant pastor to Father Patrick J O'Sullivan. This was a short assignment of one and a half years, from June 1935 to December 1937. While serving this parish, he was also Catholic chaplain to the Sacramento County Hospital (now UC Davis Teaching Hospital), and chaplain to the Carmelite Sisters' Monastery which was located on Stockton Boulevard across the street from the hospital.



Photo by John E Boll

Immaculate Conception Church, Sacramento

FIRST PASTORATE AT ST PATRICK CHURCH, SCOTIA

In 1937, Bishop Armstrong appointed Father Fitzgerald to his first pastorate at Saint Patrick Church in Scotia, Humboldt County.

Scotia was a company town founded by Pacific Lumber Company to house workers for the lumber industry. The town was completely owned by the lumber company until 2008 when Pacific Lumber declared bankruptcy. Located on the Eel River along US Highway 101 eight miles southeast of Fortuna and 244 miles north of San Francisco, the Scotia parish served Catholics who worked in the saw mill and farmers who operated dairies in the area.

Father Fitzgerald served the Catholic community of Scotia for only one year, from December 1937 to November 1938.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Patrick Church, Scotia, no Longer a Functioning Parish

APPOINTED PASTOR OF HOLY FAMILY PARISH, WEED

After his short pastorate in Scotia, Bishop Armstrong assigned Father Fitzgerald as pastor of Holy Family Parish in Weed. He served this parish for the next twelve years, from November 1938 to November 1950.

The City of Weed is nestled at the base of Mount Shasta in the Cascade Mountains, half way between San Francisco and Portland, Oregon on Interstate 5. The town is surrounded by natural beauty, breathtaking vistas, and unmatched outdoor recreation.

Weed was given its name from the pioneer Abner Weed who took over the local lumber mill. He discovered that the area's strong winds were helpful in drying lumber. In 1897, Weed bought the Siskiyou Lumber and Mercantile Mill and 280 acres of land for the sum of \$400 which is now the City of Weed. By the 1940s, Weed boasted of having the largest sawmill in the world. This sawmill continues to operate to this day and is one of the main employers of the town.



Photo from the Weed Website

Entrance to the City of Weed at the Base of Mount Shasta



Photo by John E Boll

Holy Family Church in Weed before it was Destroyed in the 2014 Boles Fire

PASTOR OF SAINT THOMAS THE APOSTLE PARISH, OROVILLE

After serving twelve years as pastor of Weed, Father Fitzgerald was next appointed pastor of Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish in Oroville by Bishop Armstrong. He began this pastorate in November 1950 and served the Oroville community for the next thirteen years until May 1963.

Oroville is situated on the banks of the Feather River where the river flows out of the Sierra Nevada Mountains to the great California Central Valley. It was established as the head of navigation on the Feather River to supply gold miners with supplies during the California Gold Rush beginning in 1849.

Gold found at Bidwell Bar, one of the first gold mining sites in California, brought thousands of prospectors to the Oroville area seeking riches.

In the early 20th century, the Western Pacific Railroad completed construction of the all-weather Feather River Canyon route through the Sierra Nevada Mountains giving it the nickname of “The Feather River Route.”



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Thomas the Apostle Church, Oroville

RETURN TO RED BLUFF

Father Fitzgerald was appointed pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Red Bluff on May 14, 1963 by Bishop Alden Bell, recently arrived from Los Angeles where he had served as auxiliary bishop. Father Fitzgerald's appointment as pastor of Red Bluff lasted only four months until September 17, 1963 when he was re-assigned to Sacramento. This would be his last assignment.

FINAL PASTORATE AT IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CHURCH, SACRAMENTO

On September 17, 1963, Father Fitzgerald returned to Immaculate Conception Parish in Sacramento as pastor. He served there for five years.

SUDDEN DEATH COMES TO FATHER FITZGERALD

After the Christmas rush of celebrations, Father Fitzgerald went on a post-Christmas break with two of his priest companions, Monsignor Patrick Donnelly, pastor of Marysville, and Father Cornelius S O'Connor, pastor of All Hallows Parish in Sacramento. On the morning of Monday, January 15, 1968, his companions found Father Fitzgerald dead in bed in Hemet, East Los Angeles. He was 65 years of age.

FUNERAL OF FATHER FITZGERALD

On Sunday, January 21, 1968, the staff of W F Gormley Funeral Home brought the body of Father Fitzgerald to Immaculate Conception Church where a rosary was prayed at 8 PM. The next day, a Funeral Mass was concelebrated with Bishop Bell as main celebrant at Immaculate Conception Church. The body of Father Fitzgerald was buried in the Priests' Section of Saint Mary Cemetery.



Photo by John E Boll

Father Fitzgerald's Headstone, Saint Mary Cemetery, Sacramento

IN MEMORIAM

Life ended suddenly and peacefully for Father Fitzgerald while he slept during the night of January 15, 1968, just two weeks shy of his 66th birthday. This brief post-Christmas break became the moment of transition for him from life in time to life in eternity.

Father Fitzgerald spent his life ministering to the People of God in seven parishes of the Diocese of Sacramento. For the first time in the history of the diocese, Father Fitzgerald and Monsignor Daniel Twomey, founding pastor of Saint Philomene Parish, died within hours of one another.

We are grateful to the hundreds of Irish priests like Father Fitzgerald who left their native homeland in Ireland to give their lives in service to the Catholic community in the Diocese of Sacramento.

May Father Michael be fully alive in the glorious presence of God forever!



Father Michael J Fitzgerald