

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 7

Father John E Boll

No 3

The Life Journey of Sister Anita Minihane, RSM Auburn Sisters of Mercy

June 10, 1950 – February 6, 2020



Hannah Mary Minihane was born on June 10, 1950 at home on the family farm in Knockskeagh near the village of Leap in County Cork. She was the first of four children born to John Minihane and Bridget Shanahan. Her brother and sisters are John, Goretti and Breda. Each of the four children was born two years apart.

GROWING UP ON AN IRISH FARM

Hannah Mary, who was later called Anne, grew up on the family farm and did her share of chores with the other family members. The Minihane family raised beef cows and grew crops of oats and barley. Her father John also raised race horses.



Parents, John and Bridget Minihane

Being the eldest child nurtured Anita's charism of leadership that has served her well through the years but not without suffering. She believes all gifts, natural or otherwise, are given to us for the common good.

“My father was a quiet man of integrity and justice who, until the day he died, was constantly seen with a book in his hand. From him I learned that passion for justice which expressed itself in younger years through marching with Cesar Chavez for the plight of farm workers and protesting on the Capitol steps for many and varied issues to this present day.”

Anne says her “mother Bridget was a compassionate extravert with a heart much larger than her small frame could hold. She knew and was known by persons too numerous to mention. This fact was brought home at my mother’s funeral. Like all people of my mother’s generation in Ireland, she was waked at home and her funeral procession stretched for three miles as we took her to her resting place at our village cemetery.”

Anita added, “Having left home at seventeen, I did not know how big an impact my mother had on all she met as she cared for the poor, visited the sick, and presided at funeral vigils for neighbors far and wide. Her early and unpredictable death on Christmas Eve from a heart attack at 60 years of age shocked us all but perhaps impacted me the most since I hadn’t seen her for five years and was due home that summer. It took me seven years to recover fully from that experience – three of them with a therapist.”

GROWING UP IN IRELAND

Anita says, “I grew up in a mixed Protestant and Catholic neighborhood. People conversed with each other daily and there was no animosity. My best friend was a Protestant and for four years we cycled to high school together which was nine miles from our home. Until I went to the Sisters of Mercy High School, I had never talked to a sister.”



Photo courtesy of Sr Anita Minihaue

Knockskeagh National School

BEGINNING HER EDUCATION

Anne began her primary school education at the Knockskeagh National School which was a two-room school. Half the students were in one classroom and half in the other classroom. In her grade level, there was only one boy and herself. There were two teachers at the school and Anne felt the discipline was sometimes cruel. If a student was not paying attention, the teacher might hit that student with a ruler or pull his/her hair. Some of the teachers were Anne's relatives and maybe they felt more at ease in using corporal punishment when they thought it necessary.



Photo courtesy of Sr Anita Minihane

The Minihane Family Farm



Anne's First Communion

Anita says her parents were poor although she did not think that was the case since everyone was poor. As she looks back, she remembers there were times when the family did not have enough food to eat.

Anne and brother and two sisters walked the three miles round trip to school daily from their home. At the end of the school day when she returned home, Anne rounded up the cows for milking and after dinner she and her mother milked the dozen or so cows. Milking was done by hand and it took about five minutes to milk each cow.

The Minihane family was an extremely close and loving family. The family home was the center for gatherings in the evenings for family and friends. They would pray the rosary together and

then play cards and visit. Anne and her mother would ride bicycles sometimes to visit her mother's family and return home by bike at 2 AM by the light of the moon.

JOURNEY TO RELIGIOUS LIFE

When Anne entered secondary or high school, she attended the Sisters of Mercy School in Skibbereen for the next four years. High school was a shock to her system when I found 60+ students per grade!" She had to ride her bicycle to school daily eight miles each way. When it rained, she would arrive home dripping wet.

"During my high school years, many religious came to speak to us about vocations and missionary work. On one occasion, a sister from Auburn, Sister Mary Grace, spoke to us about the life and ministry of Mother Catherine McAuley. As she spoke to us, I felt "my heart burning within me." During this period, Anne was very much in love with prayer and would read as much as she could about it.

Anne decided she wanted to become a Mercy sister when she was 16 years of age. She had been pondering her vocation in life since age 12. During these years, she heard many talks about religious life from different religious communities who came to the parish or her school.

ANNE APPROACHES HER MOTHER ABOUT HER CALLING

Anne remembers the evening when she and her mother were milking cows and she spoke to her mother about going into religious life. Her mother told her she needed to speak to her father about that. Anne's heart nearly stopped because she had never spoken much to her father about anything important in her life.

ASKING HER FATHER'S PERMISSION

One night when it was milking time, Anita's mother said to her: "I am going out to milk the cows now but you stay and talk with your dad." Anne asked her father if she could enter religious life as a sister. There was a silence. Her father finally looked at her and said: "Anne, if God is calling you, how can I say no. Tell me more about it." She kind of melted at that moment. She told her father what Sister Grace had said about Mother McAuley and the Mercy Sisters.



Photo courtesy of Sr Anita Minihane

The Minihane Children Help their Father on the Family Farm

He said, "If you want to join the nuns, why not join a group around here?" Anne responded that she would be in Ireland for a while but she wanted to go to the missions in California. Her father said, "Choose well and all will be well. I know we will never see you again." At that time, once a religious sister went to the missions, she never returned home to visit her family.

Anita recalls that, "The night before I entered, my boyfriend and I won the village waltzing competition and we were carried through the main street on the shoulders of others. Needless to say, he did not like my decision. I meet him still on my visits to my family and we recall those early days of youth. As a side note, he never did marry!"

ENTERS MERCY HOUSE IN ARDFERT

Anne went to the Mercy Ardfert Recruiting House for a year where she attended daily classes. During that year she was drawn more and more toward the Mercy Sisters. She knew this was the right place for her.

DRIVING THE FAMILY CAR

The Minihane family owned a car and Anne was the only one in the family who knew how to drive it. She started driving at age 14 and when she was ready to leave for the Mercy Ardfert House, her father told her where to park the car since no one else at home knew how to drive it.

After some time, Anne's father John decided he would start driving. Without any driver's training, one Sunday morning he decided to drive the family to Sunday Mass. Never having driven the car, John started out with jerks, starts and stops, ending up in the ditch a few times on the way. He made it to church, drove into the parking lot and brought the car to an abrupt halt. The children were crying in the back seat for fear of their lives, but they made it to church. It would have been quicker riding bikes to church that morning. A year later, Anne's brother John learned how to drive the car and began to be the family driver.

ANNE'S YEAR AT ARDFERT

During Anne's year at Ardfert, she took classes, especially American history, to prepare herself for life in California. One of her teachers was Sister Carmel Donohue. Anne arrived in Auburn, California in August 1967 during the heat of the California summer. When the heat hit her, she said to herself, "What have I done to myself?"

BEGINNING RELIGIOUS LIFE IN AUBURN

The postulants arrived at the Mercy Mother House in Auburn and after settling into their new environment, they began classes at Sierra Community College in Auburn. At the same time at the Auburn Mother House, they began their formation on how to live religious community life through personal and community prayer and the celebration of the liturgy of the Church.

YEARS OF COLLEGE EDUCATION

After completing two years of college at Sierra College, Sister Anita and the other young sisters were sent to Dominican College in San Rafael for the last two years of college. What Sister Anita



Sister Anita as a Novice

found most interesting at Dominican College was the great mix of students from all over the world. At the end of her four years of college, she received a degree in political science.

Following graduation from Dominican College, Sister Anita attended the University of the Pacific in Stockton for weekend classes once a month to obtain her accreditation as a certified teacher so she could teach in any school in California.

After receiving her certification at UOP, Sister Anita began classes at Saint Mary College in Moraga where she completed a master's degree in Educational Administration.

For three summers, Sister Anita attended classes at Notre Dame University in Indiana where she earned a degree in liturgy.



Photo by John E Boll

Notre Dame University, South Bend, Indiana

SEMINAR IN FUNDRAISING

Through Creighton University, Father John Flynn came to Sacramento to teach a course on how to raise significant funds for one's cause. Sister Anita attended that seminar and learned how to raise money for different schools in the diocese. Taking what she learned in this seminar, she was able to raise a good amount of money for the schools where she taught or was principal.

SISTER ANITA BECAMES A FULL-TIME TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL

In the course of two decades, Sister Anita was a teacher in many different schools in the diocese and principal of four Catholic schools in Northern California.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Joseph School, Auburn, CA

Sister Anita served the following schools in the Diocese of Sacramento

- 1970-1971 Fifth and sixth grade teacher, Saint Joseph School, Auburn
- 1971-1972 Half-time third grade teacher, Holy Spirit School, Sacramento
- 1972-1977 Sixth grade teacher, Sacred Heart School, Sacramento
- 1977-1980 Eighth grade teacher, Sacred Heart School, Anderson
- 1980-1983 Principal, Sacred Heart School, Anderson; (Pre K-8)
- 1983-1986 Principal, Saint Rose School, Roseville; (Pre K-8)
- 1986-1989 Principal, Notre Dame School, Chico (Pre K-10)
- 1989-1991 Principal, Saint Joseph School, Auburn (K-8)

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CONSULTANT

In 1991, Sister Anita became a Religious Education Consultant to the 96 parishes of the Diocese of Sacramento. She was responsible for providing assistance to parishes in the diocese in the areas of catechist formation, coordinator training, RCIA (adult and children), small ecclesial communities and retreats.

DIRECTOR OF LAY MINISTRY



When lay ministry became part of the diocesan plan, Bishop Quinn approached Sister Anita in 1992 and asked her if she would be willing to serve as the director of the Department of Lay Ministry for both Spanish and English speaking. She felt very uncomfortable with this request because she did not have any background in lay ministry.

Bishop Quinn give Sister Anita a year to travel the United States to observe lay formation programs that were functioning well. As she traveled the USA, Sister Anita became very aware that a critical element in developing a lay ministry program depended on the buy-in of the priests. She traveled the diocese to talk with pastors and found the priests very supportive of the idea of lay ministry. This encouraged her and with the help of staff, she developed an effective lay ministry program for the Diocese of Sacramento.

LIMEX DIRECTOR/FACILITATOR OF A MASTER DEGREE PROGRAM

Sister Anita was impressed by the Limex Master Degree Program from the New Orleans Xavier University and brought that two-year program to the Diocese of Sacramento for Lay Ministry Development. Students attended classes in Sacramento through a television hook-up with the Xavier University in New Orleans.

FORMING PARISH COUNCILS

While director of Lay Ministry, Sister Anita, together with other people, created a program to help parishes form parish councils and clarified the role of councils in the life of parishes. Father John Boll who was pastor of Holy Rosary Parish in Woodland, invited Sister Anita to give training to the Woodland parish council. He found the training to be very helpful in clarifying for him and parish council members what was the proper role of the council. He says this training served him well throughout the rest of his ministry as a pastor.

NANCY WHIPPLE JOINS THE LAY MINISTRY TEAM

Sister Anita hired Nancy Whipple of Redding to work with her in lay ministry. They developed three sites in the diocese where lay ministry training would be done: Saint Vincent Parish, Solano County; Mercy Center, Auburn; and in Redding, they used the various parishes in the area.



Photo courtesy of Sr Anita Minihane

Nancy Whipple, Sr Anita and Sr Sarah Aurich receive their MA degrees in Administration

SECURING TEACHERS FOR LAY MINISTRY

Sister Anita was able to secure teachers for lay ministry training from Saint Patrick Seminary, Menlo Park; Catholic Theological Union, Berkeley; and educators from Boston College. She brought well known teachers from wherever she could find them. At the same time, she and her team facilitated the *Sacred Art of Living and Dying*, a program developed by Fr Richard Groves of Bend, Oregon, in whatever parishes asked for this program. Groves also did a program on Scripture which many parishes used in their ongoing adult education program.

People who participated in the lay ministry programs in the diocese kept in touch with Sister Anita because the training they experienced was so personal and profound that it changed their lives. Sister Anita served as director of Lay Ministry from 1992 to 2000.

SABBATICAL in 2000

When Sister Anita stepped down as director of Lay Ministry Formation in Sacramento, she took a year's sabbatical and attended the Colorado Springs Spiritual Direction Center; Contemplative

Art, Israel/Ireland; Jewish and Celtic Spirituality; and Immersion in South America, the Native Peoples of the Amazon.

PASTORAL LIFE ADMINISTRATOR, OUR LADY OF THE SNOWS PARISH, RENO, NEVADA

After her sabbatical in 2001, Sister Anita was invited by Bishop Phillip Straling of Reno, Nevada to come to Reno to help with the diaconate program of that diocese. When the director of the diaconate program stepped down, the bishop asked Sister Anita if she would be willing to be the director. Bishop Straling told her that if she did not take over the diaconate program, he would be forced to close it since there was no qualified person available to take it over.

Sister Anita told the bishop that she knew a few people who might be willing to direct the diaconate program. Bishop Straling asked her to contact them to see if any were interested. Sister Anita's long-time associate Nancy Whipple who was living in Redding, California said she was interested and the Reno Diocese hired her to head up the diaconate program.

Sister Anita became the acting principal of Our Lady of the Snows Parish School in Reno. When the pastor of the parish stepped down, Bishop Straling had no priest to send to the parish and asked Sister Anita to become the Pastoral Life Administrator of the parish. She served in that pastoral role for six years, from 2001 to 2007.



Photo courtesy of Sister Anita Minihane

Our Lady of the Snows Church, Reno, Nevada

SISTER ANITA RETURNS TO AUBURN

After serving the Diocese of Reno for seven years, Sister Anita returned home to the Mercy Mother House in Auburn. Beginning in 2009, Father Michael Carroll, pastor of Saint Teresa Parish in Auburn, hired Sister Anita to be assistant administrator of the parish and pastoral associate. She served in that role for three years until 2011.

RETIREMENT

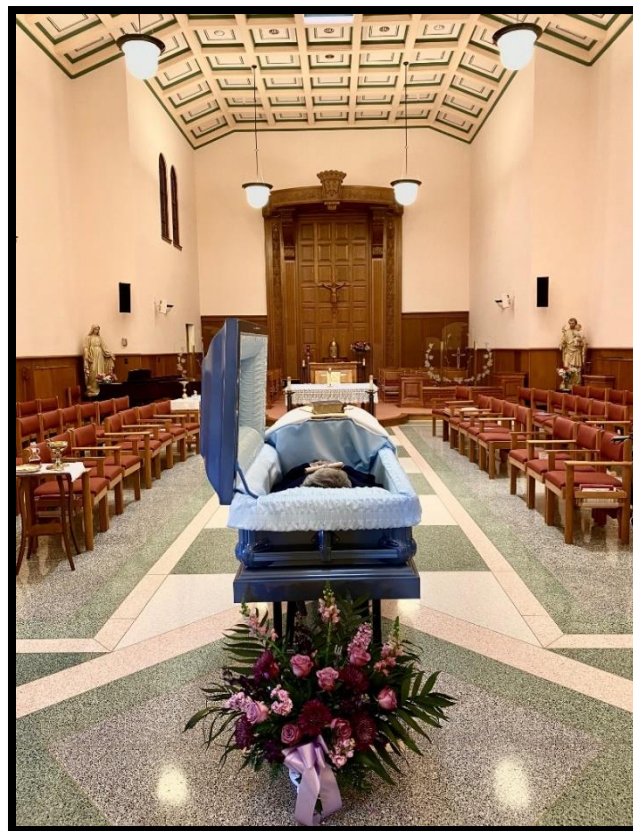
Sister Anita began to experience some health issues and retired from active ministry. She continued to live at the Mercy Convent in Auburn. During the past few years, her health continued to decline and the doctors were not able to stop her decline. In January 2020, she made the decision to begin hospice care at the convent.

DEATH OF SISTER ANITA

Sister Anita's two sisters, Goretti O'Regan and Breda Bursell, flew from Ireland to California to be with their sister Anita during her last days. As Sister Anita's health became more critical, her sisters extended their stay so they could be with Anita until the end of her life. Surrounded by the Sisters of Mercy and her sisters Goretti and Breda, Sister Anita died at home in the Auburn convent around 10:28 PM on Thursday evening, February 6, 2020, at the age of 69. The physical pain and suffering she endured was now over.

FUNERAL LITURGY FOR SISTER ANITA

A Vigil was held for Sister Anita in the Auburn Convent Chapel on Wednesday evening, February 12, at 6:30 PM.



Sister Anita Lies in State in the Auburn Mercy Convent Chapel

FUNERAL MASS

The Funeral Mass for Sister Anita was celebrated on Thursday morning, February 13, at 10:30 AM. She requested that Father John Boll preside at her Funeral Mass. Joining him as concelebrants were retired priests Fathers Michael Downey, Ignatius Haran, John Healy, William Kinane, Daniel Looney, Liam macCarthy, Daniel Madigan, Thomas Maguire, Patrick O'Connor and Joseph Ternullo.

As part of the homily, Father John shared some of Sister Anita's own reflection about her life. In her own words, she wrote:

"I was born on June 10, 1950 to John and Bridget Minihane on a farm in West Cork, Ireland. Growing up on the farm gave me a love for the soil which even today expresses itself in gardening at least once a week. Being the eldest of four, one brother and two sisters, this nurtured my charism of leadership that has served me well through the years but not without suffering. It is my belief that all gifts, natural or otherwise, are given to us for the common good.

"My father was a quiet man of integrity and justice, who, until the day he died, was constantly seen with a book in his hand. From him I developed my passion for justice and mercy.

"My mother was a compassionate extravert with a heart much larger than her small frame could hold. She knew and was known by persons too numerous to mention. This fact was brought home to me at her funeral 17 years ago. Like all people of her generation, she was waked at home and her funeral procession stretched for 3 miles as we took her to her resting place in our village cemetery. Having left home at seventeen I did not know how big an impact she had on all she met. Her early and unpredictable death on Christmas Eve from a heart attack at 60 years of age, shocked us all but perhaps impacted me the most since I hadn't seen her for five years and was due home that summer. It took me seven years to recover fully from that experience.

"I grew up in a mixed Protestant and Catholic neighborhood. People conversed with each other daily and there was no animosity. My best friend was a Protestant and for four years we cycled together to high school which was eight miles from our home. In my earlier years I attended a one-room school house with only one boy and myself in my grade level. Going to high school was a shock to my system when I found 60+ per grade!

"During my years at high school many religious came to speak to us on vocations and missionary work. On one such occasion, one of the sisters from Auburn came and as she spoke to us about Mother McAuley, I felt "my heart burning within" and the following year I joined the community. It was not unusual in that time and place to make a life choice at 17.

"The night before I entered, my boyfriend and I won the village waltzing competition and we were carried through the main street on shoulders of others. Needless to say, he didn't like my decision. I meet him still on my visits to my family and we recall those early days of youth. As an aside, he never did marry!!

“Life in California was an eye-opener for me. There was no such thing as enculturation in those days and to my dismay I didn’t see a potato in any form for the first week. I was literally starving in a house of plenty! My novitiate was no easy cake walk. Having my personal letters read by the novice director and my Irish music taken from me, I wasn’t sure I could endure. But, God prevailed - that hound of heaven - and even though I took an extra year to discern, I did make a life commitment which I’ve seldom regretted. Yes, today I’m more committed to Mercy than I was on that day I made my final vows.

“The “mission fields” of California looked nothing like I imagined but through the gift of teaching I’ve touched many a life. Even today as I write this review of my life, I have to say I’m still teaching. Only the size and age of the students have changed.”

BURIAL AT CALVARY CEMETERY

After the Funeral Mass, the Mercy community and family and friends of Sister Anita who filled the chapel, shared a meal together in the convent hall to celebrate Sister Anita’s life. After lunch, under the direction of Gormley’s Funeral Home, the funeral cortege left the Auburn convent for the final journey to Calvary Cemetery for the burial. After the Rite of Committal, Sister Anita’s body was lowered into the grave. With a handful of dirt sprinkled on the casket by the Sisters of Mercy and Sister Anita’s two sisters, Goretti and Breda, all departed.



Lowering the Casket into the Grave at Calvary Cemetery, Citrus Heights

IN MEMORIAM

Sister Anita served the Diocese of Sacramento through the Mercy charism of education. She was a teacher and principal in parish schools for twenty years. She began a new ministry in the field of Adult Education and created an important diocesan program to prepare laity for ministry in the Church of the twentieth century and beyond.

Like many young men and women who left family, friends and the land of their birth in response to God's call to the Catholic Missions of the world, Sister Anita spent most of her life ministering in the Diocese of Sacramento. She was an effective and creative teacher for over fifty years.

The Church of Sacramento and the Church of Reno are grateful for the great contributions Sister Anita made to the life of faith in these dioceses. Thank you, Sister Anita, for the personal sacrifices you made out of love for us and for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Rest now from your labors for you have been found worthy to enter the fullness of life in the joy of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Sister Anita's Journey of Life

Photos courtesy of Sister Anita Minihane



The Minihane Family Home and Farm, County Cork, Ireland



The Family Parish Church in Ireland



The Minihane Family
L-R, John, Bridget, Anita, John, Goretti, and Breda



The Young Mercy Sisters of Auburn



Leaving on a Jet Plane on Their Way to California



Young Sister Anita Minihane



Sister Anita makes her Final Vows before Bishop John Cummins and Father Ronan Brennan



Profession Day Celebration



Profession Day, Bishop Cummins, Bridget Minihane, Sister Anita and Sister Kathleen Dunn



Sister Anita with her Niece Laura



Sister Anita, Principal, and Father Michael Cormack, Pastor of Saint Rose Church

The Roseville Fire Department makes a visit to the students at Saint Rose School



Sister Anita Loves to go Fishing





Mercy Sisters' Vacation House at Moss Beach



Sister Anita in Ireland with her Brother John and Sisters Goretti and Breda



Sister Anita with Bishop Phillip Straling in Reno





Sister Anita Minihane, RSM