

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 3

Father John E Boll

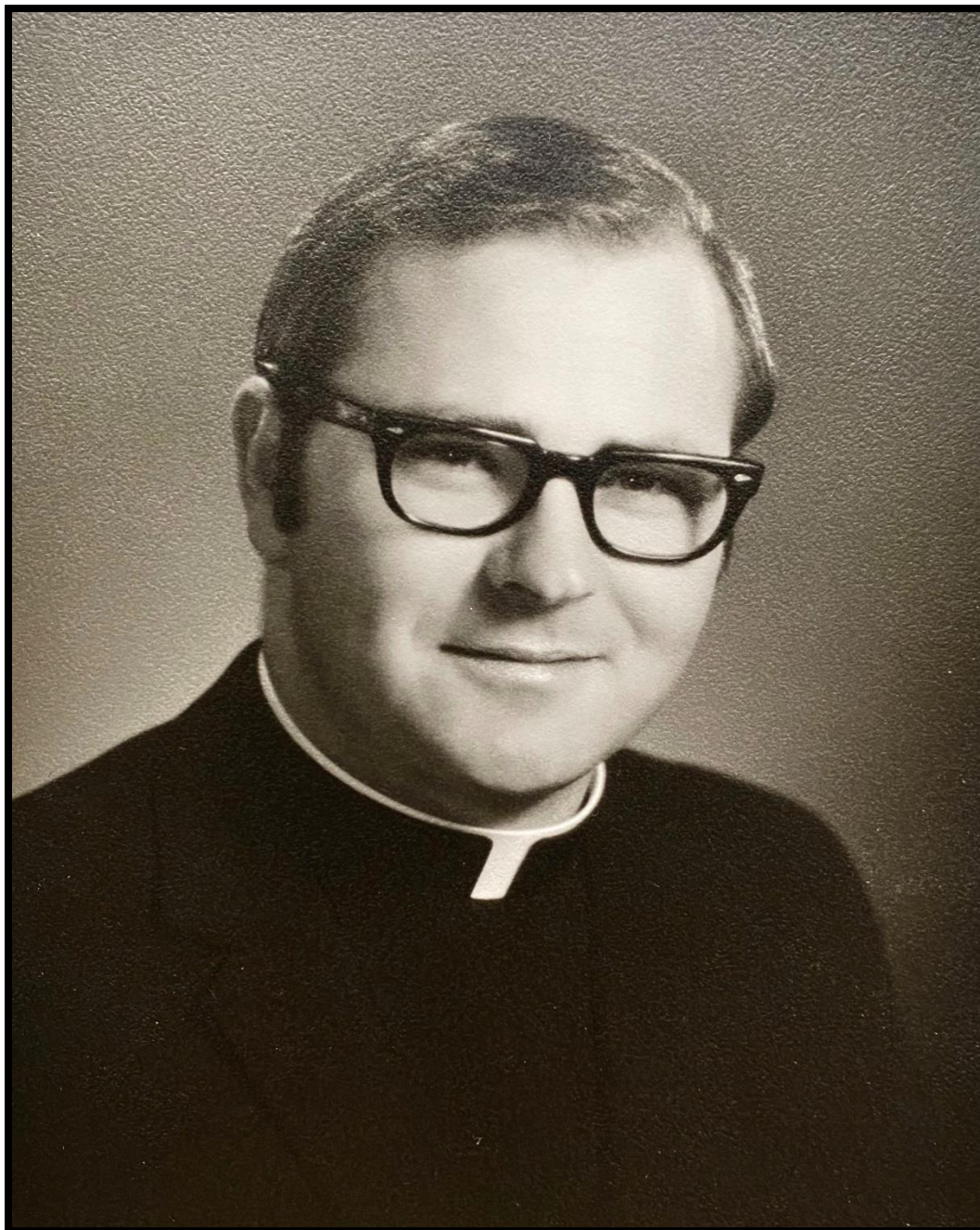
No 14

Father Patrick Columba O'Kelly

Native of Limerick City, County Limerick, Ireland

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor of Saint Catherine of Siena Parish, Vallejo, California





Sean and Agnes O'Kelly and Children



L-R, back row: Dermot, Betty, Eithne, Maureen and Jim
Sitting - Sean Sr, Sean and Agnes
Sitting on the floor, twins Terry and Colm



SEAN AND AGNES O'KELLY

Sean, the father of the family, worked for the Civil Service of Ireland. Agnes, the mother, was a national school teacher. Sean and Agnes had a family of eight children. In raising their children, the emphasis was on education and the arts which included music and drama. Sean, Sr was a member of a semi-professional acting company known as *The College Players*. All the children took piano lessons and were involved in school choirs, musicals and appearances in dramatic productions and solo performances.

Every July, the O'Kelly family spent a month in Kilkee, County Clare, by the Atlantic Ocean just to enjoy family time together. The family portrait above was the last time the whole family was together in one place at the same time.

Colm and Terry Practice the Piano

COLM BEGINS HIS EDUCATION

Colm attended Presentation Pre-School and Christian Brothers Primary School. In 1953 at age 13, he decided to become a Christian Brother and left home to attend the Christian Brothers' Juniorate in Dublin. After three years with the Christian Brothers, he decided to leave the Brothers in 1956 and finished high school in 1958 at Saint Munchin College, the diocesan high school in Limerick.

A HUMEROUS RECOLLECTION

Going back to his childhood and his father's acting career, Colm's father used him and his sister Terry to practice his lines in the plays he was acting in. The result was that the twins knew their father's lines as well as he did. One of the rewards for Colm and Terry was attending the play in which their father was acting.

During one play Sean was acting in, there was a dramatic pause and Colm thought his father forgot his lines so he shouted from the audience the missing line. Sean walked to the apron of the stage and just glared at Colm. When the play was over and Sean came to pick up the twins, he stood over Colm and shook his finger at him saying: "If you ever open your mouth in a theater again, you will never see another play!"

COLM BEGINS HIS THEOLOGICAL TRAINING

Colm entered Saint Patrick Seminary in Thurles where he studied philosophy for two years and then went on to study theology in preparation for ordination and ministry.

HOW COLM DECIDED FOR SACRAMENTO

As Colm was preparing for ordination, the rector of the seminary called him to his office to ask where he wanted to serve as a priest. Colm asked the rector where priests were needed in the world. The rector said he could go to Australia or Sacramento where priests were needed in 1958.

Colm consulted with his parents about where he should apply. His mother said, "If you go to Australia, we will never see you again." So the consensus was he should apply for Sacramento.



Photo from the Diocesan Archives

Saint Patrick Seminary, Thurles, Ireland

ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

Colm was ordained a priest on June 14, 1964 in the Thurles Cathedral of the Assumption by Archbishop Thomas Morris, Archbishop of Cashel. Ordained with him for the Diocese of Sacramento was Anthony Gurnell. In 1964, there were seven Irish born priests ordained for Sacramento and two Americans, Ed Donaghy and Charles Bencken.

After spending some time with his family after ordination, Father Colm began his journey to Sacramento on a flight to New York and then on to Chicago where he visited his sister Betty who was living in Chicago. After his visit with Betty, he flew on to San Francisco where he was met at the airport by Father Michael Dillon.

FIRST ASSIGNMENT

After meeting with Bishop Alden Bell and the other ordinandi of the class of 1964, Father Colm was given his first assignment to Sacred Heart Parish in Red Bluff with Monsignor James Casey, pastor, and Father Dermot Dwyer, assistant. This first assignment was a very interesting introduction to the life of a diocesan priest in America. After two weeks from his arrival in Sacramento, Father Colm found himself teaching at Mercy High School in Red Bluff and serving as chaplain. There were no introductory classes on American culture and he had not yet learned the American accent, culture or humor. After two years in Red Bluff, Bishop Bell gave Father O'Kelly a new assignment.



Photo by John E Boll

Sacred Heart Church, Red Bluff

ASSIGNED TO THE CATHEDRAL

Father Colm's second assignment was to the Cathedral in downtown Sacramento. The pastor of the Cathedral was Monsignor Raymond Renwald and there were five other priests living at the Cathedral with Father Leo McAllister living in residence.

Father Colm discovered that the Cathedral was a different kind of a parish because it was a downtown community where many commuted to work from the suburbs. Many homeless people roaming the streets. The Cathedral priests served two different convents and schools in the parish, Saint Joseph Convent and school and Grace Day Convent and Holy Angels Schools.

The Cathedral also had a lot of Funeral Masses to be celebrate. Father Colm enjoyed spending time with the students at Saint Joseph School on 8th and G Street. After two years of ministry at the Cathedral, he was given a new parish assignment, this time in East Sacramento.



Photo by John E Boll

Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament

THIRD ASSIGNMENT, SACRED HEART PARISH, SACRAMENTO

The next parish assignment for Father O’Kelly was Sacred Heart Parish on 39th and J Streets in East Sacramento. The pastor of the parish was Monsignor Gerald O’Driscoll with Father Niall Meagher as assistant.

In this parish, Father Colm did a lot of socializing with parishioners and in that way came to know the people of the parish quite well. He became friends with a lot of a families and many of those friendships have lasted to this present day. Because of the many friendship he made at Sacred Heart Parish, this was a very positive experience for him.



Photo by John E Boll

Sacred Heart Church, Sacramento

Father Colm says that there were a lot of rest homes in the parish and the priests had to bring Communion to Catholics early in the morning before breakfast because of the Church’s law of fasting before Communion in those days.

FOURTH ASSIGNMENT, ASSUMPTION PARISH, CARMICHAEL

The fourth assignment for Father O’Kelly was Assumption Parish in Carmichael with Father Chris Neary as pastor. This was a short assignment for Father Colm and after one year he moved to his next assignment in South Sacramento.

FIFTH ASSIGNMENT, SAINT ANNE PARISH, SOUTH SACRAMENTO

When Father Colm arrived at Saint Anne Parish in South Sacramento founded in 1961, Father Patrick O'Neil, founding pastor, was still the pastor. The parish was an active community and Irish and English born Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary taught in the parish school and were an active part of the life of the parish. This appointment for Father Colm was for only one year.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Anne Church, South Sacramento

SIXTH ASSIGNMENT, CHRISTIAN BROTHERS HIGH SCHOOL, SACRAMENTO

Father O'Kelly was next assigned to Christian Brothers High School. He lived in residence with the Brothers and served as their chaplain and as a teacher of theology in the high school where he had five classes a day. Father Colm says he really enjoyed being part of the Christian Brothers' community by living with them in residence. He found that sharing in community life with the Brothers and in the school was both interesting and enjoyable for him during his four years at CB High School. Being with the students and walking with them during the Viet Nam era when American society was going through profound challenges and changes was a unique and special moment in his life.



Photo by John E Boll

Christian Brothers High School, Sacramento

FIRST PASTORATE

After 10 years as a priest, Father Colm was appointed to his first pastorate of Immaculate Conception Parish in Downieville. This is one of the oldest parishes in the diocese founded in 1853 during the Gold Rush era of California. This parish was established by Archbishop Joseph Alemany of San Francisco eight years before the Vicariate of Marysville was established in 1861.

Father Colm's residence was at Saint John Mission Church in North San Juan, half way between Downieville and Nevada City/Grass Valley. The parish included Immaculate Conception Church, Downieville, Saint John Church, North San Juan, Saint Anthony Church, Challenge, Saint Thomas Church, Sierra City during the summer months, and Saint Michael Church, Alleghny in Sierra County.

Father Colm says he came to know his parishioners who attended the Sunday Masses on weekends. He served as the pastor of the Downieville parish for three years, from 1976 to 1979.



Photo by John E Boll

Immaculate Conception Church, Downieville

PASTOR OF SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA PARISH, VALLEJO

Some context: At the end of 1978 and the beginning of 1979, both the pastor and associate of Saint Catherine Parish died within two week of one another. Father Sean Carrigy was tragically killed in a car accident on Christmas Eve 1978 as he drove north on I-5 to help at Saint Monica Parish in Willows for Christmas Masses. The driver who crashed into Father Sean's car began racing his car the wrong direction on a freeway off ramp hitting Father Sean's car head on. Both men were killed instantly.

Father Carrigy's Funeral Mass was held at Saint Catherine Church in Vallejo and a week later on January 6, 1979, Father Dan Cullinan, pastor of Saint Catherine Parish, was found dead in his bed of an apparent heart attack. This left Saint Catherine Parish without any priests.

Bishop Bell appointed Father Colm O'Kelly as the new pastor of Saint Catherine Parish. When he arrived at Saint Catherine Parish, there were 400-500 active Catholic families. He began hiring new staff and the parish began to grow in numbers with new parishioners who were professionals in the business world. Many of these new parishioners were Filipino families who wanted a Catholic education for their children.

Father Colm put the question to the community whether the parish should build a school? He gathered the Filipino parishioners together and told them that if they wanted a school, they also

had to support the building of a church as well. A ten-year building program was created and the parish had a fund drive. To everyone's amazement, the parish was able to complete its 10 year building plan in 8 years. At the end of eight years, the parish built a parish school and a new church. The original church was converted to a gymnasium. Father Colm served as pastor of Saint Catherine parish for 16 years, 1979 to 1995.

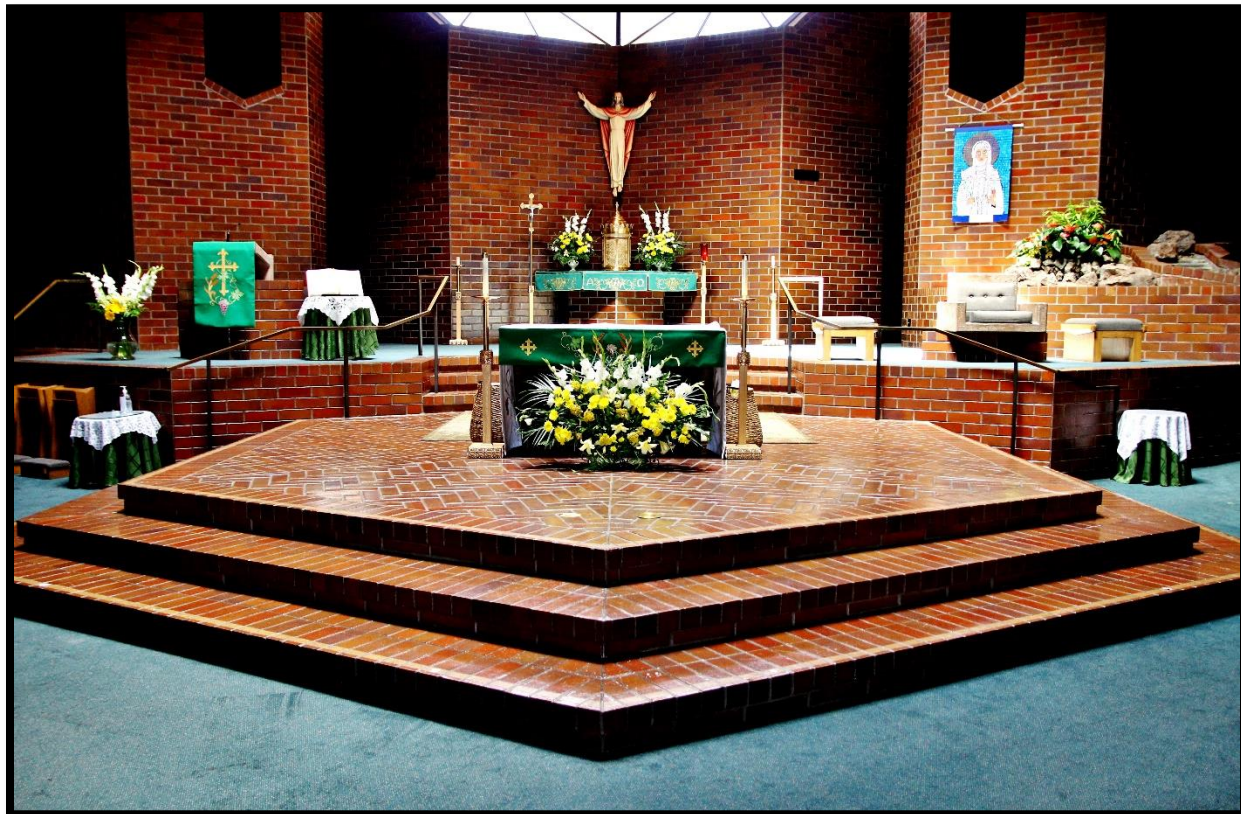


Photo by John E Boll

Saint Catherine of Siena Church, Vallejo

FATHER O'KELLY TAKES A SABBATICAL

As he completed his long pastorate at Saint Catherine Parish, Father Colm took a much needed sabbatical by participating in a sabbatical program for priests at Louvain, Belgium. He began his sabbatical on Christmas 1995 to the following May 1996.

After the sabbatical, he then spent three months with Father James Brand, a priest friend of his who was pastor of a parish in London, who became Father Colm's retreat director.

HOLY ROSARY PARISH WOODLAND

After he returned to Sacramento in 1996, Father Colm met with Bishop Weigand. The bishop asked him to meet with Father John Boll, pastor of Holy Rosary Church in Woodland, about the possibility of Father Colm becoming a parochial vicar at the Woodland parish. Father John welcomed Father Colm to the parish and he became a parochial vicar in Woodland until he retired in the spring of 2005.

Father Colm says that his time in Woodland turned out to be one of his best experience of any parish where he had served. He was well liked by the English speaking community and made many good friends among the farmers living and working in the Woodland area.

Woodland was a complex parish with many different communities. There were a farming community, a hospital community, and a large Hispanic community. The pastoral work in the parish was divided among the three priests and a friendly and harmonious working relationship developed among Fathers John Boll, Colm O’Kelly and Juan Perez.



Photo by John E Boll

Holy Rosary Church, Woodland

RETIREMENT

Father O’Kelly chose to retire in 2005 at the age of 65 and moved to Holy Trinity Parish in El Dorado Hills to live in residence for two years helping there with the liturgies. In 2010, he decided to move to the Priests’ Retirement Village in Citrus Heights.

In retirement, Father Colm returned to one of his early childhood loves, playing the piano. He began taking piano lessons once again and embarked on a ten year program with a teacher to perfect his piano playing skills. He is now in his ninth year of the ten year program.

The music he has studied and learned to play during the past nine years has taught him music theory and application. He can sight read and is able to play difficult classical pieces of music. He

practices playing his music every day and has a weekly lesson with his master teacher on Tuesdays to keep himself focused so he can master his piano playing skill. Colm plays music from Bach to Jazz.

When the weather is nice, Father Colm still plays some golf with a friend he made during his years in Woodland. These days of retirement are the happiest days of his life.

MOMENTS ALONG FATHER COLM'S LIFE JOURNEY

Photos courtesy of Father Colm O'Kelly



Father Colm and his Twin Sister Terry



Monsignor Sean O'Kelly with Pope John Paul II

FATHER COLM'S BROTHER SEAN

At the age of 26, Sean O'Kelly, Colm's older brother, felt called by God to become a priest. He was a student in Scotland at the time studying for a degree in Actuarial Science.

Sean contacted the Archdiocese of Edinburgh and applied to enter the seminary. Although considered a delayed vocation, he was accepted by the Archdiocese of Edinburgh to begin his studies for the priesthood. The Archbishop sent Sean to the Scot's College in Rome for his theological studies. Upon completion of his studies, Sean was ordained a priest in Rome for the Archdiocese of Edinburgh in 1962.

After ordination, Father Sean returned to Scotland to begin his life of ministry and after two years working in his home diocese, he was appointed vice rector of the Scot's College in Rome and eventually became the rector of the college.

In 1981, Monsignor Sean O'Kelly attended a reception at the British Embassy in Rome. After the reception he was driven back to the Scot's College by a friend. He got out of the car intending to walk across the street to the College. The car behind stopped to allow Monsignor Sean walk across the road. A second car approached and the driver thought the car ahead was parked so he pulled out to pass and struck Monsignor Sean as he began crossing the street, killing him instantly on the evening of February 17, 1981. This was a tragic loss for the O'Kelly family, the Scot's College, and the Archdiocese of Edinburgh.



Father Colm celebrates the Wedding of Jessica and Philip Manning at the Carmel Mission
Father Colm baptized Philip as an Infant at Sacred Heart Church, Sacramento



Wedding of Erica and Patrick Gormley at Sacred Heart Church, Sacramento
Father Colm baptized Patrick as an infant at Sacred Heart Church, Sacramento



Father Colm O'Kelly in 2020