

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 3,

Father John E Boll

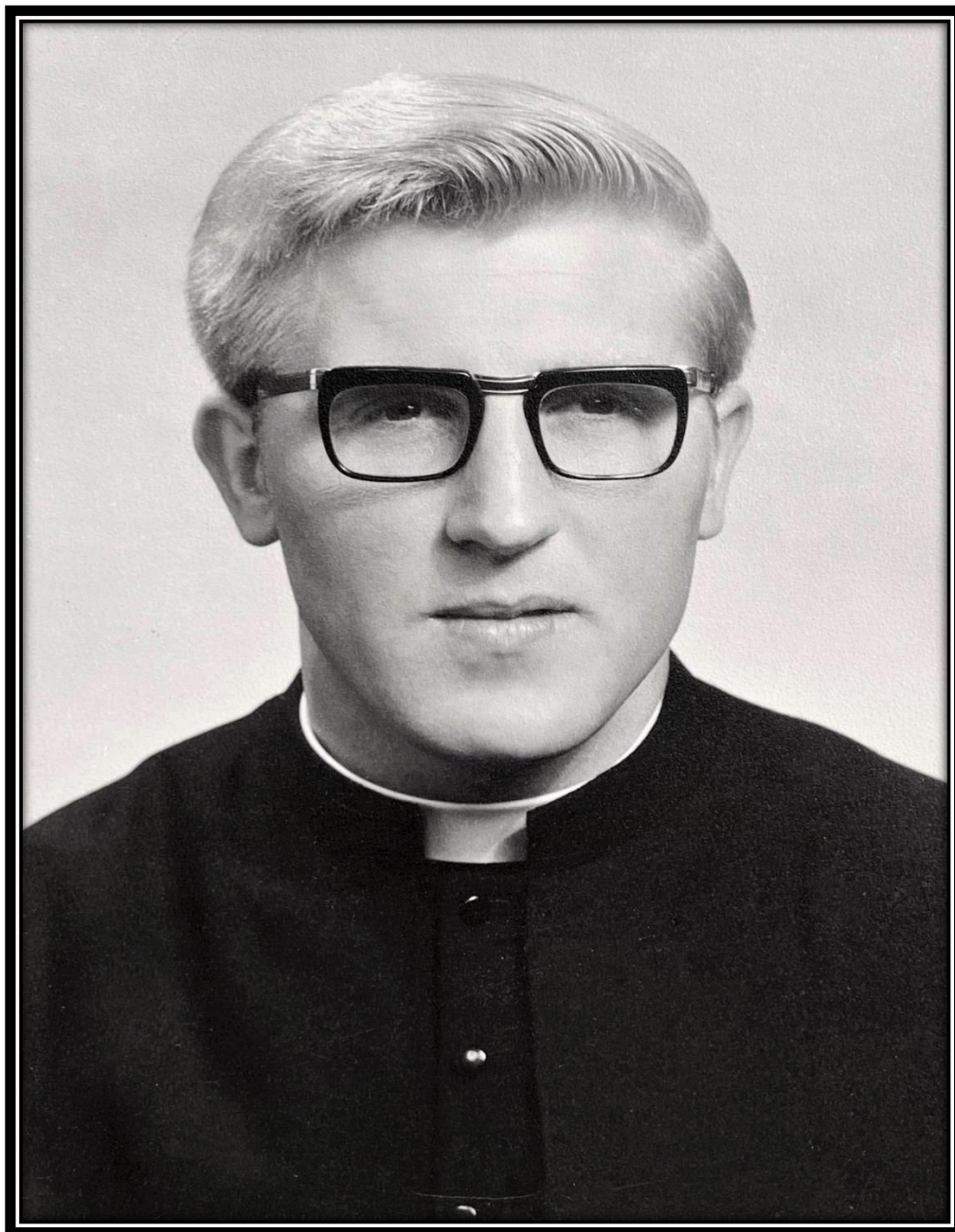
No 27

Father Brendan McKeefry

Native of Tamneyrankin, Swatragh, County Derry, North of Ireland

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor Emeritus of Our Lady of the Assumption Parish, Carmichael



Brendan McKeefry, son of Michael McKeefry and Mary Catherine McKenna, was born on Saint Patrick's Day, March 17, 1944, in the townland of Tamneyrankin, about a mile and a half from the small village of Swatragh, County Derry, in the North of Ireland. He was the sixth of seven children, 5 boys and 2 girls. The children of the family are PJ, Michael, Gertrude, John, Mary, Brendan and Peter. He was born in the family home and was raised on a medium-sized family farm.



Michael and Mary Catherine McKeefry

GROWING UP IN A STRONG CATHOLIC FAMILY

Brendan grew up in a staunch Catholic family in a mixed community of Nationalists – Catholics, and Unionists – Protestants, in the North of Ireland. He believes his call to priesthood came in part from his family's strong Catholic faith, their weekly Mass attendance, nightly family rosary, Sunday devotions, eating meals together, and his mother's habit of sprinkling him with holy water every time we left home to go somewhere. God had a hand in it too!

HELPING ON THE FARM

Helping with chores after school each evening and on weekends was the norm and way of life in the McKeefry family. In rural South Derry, most farm owners raised beef cattle, sheep, milk cows

and planted corn, barley, potatoes and flax. The McKeefry family also operated a moderate size poultry and pig rearing and fattening business. Those were happy, memorable times for Brendan before the “troubles” of the late 60s and 70s began.

BRENDAN SPEAKS ABOUT HIS FAMILY LIFE



Brendan spoke about his family life in the North of Ireland: “As a family, we were actively involved in the local community and the parish of Saint Mary Church, Craigavole. There I served Mass and celebrated my first Mass, presided at my parent’s funerals as well as at the weddings of siblings, and nieces. In our home, hospitality was practiced, religion was lived, and life was very simple yet enjoyable. Those were the days before TV took over our family games, conversations, card playing, and lots of old fashion Irish ‘CRAIC’.”

Brendan 9 years of age

BRENDAN BEGINS HIS EDUCATION

Brendan began his education at the local village primary school and he walked to school each day. When he completed his primary schooling, he enrolled as a boarder at Saint Columb’s College in Derry City. This high school was mostly staffed by Derry diocesan priests.

THE REALITIES HE FACED IN HIGH SCHOOL

Brendan speaks about his high school experience in these words: “Boarding at Saint Columb’s was a totally different experience from what I was used to. It was a Dickensian sort of institution. Being partially cut off from family at the tender age of twelve was traumatic. I would not do it again or wish it on anyone. Loneliness, poor food, cold dormitories, bullying and corporal punishment have left me questioning the value of boarding schools. Soccer and Gaelic football helped to keep me sane. The fortnightly parcel of goodies from my mother and a rare visit from a family member was much appreciated.

“In the North of Ireland where I grew up, there occurred lots of discrimination and gerry-mandering. Catholics were treated as second class citizens, and there were few opportunities for young high school or university graduates. In spite of the institutional nature of Saint Columb’s in my time, it produced noticeable luminaries like John Hume, Seamus Heaney, Phil Coulter, Paul Brady, and of course, a plethora of priests scattered throughout the world, caring for the Irish Diaspora.

“In the early 60s, lots of young men thought about the priesthood. One staff member in high school sowed some seeds of vocation in me as it seemed for him being a priest was joyful and meaningful, so I decided to follow the call or at least give it a try.”

ENTERS ALL HALLOWS COLLEGE

In September 1961, Brendan entered All Hallows Seminary in Dublin and studied philosophy for two years and then went on for his four years of theological studies.



Photo from the Diocesan Archives

All Hallows College, Dublin

Speaking about those years at All Hallows Seminary, Brendan said the following: “Moving to All Hallows Seminary as a 17 year-old was a fairly easy transition after Saint Columb’s. The entire class of 1961 was made up of 58 young, idealistic, energetic teenagers who blended in well with the few ‘mature’ students mostly from overseas. It took some time to ‘learn the ropes’ and stay under the dean’s radar. I was a quick learner!

“Being in the middle of the class, I escaped much of the attention and scrutinizing given to those above me or below me. All told, I had a good time in the seminary; yet, I barely survived a few tsunamis. Indeed, to be honest, I spent quite a bit of time and energy trying to talk myself into leaving the seminary, and ever since ordination talking myself into staying in the priesthood.”

ORDAINED A PRIEST FOR THE DIOCESE OF LEEDS

At the age of 23 and 3 months, Brendan McKeefry was ordained a priest on June 18, 1967 for the Diocese of Leeds in Yorkshire, England by Bishop John J Scanlon, Bishop of Honolulu, who was himself an alumnus of All Hallows Seminary. Ordained with him that day were 28 other young, energetic Irish men who were headed to dioceses in the English speaking world where they were needed. As the Latin mission statement of All Hallows states: EUNTES DOCETE OMNES GENTES which means in English, *GO, TEACH ALL NATIONS.*



Photo courtesy of Fr McKeefry

All Hallows Seminary Ordination Class of 1967

FIRST ASSIGNMENT IN SHEFFIELD, ENGLAND

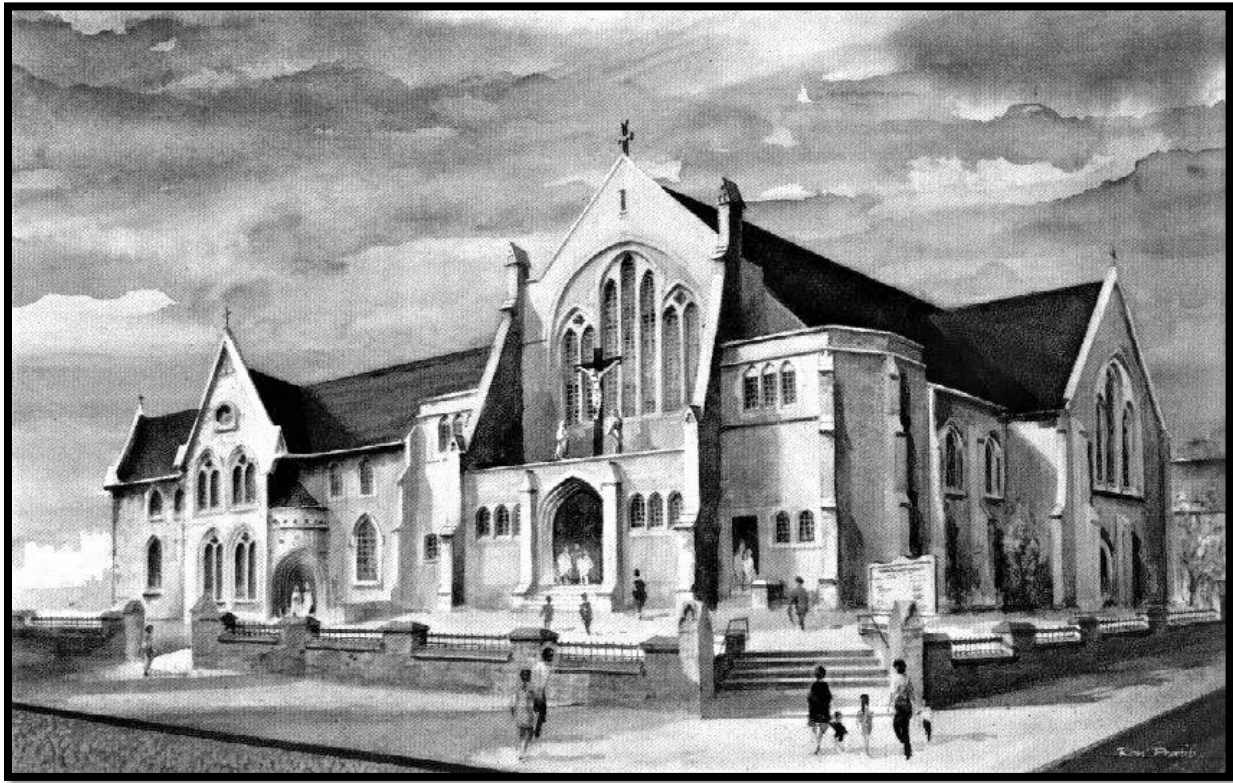
Father Brendan began his ministry in the Diocese of Leeds in 1967. Speaking about his first assignment, he says: "On the feast of Our Lady of the Assumption in 1967, I took up my first assignment in Mother of God parish in Sheffield, England, my first 'parish' love. The diocese of Leeds, for which I was ordained, was similar to the diocese of Sacramento. It was run by the Irish!



"My first pastor was a true gentleman who encouraged me to visit the homes, hospitals, schools, and rest homes in our area. Riding my bicycle was my main mode of transportation. However, over my time there, I failed to convert Father Falvey to the ways of Vatican II after many attempts.

I was the young brat and he was the old pastor."

Father Brendan on Parish Visits



Picture from Mother of God Parish Website

Mother of God Parish, Sheffield, England

THE NEXT ASSIGNMENT

“In 1970, the southern portion of the Leeds diocese was about to become the new diocese of Hallam. The newly appointed auxiliary bishop needed a personal chauffeur, so I was asked to move from my residence to accommodate his driver. In the new rectory resided one of the most difficult pastors in the diocese although I had done nothing wrong to deserve this pastor! It nearly resulted in my giving up my ministry; it was a trying time. I am sure I caused him as much consternation as he did me. Let me put it this way, we did not talk much for six months.

“After about 18 months of a difficult assignment in Saint Joseph Parish in Brighouse, Yorkshire, I was asked by the bishop if I would like to go for further studies. I spent a marvelous year in Dundalk, Ireland, studying catechetics or religious education. This was a year of tremendous personal growth and a deepening of vision. I learned more in that year than in the six years I spent in the seminary!

APPOINTED DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

“Seven diocesan priests returned to the Leeds diocese in the summer of 1972 after post graduate studies. Since I had previously worked closely with the outgoing director of the Sheffield Center of Religious Education, Father Donal O’Leary, I was selected for that position. I think Monsignor Steve Sullivan thought I’d be the easiest to handle! Perhaps he misread the situation! In residence at Saint Maries Cathedral, I helped out in what was a very vibrant parish. There, we four assistants

under thirty years of age worked with a truly gifted pastor. It was a wonderful, creative time in many ways.



Photo from Saint Maries Cathedral Web-Site

Interior of Saint Maries Cathedral

“My basic assignment meant that I provided support services for 30 grammar schools and 4 high schools in the South Yorkshire area organizing courses, seminars, retreats, advising teachers of religious education curriculum, etc. This was an exciting and challenging time. There was lots of opposition to Vatican II, and the ‘Alt-Right’ Catholic teachers and principals regularly flexed their muscles.

“For me, this was a moment of personal crisis. I had to make a decision whether to continue in my vocation as a priest or to leave. I took some time out to study social work at Huddersfield University and finally, after a lot of soul searching and spiritual guidance, I decided to remain in ministry.

“After serving in the Diocese of Leeds for over twelve years, I realized I had to make a change in my life. Although it had been a wonderful and challenging time in the diocese and there was never a dull day visiting schools in the southern part of the diocese, I knew I had make a change for my own well-being.”

TRANSFER TO SACRAMENTO

Father Brendan tells how he came to the Diocese of Sacramento. “In 1979, I requested permission, which was reluctantly given, to transfer to the Sacramento diocese. The then Chancellor of the Diocese of Sacramento, Monsignor Al O’Connor, was a classmate of mine at All Hallows Seminary, so the official transition to Sacramento went very smoothly. The diocese grabbed me on a free transfer! Of course, I needed some readjustment time as I began my new life in Sacramento.”

BEGINS HIS LIFE OF MINISTRY IN THE SACRAMENTO DIOCESE

Father McKeefry’s first assignment in the Diocese of Sacramento was Holy Spirit Parish in Fairfield where he immersed himself in basic parish ministry. As he says, “This was the beginning of a 41 year journey that took me from Holy Spirit Parish, Fairfield to All Hallows, Sacramento; Saint John the Baptist, Chico; Saint Thomas More, Paradise; Good Shepherd, Elk Grove; and finally to Our Lady of the Assumption, Carmichael.



Photo by John E Boll

Holy Spirit Church, Fairfield

“In each of these six parishes, I was privileged to serve many loyal, faith-filled parishioners who affirmed and challenged me, who supported and opposed me, who prayed with me and lit candles for my conversion. I have treasured memories of all these assignments and of the priests with whom I shared ministry.

RETIREMENT AFTER FIFTY YEARS OF SERVICE

Father Brendan McKeefry, at the age of 68, retired as Pastor of Our Lady of the Assumption Parish on July 1, 2012 and took up residence at the Priests’ Retirement Village in Citrus Heights. He says, “As a retiree now, I have lots of time to read, write, remember, relax, pray and play. I help out in parishes when and where I am needed. It is a relief not to be burdened by administrative duties. Life as a priest has been good. My brother priests both in England and Sacramento have been supportive and have helped me to stay on track. Sometimes I wonder why God has held on to me. I have an idea that maybe he is not finished with me yet!”



Photo by John E Boll

Father Brendan's Apartment at the Priests' Village, Citrus Heights

THE LAST WORD FROM FATHER BRENDAN McKEEFRY

I have known Father Brendan for many years but did not know the story of his life until working with him to write his biography. Through his many experiences in Ireland, England and America, he has developed a wisdom about life, faith, ministry, priesthood, Church, and Christian life. He has the last word as he sums up his perspective and hopes for the future.

REFLECTION BY FATHER McKEEFRY

"At 76 years of age, the evening of life has announced its arrival. Life is closing in around me. I have to try to name the truths I find difficult to accept and face the facts of life as a retired priest. I cannot camouflage intimations of mortality or the disconnectedness and isolation of a cleric growing old.

"As I come to the last chapter of my life, interests diminish and some eventually melt away. I cannot just sit looking out the window or curse the darkness or do nothing. I cannot lapse into negativity --- yet, this is understandable, even inevitable. Faith and trust in God is what sustains any of us as we deal with life issues, not merely discuss them.

"Pope Francis constantly reminds us that we are 'tillers of the garden', not curators of a museum. Instead of hankering for past success, security, power, honors, titles, position and influence, he

tells us that we should become a poor Church, a little Church, a simple Church, a humble Church, a forgiving and welcoming Church.

“What we need is a new vision, a new balance, a new openness, a less judgmental approach as we together try to shape the Church of the future. Priests need to be men of faith as daily work and responsibility expands rather than contracts. We need a lot of energy and commitment to carry our daily ministry.

“We have to become people of faith, joy, and hope. Instead of being ‘Lone Rangers’, we priests need a collegial spirit, a spirit of inclusiveness, a spirit of realism, and to be above all good listeners! Pope Francis has been a great light – a breath of fresh air.

“Personally, retirement is great – I am enjoying it immensely and glad to be of some assistance somewhere sometimes. So, as the shadows lengthen, the evening comes; the busy world is hushed; the fever of life is almost over; day is nearly done and a ‘new sprint’ is being ushered in by the old man from Argentina. Bravo!”

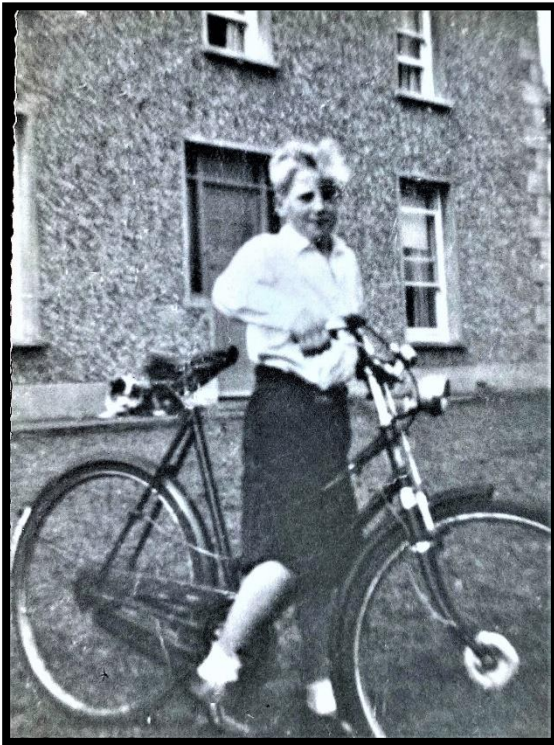
Father Brendan McKeefry

Photos of Father Brendan’s Journey of Life

Courtesy of Father Brendan McKeefry



Brendan with his Father Michael



On the move with his bike



Father Brendan's first wedding of his brother Michael and wife Breige



Father Brendan with his Parents Michael and Mary McKeefry



The Seven McKeefry Children

L-R, back row: Peter, John, Michael and Patrick Joseph
Front row: Mary, Brendan, Gertrude



Monsignor Al O'Connor and Father Brendan, Friends & Classmates from All Hallows, Dublin



Vacationing in Hawaii

L-R, Fr Brendan, Msgr Al O'Connor, John McKeefry, Brendan's brother, Fr Pat O'Connor, Al's brother, Fr Iggy Haran



Wedding of Brendan and Cathy McKeefry, Fr Brendan's Nephew



Photo by John E Boll

All Hallows Church, Sacramento, Fr Brendan's Second Assignment



Photo by John E Boll

Saint John the Baptist Church, Chico, Fr Brendan's Third Appointment



Photo by John E Boll

St Thomas More Church, Paradise, Fr Brendan's Fourth Appointment



Photo by John E Boll

Good Shepherd Church, Elk Grove, Fr Brendan's Fifth Assignment



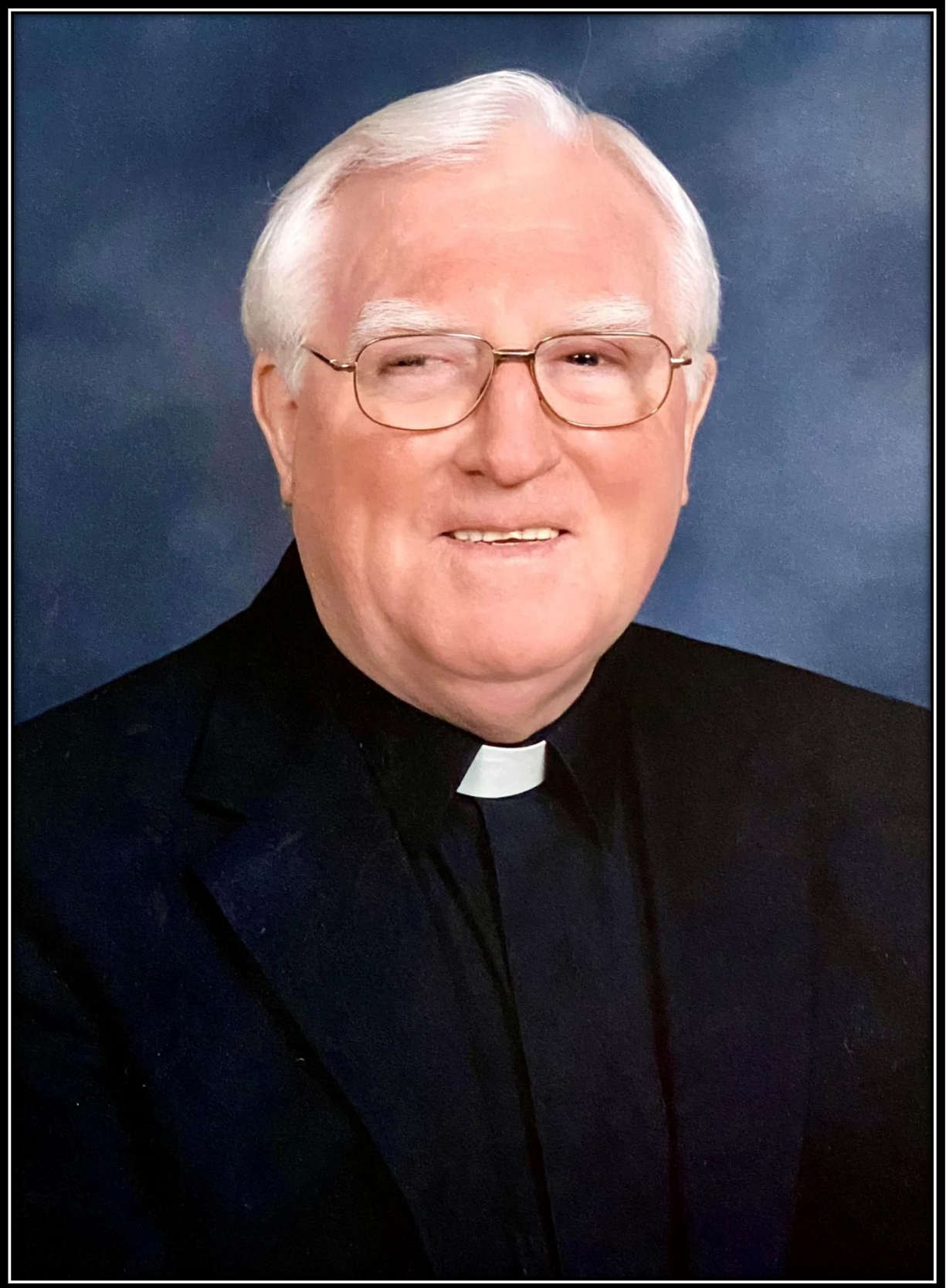
Photo courtesy of Fr Brendan



Photo by John E Boll

Our Lady of Assumption Church, Carmichael, Fr Brendan's Final Assignment

*Lord God, Creator of the Universe,
We thank you for the ministry
Of Father Brendan McKeefry who has
Served Your People in the Diocese of
Sacramento for four decades.
As he enjoys these years of retirement,
Give him good health, many caring friends,
And much joy and peace in his life.
Amen!*



Father Brendan McKeefry