



50 years a priest

Bishop Emeritus
William K. Weigand
reflects on the
different phases of
his ministry and on
life after being the
bishop of Sacramento



Bishop Weigand prays inside the chapel in his home.

On May 25, Bishop Emeritus William K. Weigand will mark the milestone of the 50th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood. He spoke with *Catholic Herald* recently at his home about the various phases of his priestly ministry.

Bishop Weigand, who served as the eighth bishop of the Diocese of Sacramento from Nov. 30, 1993, to Nov. 30, 2008, talked about his years as a priest of the Diocese of Boise; as a missionary and pastor of a large parish in Cali, Colombia; as bishop of the Dioceses of Salt Lake City, Utah, and Sacramento; and what he is doing now in retirement.

On what experiences as a youth led him to choose his vocation to the priesthood ...

>> My earliest remembrance of a vocation was in the fourth grade, because my pastor talked about vocations in a homily and his own background. He had been a World War II chaplain and a diocesan priest of Spokane.

The greatest influence was my father, Harold. My mother, Alice, was a convert and a great Catholic, but her experience

of the church was of less depth. My father's attitude toward the church was always one of great respect. His association with priests, bishops and church officials, and with church practices, especially Sunday Mass, was just taken for granted. His example to me was one of faith.

That clearly had an effect on me. We would go on vacation – one of the first right after World War II was to Yellowstone National Park for camping – and he would figure out in advance where we would go to Mass. We would never miss Mass – ever.

In the small town of Tekoa, south of Spokane, I attended Mount St. Joseph's Academy with the Sisters of St. Joseph (of Philadelphia) and I learned to serve Mass. In a sense, growing up near the church and in service to the church just kind of grew on me. It came to a focus during Lent, when I was in the sixth grade. My family never went to daily Mass. That Lent I got up early every day and walked across town to serve Mass at the sisters' chapel, came back, had breakfast, and went back across town to school. About halfway during Lent, one friend, a year older, joined me in serving Mass. Both of us later became priests.

At the end of fifth grade, I was confirmed and the Holy Spirit touched me at that time. One of my brothers, two years older than me, talked rather openly about becoming a priest. He didn't. But I never talked about it. In eighth grade, we moved an hour east to St. Maries, Idaho, and during that year at St. Mary's Academy, the

Benedictine sister who taught me and my Irish pastor encouraged me to go to the seminary. But when I told my parents that summer, it was the first time I ever talked to them about it. So it was kind of a surprise. My dad was very pleased and my mother was shocked about me leaving home at age 14, but she got over it.

On his first years after ordination ...

>> The different phases of my ministry are like equal segments of my priesthood. I have served in almost all possible functions for a priest. I started as an assistant priest in Lewiston, Idaho, for one year, and for four years also worked in the bishop's office (vice chancellor and chancellor) and I taught some religion classes at Bishop Kelly High School in Boise. I had weekend Mass service and was pastor of a couple of missions where I established a parish council. Later, I was pastor of a parish of four cultural backgrounds.

In Boise, I was living with Bishop Sylvester Treinen, during and after his attendance at all four sessions of the Second Vati-

the Baptist Parish). I did not have great confidence about this – it was sort of a fearsome thing. One thing that always helped me was obedience and the guidance of the church. Bishop Treinen had started a mission relationship with Cali and I had said I would be willing to be sent there to serve. That's also how I got over the fear of going to Salt Lake City as bishop. I was appointed and I can trust God. I didn't want to leave Salt Lake City, but I was appointed to Sacramento. I'll do the best I can and if it's not perfect, the church sent me. And God backs that up.

In Cali, I worked with two priests, but they returned to Idaho and I soon became lead priest of a very big operation. Rather quickly, I got a sense of a large community of faith that served me well when I got to Salt Lake City. When I first got to Salt Lake City, the estimated Catholic population was only 65,000. I had that many people in one parish in Cali in a small area with barrios and satellite missions. Since I had some experience with other religions, I quickly got into ecumenical things there



Clockwise from top left: Bishop Weigand, Bishop Jaime Soto and Bishop Emeritus Francis Quinn stand outside the cathedral in Sacramento; Bishop Weigand greets parishioners of St. Joseph Marelllo Praish in Granite Bay; he blesses Dan Haverty, liver donor, on Holy Thursday in 2005; he signs the Diocesan Synod documents; Bishop Weigand removes the Eucharist in 2003 when the cathedral closed for an 18-month restoration; the bishop chats with Dan Haverty at a birthday luncheon; the bishop greets people outside the cathedral.

can Council (1962-1965). I could ask him questions about the process and the key moments. I got incredible insights from him into Vatican II, apart from the documents. Because of this, I had a good insight into Vatican II. It was in the middle of the council when I went to work in the bishop's office – he had already been at two sessions. I was “holding down the fort” in the diocese when he attended the last two sessions.

One of the important things from Vatican II was ecumenism. Early on, Bishop Treinen asked me to work on statutes and to set up a diocesan ecumenical commission. I went through the document on ecumenism and developed some temporary guidelines and started meetings with other churches, which I continued when I went to Colombia, and also as bishop of Salt Lake City and Sacramento.

On his experience as a missionary in Colombia ...

>> After five years ordained, I went to serve in the Archdiocese of Cali in Colombia for nine-and-a-half years (pastor of St. John

on the diocesan level. I had also made a Cursillo in Boise as a young priest, so I got that going in the parish. That got me into relationship with lay leaders and pastors from other parishes.

Vatican II was very new. Within three months of my arrival, Pope Paul VI visited Colombia. I got there in May 1968 and his visit was in late July. The pope, who had recently published his encyclical on the development of peoples, *Populorum Progressio* (March 1967), came to conclude the second general meeting of the Latin American Episcopal Conference known as CELAM at Medellin, in which the preferential option for the poor was highlighted.

The Medellin documents and the pope's visit were part of the implementation of Vatican II. There was a huge ferment of faith going on. The bishops of Colombia, in preparation for the first-ever visit of a pope, had published catechetical booklets facilitating entering into prayer groups, Scripture sharing, dialogue and singing. People were invited by their pastors to meet in “family assemblies” (*“asemblas familiares”*) in their homes. They were

neighbors basically coming together, very much like what we would call a prayer/Scripture sharing today.

The people would read a Scripture passage and then share their ideas about it. This was totally new for laypeople. I attended some of these meetings in my parish and was greatly impressed. People were praying, and, easily in that culture, they went to spontaneous prayer. People would apply their insight from Scripture to their work, their family, their unemployment, their neighborhood problems. Quickly, application was made to social justice. This was the beginning of my understanding of both the domestic church and the basic Christian community on a grassroots level.

“Liberation” theology was in vogue in Latin America at the time and Marxists were making inroads in the poor areas of cities. I took an early week-long course on Marxism from the Brazilian educator and philosopher, Paulo Freire, on the “Pedagogy of the Oppressed.” I wanted to understand the dynamic and the didactic. It forced me to go back and read the Vatican II docu-

I also learned how evangelization starts with Scripture, dialogue and witness. I mean, thinking about the Word of God, living it, applying it and sharing it so it becomes personal and real, to keep the baptismal grace active and growing. There’s ultimately more power in that than in the dialectic of Marxism, which is basically class hatred and class warfare.

On being bishop of Salt Lake City ...

>> My collaboration with so many others in Colombia helped prepare me for my ministry as a bishop. The day after my ordination, I started a series of meetings with the clergy, religious, deacons and lay leaders from all the parishes to do a needs assessment and visioning. I was an outsider – I couldn’t trust my own judgment. There was an ongoing desire for collaboration and shared responsibility. We were able to develop priorities for the diocese and establish all kinds of councils and implemented Vatican II. I might never have done this if I hadn’t had that similar experience



Clockwise from top left: Bishop Weigand greets children outside the cathedral in Sacramento; the bishop elevates the Eucharist during the Chrism Mass; Bishop Weigand returns to the Diocesan Pastoral Center in April 2005 after successful liver transplant surgery; the bishop speaks with Dan and Terri Haverty at a press conference about the transplant in 2005; Bishop Weigand walks with participants in Catholic Lobby Day from the cathedral to the state Capitol.

ments and Scripture to see the difference.

With the help of Cursillo, the charismatic movement, the family assemblies and youth movements – all leading to the development of networks of base Christian communities in my parish – I learned how effective that can be in comparison to the method of the Marxists: the parish as the “umbrella” community of many small Christian communities. That’s why I included that concept in my episcopal coat of arms. Pope Paul VI’s 1975 apostolic exhortation, “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*,” also had a major influence on me.

My years in Colombia taught me in a sense how to be the bishop of Salt Lake City and Sacramento. Through my experiences there and because of Vatican II, I learned what people need most is help to ignite the fires of baptismal life. We got people into Scripture and thinking and talking about their own innate dignity. Through their baptism, they share in the divine life and they are members of God’s family. They can do a lot here in this life, but they can also get to heaven.

in Latin America, where I had no choice but to do it.

Our pressing needs were vocations, Hispanic ministry and the diocese’s dependency on money from elsewhere. We had to get out of the “mission” mind-set of the diocese. Also, the diocese had been too “invisible,” in comparison with the Mormon Church. We had to get out there and tell our story. We also had to develop a better support base for Catholics in the outlying areas of Utah and for the emerging Hispanic population.

All along it was clear to me that people really do have insight – the laity, together with the pastors. The Holy Spirit really does guide us. That gave me the confidence to form a Diocesan Pastoral Council. I knew we would be much better and deeper as church if there are collaborative processes in which the Holy Spirit is actually directing, rather than just relying on the human process.

On some of the high points as bishop of Sacramento ...

>> I had no doubt that I was called to this diocese and I was the

right person and in the right place. I had absolute confidence in the church and the grace of office. Even in spite of my health concerns, the apostolic nuncio told me, "It's in God's hands, have faith." There were so many similarities between Salt Lake City and Sacramento that I felt immediately at home. There were some of the same needs, including ongoing implementation of Vatican II. Some of the clergy here were fearful about that and some weren't convinced that I would do it. Many didn't know anything about my background in collaborative ministry with others.

Recruiting seminarians, rebuilding the presbyterate and Hispanic ministry were priorities. It was even more urgent here because of the declining number of priests. I am quite pleased as I look back. When I arrived, there were only a handful of parishes in the diocese that were actually offering the Mass and sacraments in Spanish and many communities were divided. It's very different today.

We also had to address the needs of our Filipino Catholic

the first pastoral session in October 2004, there was no doubt in anybody's mind that the Holy Spirit was present and working in a very different way than in ordinary planning sessions.

The third priority initiative, after vocations and evangelization – even before sacraments and the Eucharist – was collaborative ministry and shared responsibility. We didn't predict this beforehand. That's precisely – in terms of my experience – what was going on in Latin America and where I came to those same insights. All of the sessions (including the second and third convenings to report on implementation) were a very holy process. I never felt I was directing anything. It's the closest thing at a diocesan level to a Vatican Council.

The restoration of our beautiful Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament was also a highlight. I didn't seek that out, but I will be remembered probably as much by that as by the Synod. Other things will be forgotten, but the cathedral is such a crown jewel now that it's hard to say it wasn't worth it.



Clockwise from top left: Bishop Weigand ordains Father Mervin Concepcion to the priesthood; the bishop greets Deacon Allen and Eulah Pierre; the bishop blesses participants of the Synod during a Mass at St. Isidore Church in Yuba City in 2004; the bishop speaks to a high school student at Catholic Lobby Day; Bishop Weigand preside at the dedication of St. Joseph Church in Vacaville; hundreds of parishioners gather at the first session of the Diocesan Synod at St. Isidore Parish in 2004; Bishop Weigand relaxes in his Airstream travel trailer with his dog, Rubio.

population. When I arrived, there were already quite a large number, but, from 1993 on, our Filipino Catholic population grew from migration from the Bay Area, especially to Elk Grove, Natomas and Solano County. There was a concern that we needed more Filipino priests in ministry.

We had to plan for a presbyterate that would eventually be totally non-Irish and be from local, Hispanic and Filipino vocations. Today, we have a very diverse presbyterate. We also developed parish vocation committees to recruit more local vocations. We also had few religious for a diocese our size and we were able to bring in priests and sisters from several religious communities.

The Third Diocesan Synod process (and publishing the statutes and implementing the pastoral initiatives), is the highlight of my 50 years as a priest, because it was the deepest and broadest experience of church. It was not just planning, not just consulting on a secular level for input, but a six-year process. Especially during

I can't forget my liver transplant on April 1, 2005. Five-and-a-half years prior to that – from September 1999 until the transplant – my health was very clearly going downhill. During that time, I made regular trips to UCSF Medical Center for the process of ballooning strictures in the liver and bile duct to keep me functioning. All total, it was 55 procedures.

Just six months before my transplant was the Synod, when I was at my worst. The major part of preparation for the Synod, the actual pastoral session, and the promulgation of the pastoral initiatives all happened just before the liver transplant. And the cathedral restoration was also going on during this time, and I was at my least able to give direction. So the committees really took over.

So when I was at my weakest, it's in a sense when the most got done. There's a theology behind that, of course. God can even do more when we stop trying to do everything. As long as somehow the Holy Spirit was allowed to function in all the other ways, my health really didn't matter.

On his health today and about retirement ...

>> It's been eight years since my liver transplant. My health got better once I stepped down as bishop in 2008, because I was much better able to do what the doctors wanted me to do. The pressures were off and my stress level went to nothing. I was getting better rest and exercise.

I am still feeling very good. I have a few heart issues, but they are medicated. My first priority in stepping down was to live a more contemplative lifestyle. It's fun living this way. It's a very new experience. I take my time doing everything. I eat slow, I pray slow and I pray a lot. I take my time if I'm walking my dog, Rubio. I use my travel trailer to get away for a week or two with relatives to some part of the West or California.

I take off every couple of weeks for three or four days. I go to various places like Yosemite or Seacliff State Beach at Aptos, where there is an RV park. I sit and watch the waves. I walk my dog and I walk the beach. I take my bike along and ride. I do



Clockwise from top left: Bishop Weigand and Dan Haverty cycle on the American River Bike Trail following his recovery from liver transplant surgery; the bishop's official portrait; Bishop Weigand picks oranges from a tree in the backyard of his home in Sacramento; Synod participants carry banners in procession at the closing Mass of the Synod at St. Isidore Parish in Yuba City.

some sightseeing at the different groves of redwoods. I take my Bible and books and spend a few days in different settings to enjoy life and to pray and reflect.

Until there is an auxiliary bishop, I have a fairly full confirmation schedule and I take other events Bishop Soto cannot attend. I have 35 confirmations scheduled this year. The main parish where I help out with Mass on weekdays and weekends is at the cathedral. As called on, I also help out at other parishes on weekends. Sometimes I ask to celebrate a Mass, even if I'm not called on.

My first ministry now is a very intentional praying for the church, and more specifically for our diocese, Bishop Soto and the clergy, religious, lay leaders, young people and families. I pray for all of the diocese's needs, as best I know them. I pray for the people of the Middle East and for the Christian community in the Holy Land. I also pray for our state, nation and world, for our civil leaders and for all the many needs of humanity and our world.

Bishop Emeritus William K. Weigand

Born: May 23, 1937,
in Bend, Ore.

SCHOOLS

- **Elementary** - Mt. St. Joseph Academy, Tekoa, Wash., 1943-1950
- **St. Mary's School**, St. Maries, Idaho, 1950-1951
- **High School** - Mt. Angel Minor Seminary, St. Benedict, Ore., 1951-1955
- **College** - Mt. Angel Seminary, St. Benedict, Ore., 1955-1957
- **St. Edward's Seminary**, Kenmore, Wash., 1957-1959, B.A. degree in philosophy
- **Theology** - St. Thomas Seminary, Kenmore, Wash., 1959-1963, master of divinity



ORDINATION TO PRIESTHOOD

May 25, 1963, St. Mary's Church, St. Maries, Idaho, by Bishop Sylvester W. Treinen, D.D., bishop of Boise

ASSIGNMENTS AS A PRIEST

- Associate pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Lewiston, Idaho, 1963-1964, and St. Mary's Parish, Boise, Idaho, 1964-1965
- Administrator of St. Matthew Mission, Eagle; St. Henry's Mission, Grandview, Idaho Queen of Heaven Mission, Oreana, Idaho, 1965-1968
- Chancellor and Vice-officials of the Diocese of Boise, 1964-1968
- Member of the Boise Council of Priests
- Founding Member of the Boise Diocesan Ecumenical Commission
- Missionary in South America, pastor of the parish of St. John the Baptist in Cali, Colombia, S.A., May 1968 - December 1977
- Pastor of St. Hubert's Parish, Homedale, Idaho, January 1978 - November 1980.

ORDINATION TO EPISCOPACY

- Appointed seventh bishop of the Diocese of Salt Lake City, Sept. 3, 1980. Ordained and installed Nov. 17, 1980, Salt Lake City.
- Appointed eighth bishop of the Diocese of Sacramento, Nov. 30, 1993. Installed Jan. 27, 1994, Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, Sacramento. Living donor liver transplant, April 1, 2005, (Dan M. Haverty, donor).
- Retired as bishop of the Diocese of Sacramento, Nov. 30, 2008.