

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 5

Father John E Boll

No 74

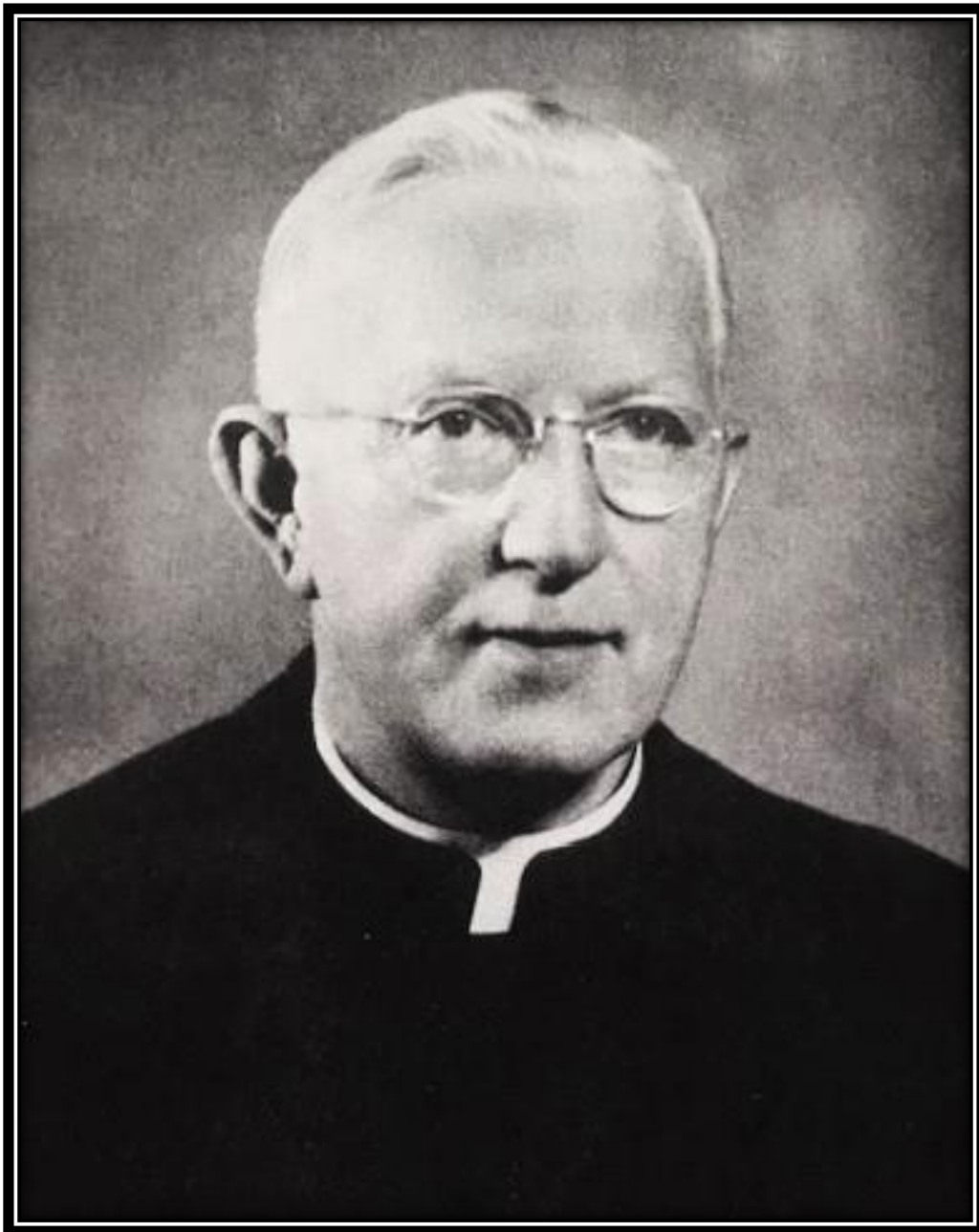
Monsignor Michael Louis Lyons

Native of Galway, Ireland

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor of Sacred Heart Church, Sacramento

October 24, 1887 – May 27, 1958



Michael Louis Lyons was born on October 24, 1887 in Galway, Ireland. He entered the Seminary of Saint Jarlath College in September 1904 and attended there until 1908. He then matriculated to All Hallows College in Dublin from 1908 to 1914 where he completed his theological training and was ordained a priest in the All Hallows Seminary Chapel on June 21, 1914 for the Diocese of Sacramento.

After spending some time with his family in Galway after his ordination, he began his journey to America by ship crossing the Atlantic Ocean and arriving in New York City. He continued his journey to Sacramento by train, traveling through the heartland of the United States until he finally arrived in the Capital City of Sacramento.

FIRST ASSIGNMENT, THE CATHEDRAL



Father Lyons' first bishop in Sacramento was Bishop Thomas Grace who appointed the newly arrived priest to the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. His first pastor at the Cathedral was the newly appointed Cathedral Rector, Father Patrick F Ryan.

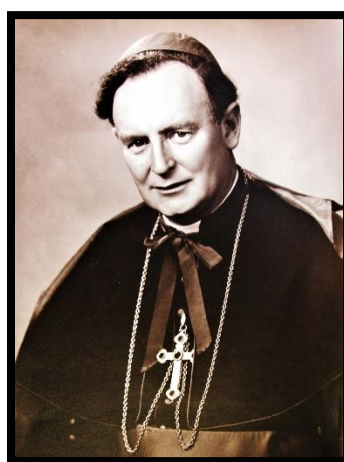
Bishop Thomas Grace

NAMED THE FIRST PRIEST SECRETARY OF THE BISHOP

Early in his priestly life, Father Lyons' administrative talents were recognized and he became the first priest in the diocese to serve as the Bishop's Secretary, a position he held with both Bishop Patrick Keane and Bishop Robert Armstrong. He was also appointed the first business manager of the *Superior California Catholic Register* newspaper in February 1930, a position he held for several years.



Bishop Patrick Keane



Bishop Robert Armstrong

INTERMITTENT PARISH ASSIGNMENTS

Father Lyons held intermittent posts as assistant pastor *pro-tem* at both Holy Rosary Parish in Woodland and Saint Joseph Parish in Marysville.



Photo from the Diocesan Archives

Saint Joseph Church, Woodland



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Joseph Church, Marysville

APPOINTED PASTOR OF SACRED HEART PARISH, SACRAMENTO

On December 1, 1929, Father Lyons was named pastor of Saint Stephen Parish in East Sacramento. This parish was later renamed Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish where Father Lyons served as pastor for almost 29 years until his death on May 27, 1958.

SACRED HEART CHURCH IS BUILT

Under his leadership, the imposing church on the corner of 39th and J Streets was built, as well as the rectory and later the parish school at 39th and I Streets. Many longtime residents of Sacred Heart Parish remember Father Lyons' indomitable will to hold his parish together during the dark depressing days of the early 1930s, when church finances were caught up in the financial disaster of that era. The depression struck, leaving a tremendous parish debt because of unfulfilled pledges, adding to the burdens of this busy pastor.



Photo by John E Boll

Sacred Heart Church, Sacramento
Built during the Pastorate of Monsignor Michael Lyons

NAMED DOMESTIC PRELATE

On April 19, 1948, in recognition of his priestly service to the Diocese of Sacramento, Father Lyons was honored by Pope Pius XII by being named a Domestic Prelate with the title of Right Reverend Monsignor.

**TRANSLATION OF THE APOSTOLIC BRIEF, WRITTEN IN LATIN,
RECEIVED FROM HIS HOLINESS, POPE PIUS THE TWELFTH,
APPOINTING FATHER MICHAEL LOUIS LYONS A MEMBER
OF THE PAPAL HOUSEHOLD AND CONFERRING ON HIM THE TITLE OF
RIGHT REVEREND MONSIGNOR**

**Secretariate of the State of the Holy See
Vatican City,
Pius the Twelfth, Pope**

To our dear son, Michael Louis Lyons, Pastor of the Church of Sacred Heart of Jesus, Sacramento, California, health and Apostolic Benediction.

Our venerable brother, His Excellency, The Most Reverend Robert John Armstrong, Bishop of the Diocese of Sacramento, informs Us that you, Michael Louis Lyons, have spent thirty-four years in the Priesthood, and in the continuous service of the Diocese of Sacramento, Sacramento, California; that you have given of yourself faithfully and well all these years to the service of God and his Church; and that you have been, for almost twenty years, Pastor of the Church of Sacred Heart of Jesus and that during that time you have by word, example and priestly devotion, fostered and diligently cared for the faithful, and that during your years in the Priesthood, there has been committed to you by your venerable Bishop, many offices of trust and responsibility, all of which you have fulfilled with diligence, care and painstaking zeal, and that in particular you helped to establish the Superior California Register, thereby giving the Diocese of Sacramento, for the first time in history, a Catholic paper of its own; and that you introduced into the Diocese the Legion of Mary and fostered its establishment in the parishes of the Diocese; and so beloved brother, We judge you worthy of special ecclesiastical distinction.

The wishes of our brother, your venerable Bishop, have been received by Us with great favor and We, in order that you may be rewarded with fitting honor, and in order too, that We may give public testimony of our good will, by these Apostolic letters and by our own authority, do hereby choose, create, appoint and declare you a Priest of the City of Rome, and hereby confer upon you, Michael Louis Lyons, the honor of a Prelate of our own Household, together with the title of Right Reverend Monsignor.

Moreover, dear son, we grant to you the privilege of wearing the purple Cassock, the Rochet and Mantelletum; likewise, We extend to you the use and enjoyment of all the honors, privileges and prerogatives which all Domestic Prelates of your rank possess and enjoy.

Given at Saint Peter's, in the City of Rome, under the seal of the Fisherman's Ring, this twenty-ninth day of April, in the year of our Lord, Nineteen-hundred and forty-eight, the ninth year of our Pontificate.

Signed: Pius the Twelfth, Pope
John Baptist Montini, Assistant Secretary of State

*The Right Reverend Monsignor
Michael L. Lyons
cordially invites you to attend
the
Ceremony of his Investiture
as a
Domestic Prelate
by His Excellency
The Most Reverend
Robert J. Armstrong, D. D.
Sacred Heart Church, Sacramento, California
Thursday morning, October twenty-eighth
nineteen hundred and forty-eight
at ten o'clock*

The Invitation to Monsignor Lyons' Investiture

NAMED A CONSULTOR OF THE DIOCESE

During the episcopacy of Bishop Robert Armstrong and Bishop Joseph McGucken, Monsignor Lyons served for many years as Defender of the Bond for the Diocesan Tribunal. On November 7, 1957, he was appointed a member of the Board of Pro-Synodal Examiners and Parish Priest Consultors.

DIOCESAN DIRECTOR OF THE LEGION OF MARY

Monsignor Lyons also served as diocesan director of the Legion of Mary and it was largely due to his zeal and devotion that this movement spread throughout the area. He was a member of the Diocesan Council of Administration, Director of the Priests' Eucharistic League and Treasurer of the Priests' Diocesan Aid Society.

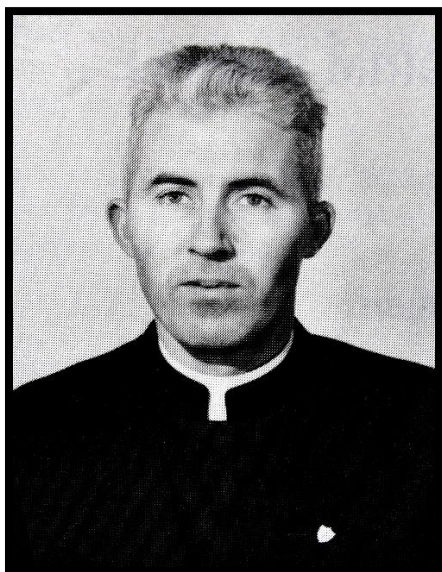


Photo courtesy of Fr Michael Cormack

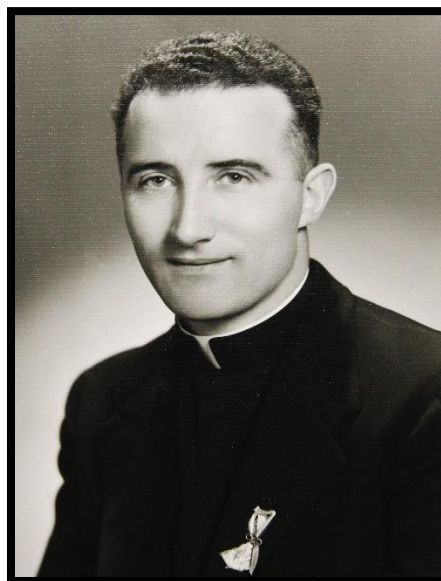
**Monsignor Lyons with Fathers Edmund O'Neill and Michael Cormack
Sacred Heart Church, Sacramento**

UNCLE OF FATHERS PATRICK AND VINCENT LYONS

Monsignor Lyons was the uncle of Father Patrick Lyons, pastor of Saint Theresa Parish, Al Tahoe, as South Lake Tahoe was then called, and Father Vincent Lyons, assistant at Immaculate Conception Parish in Sacramento.



Father Patrick Lyons



Father Vincent Lyons

MONSIGNOR LYONS BECOMES ILL

Monsignor Lyons was still convalescing from the effects of pneumonia and pleurisy when he entered Mercy Hospital on Wednesday of Holy Week. He remained in the hospital for a month. The illness weakened his already weak heart.

In his last weekend in the hospital, Monsignor Lyons was in good spirits and closely followed the results of the diocesan St Pius X Seminary Campaign. The excellent results of the campaign from Sacred Heart Parish gave him much consolation when he received the news on Tuesday.

On Tuesday, May 27, 1958, while Monsignor Lyons had a visit from Father Frederick Cosgrove, S.J., pastor of Saint Ignatius Church in Sacramento, and Father Patrick Nolan, hospital chaplain, the aneurism he was suffering from suddenly broke. Realizing his death was imminent, he immediately asked Father Nolan to administer the anointing of the sick to him. Before his two assistant priests, Fathers Edmund O'Neill and Michael Cormack, could rush across the street from Sacred Heart Church to the hospital, Monsignor Lyons was dead at 4:15 PM at the age of 70 years.

NEWS OF MONSIGNOR LYONS' DEATH BEGINS TO SPREAD

Messages of condolence began pouring into Sacred Heart rectory as news of Monsignor Lyons' death became known. Bishop McGucken, when informed of Monsignor Lyons' death, stated, "The death of one of the most beloved pastors of the diocese is a severe loss to the Bishop as he was one of the diocesan consultors. It is particularly sad for his parishioners who looked upon

him as a beloved shepherd and leader. He was respected and loved, not only for his exceptional learning but because of his model of sanctity.”

THE FUNERAL OF MONSIGNOR LYONS

On Thursday morning, the body of Monsignor Lyons was brought to Sacred Heart Church to lie in state until Saturday when the Funeral Mass was celebrated.

Three Requiem Masses were planned for Monsignor Lyons. On Thursday morning, the children of Sacred Heart School and their parents assisted at a Solemn Requiem Mass at 10 AM. On Thursday evening at 8 PM, a rosary was prayed for Monsignor Lyons led by members of the Legion of Mary, St Theresa’s Altar Society, Sacred Heart Mothers Club and the Christian Family Movement of the parish. The all-night vigil was directed by the Nocturnal Adoration Society and the Sacred Heart Dad’s Club.

On Friday morning at 10 AM, a second Solemn Requiem Mass was held for parishioners of the parish. On Friday evening, the clergy recited the Office of the Dead at 8 PM while the Fourth Degree Knights of Columbus formed an honor guard around the casket. Members of the Holy Name Society staffed the all-night vigil.

On Saturday morning at 11 AM, the Solemn Funeral Mass began with Bishop Joseph T McGucken presiding. Celebrant of the Mass was Father Vincent Lyons, nephew of Monsignor Lyons. Three of Monsignor Lyons’ close priest friends participated in the Solemn Requiem Mass, Father Patrick McHugh, pastor of Holy Spirit Parish; Father John Maguire, pastor of All Hallows Parish; and Monsignor Patrick Donnelly, pastor of Saint Bernard Parish, Eureka.

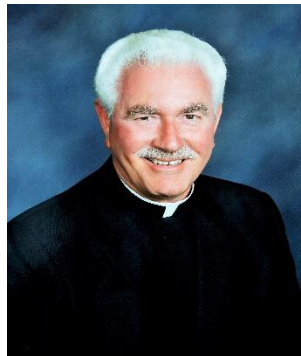


Priests’ Section, Saint Mary Cemetery, Sacramento

BURIAL AT SAINT MARY CEMETERY, SACRAMENTO

At the conclusion of the Funeral Mass, the body of Monsignor Lyons was taken in procession to the Priests' Section of Saint Mary Cemetery. After the Rite of Committal, the body of Michael Lyons was lowered into the grave as the priests sang the *Salve Regina* chant.

CONCLUDING REMARKS



Fr John E Boll

In remarks made about Monsignor Lyons in his 1958 obituary in the *Catholic Herald*, it says: "Revered by both clergy and laity alike, it was often said of him that he was the ideal priest, graced with the dignity and kindness which are the marks of greatness."

Monsignor Lyons was exceptionally gifted with intelligence and was a very kind and compassionate priest. These are the marks of greatness both in the world and as a disciple of the Lord. As Jesus said to the Twelve and to all his disciples, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves." (Mat 10:16)

Father Michael Cormack who served as an assistant at Sacred Heart Parish and worked with Monsignor Lyons, says that Monsignor Lyons was always fair with his assistant priests, taking his turn in the rotation of the scheduled Masses, hearing confessions, visiting the sick and counseling those who needed to talk with a priest. And even though he was honored by Pope Pius XII as a Domestic Prelate of the Papal Household with the title of Right Reverend Monsignor, he chose not to use that title and preferred instead the title of Father Lyons. Yes, he was graced with wisdom, dignity, humility and kindness and the people and priests of the Sacramento Diocese loved him and held him in great esteem.

As Bishop Manogue often said, quoting the American poet Sam Walter Foss, "Bring me men to match my mountains: Bring me men to match my plains." Well, this priest from County Galway in the person of Monsignor Michael Louis Lyons was such a man who "matched the mountains and the plains" of the Diocese of Sacramento.

*Eternal rest grant to Monsignor Lyons,
O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him.
May he rest in peace!*



Photo by John E Boll

Headstone of Monsignor Michael L Lyons
Saint Mary Cemetery, Sacramento

*Indeed for your faithful, Lord,
Life is changed not ended,
And, when this earthly dwelling
Turns to dust, an eternal dwelling
Is made ready for them in heaven.*

Preface I for the Dead