

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 5

Father John E Boll

No 81

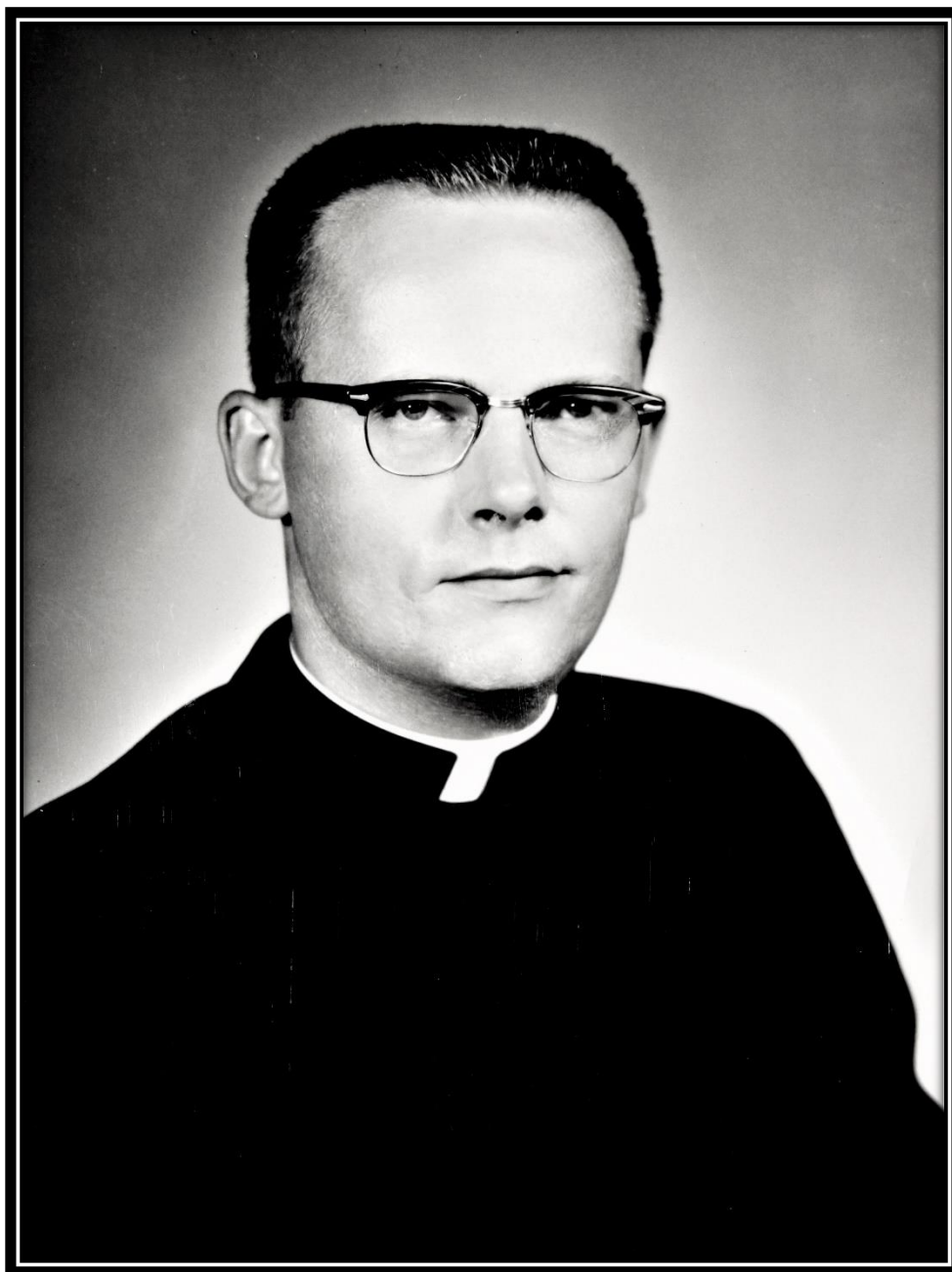
Father Joseph Edward Bishop

Native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor of Saint Isidore Parish, Yuba City, California

July 29, 1932 – December 17, 2000



Joseph Edward Bishop, son of Joseph Bishop and Anna Voitko, was born on Friday, July 29, 1932, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was baptized on August 30, 1932 in Transfiguration Church, Russelton, Pennsylvania.

JOSEPH IS RAISED BY HIS MOTHER

Joe was raised by his mother and he never knew his father. His mother Anna worked as a housekeeper during the years of the great depression. One of the jobs she held was working for a Hungarian family and young Joe learned to speak Hungarian. Later, she worked for a Jewish shopkeeper and Joe learned Yiddish. Anna also worked for a German family which enabled her son to learn German. So, at a young age, Joe was exposed to different cultures, languages and ways of living.

JOE BEGINS HIS EDUCATION

Young Joseph began his education in 1937 at Burgwin Public School in Pittsburgh, PA. In 1944, he transferred to Resurrection School in Pittsburgh and attended there until 1946. He then entered Holy Cross Seminary in Notre Dame, Indiana in 1946 and spent two years studying there. In 1948, he left the seminary and transferred to Central Catholic High School in Pittsburgh and graduated from high school in 1950.

ENTERS PONTIFICAL COLLEGE JOSEPHINUM

In 1950, Joe decided to return to the seminary and began college at the Pontifical College Josephinum in Worthington, Ohio and continued there for eight years, four years in college followed by four years of theological studies in the major seminary.



Photo from the Pontifical College Josephinum Website

The Pontifical College Josephinum Church

JOSEPH BISHOP IS ORDAINED A PRIEST

On June 10, 1958, Joseph Edward Bishop was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Sacramento by Cardinal Ameleto Cicognani. After his ordination, he spent some time with his family before heading west to Sacramento to begin his life of ministry as a priest.



Photos from the Saint Isidore Archives

Father Bishop is Ordained a Priest with his Classmates in 1958



Father Bishop gives his First Blessing

FATHER BISHOP BEGINS HIS MINISTRY

When Father Joe arrived in Sacramento, the bishop of the diocese was Bishop Joseph McGucken. On August 4, 1958, Bishop McGucken appointed Father Bishop as an assistant to Father John E Tumully, pastor of Holy Rosary Parish in Woodland. In the early 1960s, Father William Slakey, also an assistant in the Woodland parish, urged Father Joe to become fluent in Spanish in order to serve the growing Mexican American population in the Diocese of Sacramento.

Within a short time, Father Joe was able to speak Spanish fluently and found himself drawn to social service ministry. During the summer months, he made it a habit of going to the nearby labor camps to celebrate Mass for the Mexican farm workers. Father Joe served the Woodland community for six years until September 1964.

FATHER JOE ATTENDS CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY IN WASHINGTON, DC

In the Fall of 1964, Bishop Alden J Bell granted permission for Father Bishop to attend the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, to pursue a Master's Degree in social work. Also attending the University was Father Vincent Coleman who was scheduled to complete his doctorate degree in Canon Law in the spring of 1966.



Photo from the Catholic University of America Website

The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC

On an August evening in 1965, Father Coleman drove to Yuba City to talk with Father Bishop, who was serving as assistant *pro tem* at Saint Isidore Parish, to discuss their travel plans to Catholic University in Washington, DC in September. On his drive back to Sacramento that Monday evening on August 23, Father Vincent was involved in a terrible auto crash and was killed at the

age of 25. Father Joe had to return to Catholic University in September alone to complete his social work studies.

FATHER BISHOP IS ASSIGNED TO OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE PARISH

After his return to Sacramento, Bishop Bell assigned Father Bishop to the National Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Sacramento as an assistant. This appointment began on October 1, 1965 to April 19, 1966. During those six months, Father Joe was able to work with the Hispanic community and continued to perfect his Spanish speaking ability.



Photo by John E Boll

La Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, Sacramento

SHORT ASSIGNMENT TO THE CATHEDRAL

Father Bishop was given a very temporary assignment to the Cathedral for a month, April 19 to May 10, 1966, until his permanent assignment was given to him at Saint Isidore Parish in Yuba City.

FATHER BISHOP APPOINTED TO YUBA CITY

On May 10, 1966, Father Joe began his appointment as assistant pastor of Saint Isidore Parish in Yuba City to serve as an assistant to Father Bernard McElwee until Father McElwee retired from his pastorate in 1973.

MINISTRY TO THE SPANISH SPEAKING

As Father Joe began his new ministry in Yuba City, Father Gene Lucas was serving as assistant pastor in Marysville. Together these two priests decided to learn Spanish from the farm workers and they started celebrating Masses for the farm workers both in the parish churches and in the camps. The response of the farm workers was tremendous. Father Joe made sure the farm workers received medical services when they needed them. Fathers Joe and Gene worked together and became involved in social services for the Hispanics. They worked with Cesar Chavez in the area as well in the late 1960s and 1970s.

In 1970, Bishop Alden Bell established a department of Mexican American Affairs and Father Bishop became one of a number of priests who served multiple parishes providing Mass and the other sacraments to the Spanish speaking Catholic communities.

For canonical purposes, Father Joe became assistant pastor for the Catholic communities in Live Oak, Lincoln, Colusa, Gridley, Marysville and Yuba City, and also coordinated Centro San Felipe, a social service center in Yuba City. The center included an office for minority business enterprise workers, a youth program targeting primarily the Mexican American community, and Vista Volunteers.

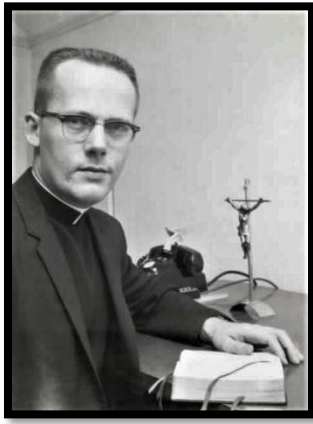
FATHER BISHOP APPOINTED PASTOR OF YUBA CITY

On July 1, 1973, after the retirement of Father McElwee, Father Joseph Bishop was appointed pastor of Saint Isidore Parish in Yuba City by Bishop Bell, a position he held for the next 24 years.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Isidore Church, Yuba City



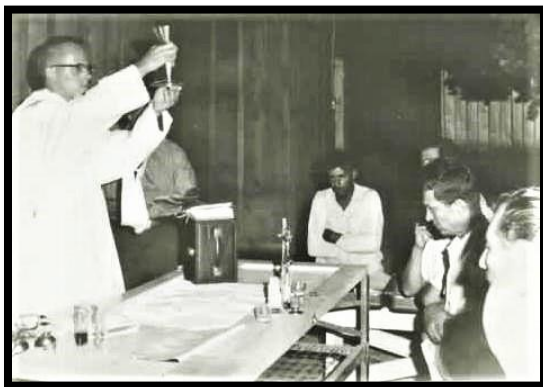
Deacon Rubén Rojo first came to know Father Bishop in 1969. He says, “We called him Father, and that is exactly what he was because he was the people’s priest. Father Bishop took an interest in the needs of people as individuals; not only spiritual needs but all needs. If people needed food, shelter or just someone to listen to them, Father Bishop was there to help.”

Sheila Garlock, principal of Saint Isidore Parish School, expressed the same type of reverence for Father Bishop. She said, “He truly exemplified all a person would like to find in a priest. Father Bishop was committed to the area’s youth and their education,” she said.

“He helped adolescents find their way when they got lost, and it was not uncommon for Father Bishop to open his home to young people who were struggling, not only during his priesthood, but even after he retired.”

“To provide a constructive place for youth to keep active, Father Bishop founded the Center of San Felipe on Percy Avenue in Yuba City,” said Rubén Rojo. “The center was a place that offered activities for young people and all types of assistance for members of the Mexican community, such as help with income taxes, immigration and child services. Father Bishop took it upon himself to look out for the unfairness of living conditions in labor camps.”

Rebecca Espinoza said that when she was growing up, her mother was a cook at one of the camps and she remembers Father Bishop celebrating Mass in the open air for the men who were unable to get to Mass at the church. Father Bishop intervened when farm workers were denied pay for the work they had done. He contacted advocacy groups that could offer legal assistance and workers received what was owed to them,” she explained.



Christina Garcia said Father Bishop was always willing to listen and help with problems and gave encouragement. That is how he was known by young people. “He was out there with us,” she said, “and he encouraged kids to stay away from trouble.”

Celebrating Mass at a Labor Camp

Ricardo Fávila said he knew of youth who were involved in drugs and turned to Father Bishop for help. He steered young people in a direction that would offer them a future, encouraging them to get an education and go to college.

Father Bishop encouraged people of all ages. Deacon Eldon Vignery said Father Bishop encouraged him to become a deacon and he became Eldon's mentor and spiritual director. "He was like a second father to me."

THE WORK FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IS DIFFICULT AND OFTEN PAINFUL AND DANGEROUS

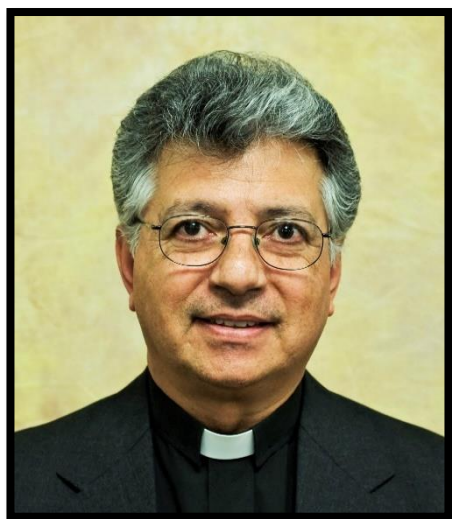
Father Bishop organized and participated in marches against the unjust and inhuman working conditions that many of the farm workers had to endure. Since the Yuba City area is a farming community, tensions and conflicts developed between the farm owners and farm workers. The old problem of power, money, greed and corruption has raised its ugly head, and tensions and conflicts have spread to all societies of the world to this very day.

As Father Bishop stood up for the rights of farm workers, his voice caused conflict with the farm owners, some of whom were members of the Catholic faith and parishioners of Saint Isidore Parish. Bishop Bell was not happy with the growing tension in the community and Father Joe felt some of the priests were against his efforts to work for justice. He felt rejected by some of his brother priests and from that time forward, he never attended another diocesan or clergy meeting.

In his retirement with the *Catholic Herald* in September 1997, Father Bishop recalled that he often took time to celebrate Mass at labor camps at nearby ranches, but never forgot that he was also pastor to Yuba City ranchers as well.

FATHER BISHOP RETIRES

On September 14, 1997, Father Joseph Edward Bishop retired as pastor of Saint Isidore Parish in Yuba City. Father Manuel Soria who was pastor of Saint Joseph Parish in Lincoln was named the new pastor of Yuba City. After being selected pastor of Yuba City, Father Soria went to the Diocesan Pastoral Center to receive information about the Yuba City parish. The diocesan policy at that time was the retiring pastor could not continue living in the rectory. Father Soria had known Father Bishop since 1989 when he was assistant to Marysville and they were friends.



Father Manuel Soria

Father Soria went straight to Yuba City to meet with Father Bishop. He asked Father Bishop where he planned to live in retirement. Father Bishop told Father Soria, "I have no idea." Father Manuel knew that Father Joe had little money because he had used most of his personal resources to help the poor of the area. He knew that Father Joe gave many young men who were in trouble a second chance by helping them. So, he said to Father Joe: "You have been here for 30 years and you have served this community well. The people love you, so why don't you live in the former convent since the nuns are no longer here. The convent is yours." Father Joe was totally surprised at Father Manuel's

offer and he said, "I promise not to interfere with your ministry." Father Bishop lived in the convent surrounded by his many friends until the day he died on December 17, 2000.

Father Bishop had hoped to spend 6 months a year in Mexico with friends and 6 months in Yuba City, but not long after he retired, the doctors found that Father Joe had a very large cancerous tumor in his lungs and they decided to do nothing since the cancer was so large. Father Joe had been a smoker all his life.

DEATH COMES TO FATHER BISHOP

Father Bishop died on Sunday, December 17, at the age of 68. During his time of confinement, Father Joe's many friends took care of him throughout his illness. Between Masses that day, Rubén Rojo asked Father Manuel to come and anoint Father Joe one last time. When Father Manuel arrived at the convent, there were at least 20 people in the room, mostly Mexican. Father Joe was smoking and Father Manuel asked him why he was smoking? Father Joe responded, "Have you ever smoked?" Father Manuel replied, "No." Father Joe responded, "Then you don't know what it is like, so leave me alone!"

During the next Mass, Rubén came into the church and told Father Manuel that Father Joe had just died. Father Manuel told the congregation that Father Bishop had just died. There was a minute of silence and everyone began to weep. Father Manuel continued with the Mass knowing how much the people loved Father Joe. It was a holy moment of love, life and gratitude for Father Joseph Bishop whom they deeply loved.

THE VIGIL AND FUNERAL MASS FOR FATHER BISHOP



Bishop Richard Garcia

The night of the Vigil on Monday, December 21, 2000, it was a wet rainy night. Father Bishop's body was brought to Saint Isidore Church and the church was packed with parishioners who loved Father Joe.

Auxiliary Bishop Richard Garcia presided at the Vigil liturgy. Father Soria says the Vigil was a beautiful experience of love and faith. According to Mexican custom, the body of Father Bishop was waked all night in the church which was completely filled with parishioners.

THE FUNERAL MASS

Knowing that Father Bishop's Funeral would be a large event, the city authorities of Yuba City prepared for 1500 people but Father Soria says there were 3000 people attending Father Bishop's Funeral Mass. It was the largest funeral Father Soria had ever seen. The main presider of the Mass was Bishop William Weigand. The Mass was celebrated primarily in Spanish with some parts of the Mass in English.



Bishop Weigand Prepares to receive the Bread and Wine for Mass

BURIAL OF FATHER BISHOP

After the Funeral Mass at Saint Isidore Church, a large procession of cars followed the hearse to the Sutter Cemetery about 15 miles west of Yuba City for the Rite of Committal which was celebrated by Father Manuel Soria, the pastor of the parish. After the lowering of the casket into Mother Earth, the reluctant community of mourners slowly left the gravesite.



Photo by Fr Manuel Soria

Headstone of Father Joseph Bishop

FATHER BISHOP'S SURVIVING FAMILY MEMBERS

Father Bishop was survived by his sister, Anne Lynch of Pittsburgh, and a nephew, James Lynch.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Father Manuel Soria, who succeeded Father Bishop as pastor of Saint Isidore Parish, called Father Joe “the spiritual father of two generations of this parish. He was the pioneer for Hispanic ministry in Yuba City and the surrounding areas. He was the one who began serving farm workers, and most of his closest friends over the years were farm workers. He was a simple man, dedicated to serving the Lord.”

Those words sum up the life of Father Bishop who dedicated his life to standing with the poor and raising his voice against injustice and abuse when he saw it. He worked to make the world a better place by standing with farm workers when they were not treated with justice and respect. He was a prophetic voice of the Lord in a time of great social conflict in the agricultural fields of California. We honor him and thank him for his courage to speak out and speak up when it was necessary to do so. Father Joseph Bishop gave his life for the cause of justice and the common good of all. Rest now in peace, Father Joe.



Father Joe Bishop and Father Jim Kidder talks with a Parishioner on the Farm

*Lord, You called
Father Joseph Edward Bishop
to be a priestly and prophetic voice
in a time of great conflict in the
agricultural fields of California.*

*He was a good shepherd, after your
own heart, of the flock you gave him
to watch over and protect.*

*Grant him eternal peace and delight
in your Holy Presence forever.*

Amen



Father Joseph Edward Bishop