

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 5

Father John E Boll

No 84

Father Jeremiah Dermot Dwyer

Native of Tralee, County Kerry, Ireland

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor of Saint Dominic Parish, Colfax, California

January 18, 1923 – May 7, 2005



Jeremiah Dermot Dwyer, son of James Dwyer and Bridget Rice, was born on January 18, 1923, the fifth of nine children born in the Dwyer family. He was baptized on January 22, 1923 in Saint John Church in Tralee and was raised in “a very Catholic family.”

DERMOT BEGINS HIS PRIMARY SCHOOLING

In 1927, Dermot began his primary schooling at the Presentation School in Tralee. In 1931, he transferred to the Christian Brothers School in Tralee and graduated from grammar school in 1938. He quit school after the eighth grade and at the age of 15 headed to England where he took a job as a laborer at a steel factory.

After working in England for some years, he returned to Tralee and took a job at the Traly Shoe Factory and later he worked for the Kelliher Grain Merchant Company. During harvest time, Dermot helped his farmer friends who were harvesting their crops.

Since Dermot had worked as a laborer for a number of years in the steel industry, he became interested in Trade Unions and worked on the campaign of Dan Spring who ran successfully for membership of the Irish Parliament as a member of the Labor Party.

Since Dermot intended to enter the seminary to become a priest, he took Latin classes after work from a teacher in Tralee so he would have enough ability in Latin to get into the seminary.

Dermot returned to England in 1954 to enter the Jesuit Campion House in Osterley, Middlesex, England, where he studied for two years in order to prepare himself to enter the seminary in Ireland.



Photo from the Campion House Website

Campion House, Osterley, Middlesex, England

ENTERS SAINT PATRICK COLLEGE, THURLES, IRELAND

In 1956, Dermot returned to Ireland and entered Saint Patrick College in Thurles. Since he had no background in philosophy, he had to take two years of philosophy at Saint Patrick College before going on to his theological studies.

Dermot completed his four years of theological studies in 1962 and was ready for ordination to the priesthood. The reason he decided to study for the Diocese of Sacramento was the result of a visit by Monsignor Thomas Kirby who was a priest of the Diocese of Sacramento. Monsignor Kirby grew up in the same neighborhood of Tralee as Dermot so they became friends and Monsignor Kirby encouraged Dermot to consider coming to the Diocese of Sacramento to serve as a priest. Dermot took that advice and applied to the Diocese Sacramento and was accepted.



Photo from Diocesan Archives

Saint Patrick College, Thurles, Ireland

ORDAINED A PRIEST FOR THE DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO

At the age of 39, Jeremiah Dermot Dwyer was ordained a priest on June 10, 1962 in the Cathedral of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Thurles, for the Diocese of Sacramento by Archbishop Thomas Morris, Archbishop of Cashel.

After his ordination to the priesthood, Father Dwyer spent about two months with his family in Tralee before he began the long journey westward to the Diocese of Sacramento in Northern California where he would spend the rest of his life in ministry.

*You have been anointed by the Lord to bring the
Good News of the Gospel to the World*



Photo of Tralee from the Web

Tralee Windmill, Ireland

FATHER DWYER RECEIVES HIS FIRST APPOINTMENT

Upon his arrival to the Diocese of Sacramento, Father Dermot met with Bishop Alden J Bell who was recently installed as bishop of the diocese on May 15, 1962, just a few months before Father Dwyer's arrival in Sacramento.

Since Father Dwyer already knew Monsignor Kirby from their meeting in Ireland, it was no surprise that Monsignor Kirby encouraged Father Dwyer to begin his ministry at Immaculate Conception Parish in Sacramento where Kirby served as pastor. Indeed, Bishop Bell appointed Father Dwyer as assistant to Monsignor Kirby at Immaculate Conception Church.

Father Dwyer spent his first two years of ministry at Immaculate Conception Parish in the Oak Park Area of Sacramento from September 28, 1962 to January 16, 1964. These two years of ministry with Monsignor Kirby were a positive beginning for Father Dwyer and his life of ministry in the diocese of Sacramento.

Having completed his first two years of ministry at Immaculate Conception Parish, it was time for him to experience ministry in a different parish in the diocese. Bishop Bell sent Father Dwyer north to Tehama County where he would minister to the People of God in a different parish in another part of the vast Diocese of Sacramento.



Photo from the Diocesan Archives

Immaculate Conception Church, Sacramento

NEXT MOVE TO RED BLUFF

On January 16, 1964, Father Dermot was assigned to Sacred Heart Parish in Red Bluff as assistant to Monsignor James Casey who was pastor. Monsignor Casey was a seasoned pastor who served a number of small parishes throughout the diocese as well as serving as the editor of the Catholic Herald for seven years when Bishop Robert Armstrong was bishop of Sacramento. No doubt Father Dermot learned a lot from Monsignor Casey in the Red Bluff parish during the five years he served there.



Photo by John E Boll

Sacred Heart Church, Red Bluff

PAROCHIAL VICAR OF HOLY FAMILY CHURCH, CITRUS HEIGHTS

Father Dwyer's next appointment was to Holy Family Parish in Citrus Heights where he joined the pastoral team headed by Monsignor Vito Mistretta. There were three priests serving Holy Family Parish at this time since it was a growing and thriving parish.

Father Dwyer began his assignment at Holy Family Parish on September 16, 1969 and continued serving there for three years until September 1, 1972.



Photo by John E Boll

Holy Family Church, Citrus Heights

FIRST PASTORATE FOR FATHER DWYER

After ten years serving as a parochial vicar, it was time for Father Dwyer to take on the role and responsibilities of being a pastor. On September 1, 1972, Bishop Alden J Bell appointed Father Dwyer pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Alturas.

Alturas has the distinction of being the most distant and remote parish in the diocese from the See City of Sacramento. It is the County Seat of Modoc County and the most north-eastern county in the State of California. The driving distance between Sacramento and Alturas is 305 miles and it takes at least 5 hours on a good day to drive to Alturas from Sacramento.

The population of Alturas in 1972 was about 2000 people and the elevation of the town is 4,370 feet. The average yearly snowfall is 30.2 inches and the temperature in January can be as cold as 8 degrees below zero. There is one parish mission, Saint James Church in Cedarville, which is 23

miles east from Alturas. In the wintertime, the drive from Alturas to Cedarville can be treacherous because of the snow and ice. Not an easy assignment for a priest who is 50 years of age. Father Dwyer's assignment in Alturas was for two years, September 1, 1972 to October 1, 1974.

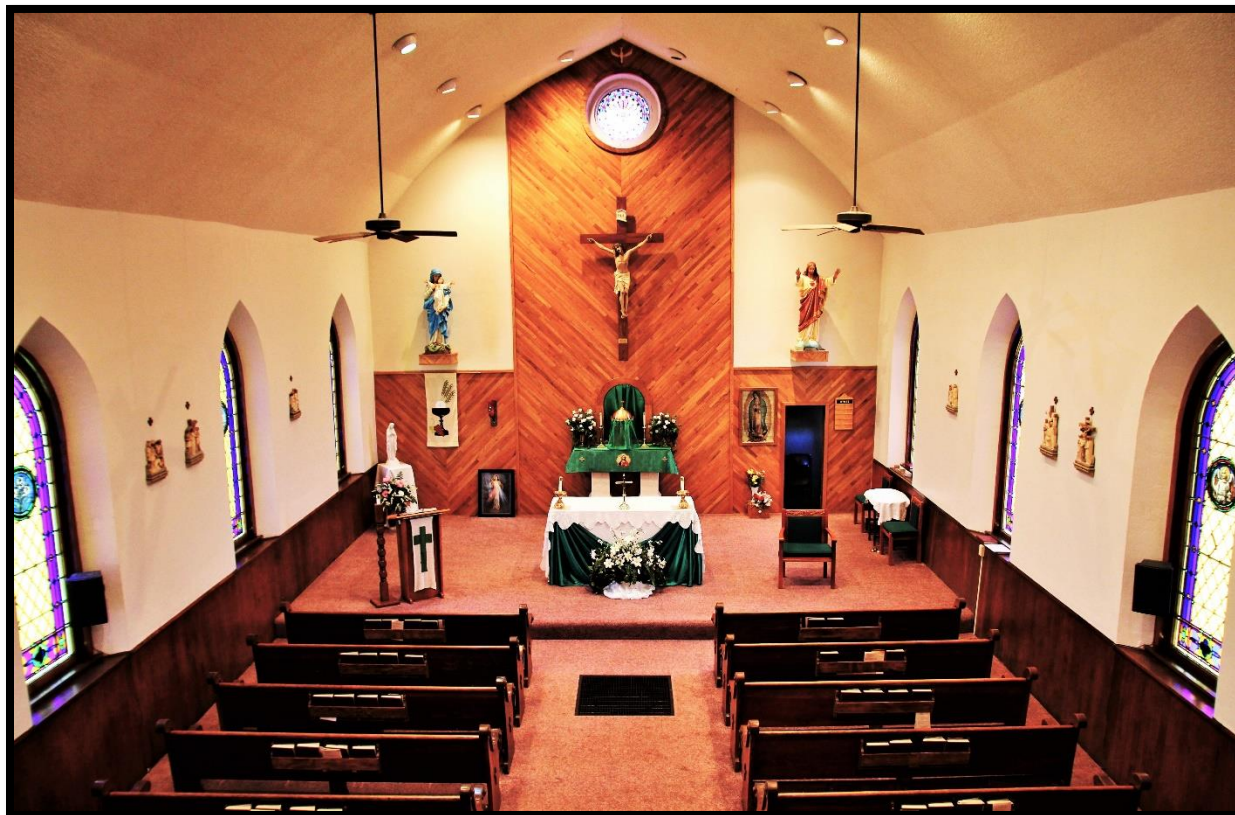


Photo by John E Boll

Sacred Heart Church, Alturas

NEXT, ASSIGNED TO THE CATHEDRAL OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

On October 1, 1974, Father Dermot was assigned as parochial vicar of the Cathedral in Sacramento. He served at the Cathedral as a parochial vicar from October 1, 1974 to August 18, 1980 and then was named Rector of the Cathedral from August 18, 1980 to January 21, 1983.

Deacon Don DeHaven who was a parishioner at the Cathedral and later became a permanent deacon at the Cathedral, said, "Father Dwyer was a brilliant priest, friendly with all the parishioners. He changed a lot of people's lives, just because he was always willing to talk and listen."

Deacon DeHaven recalls Father Dwyer's frequent evening walks along the K Street Mall by the Cathedral where he would talk with the homeless. He said Father Dwyer also taught a popular and stimulating theology class for young adults. Deacon DeHaven also said, "Father Dwyer could tell jokes for hours, and was very good at entertaining. I was blessed that he was my very good friend for many years."

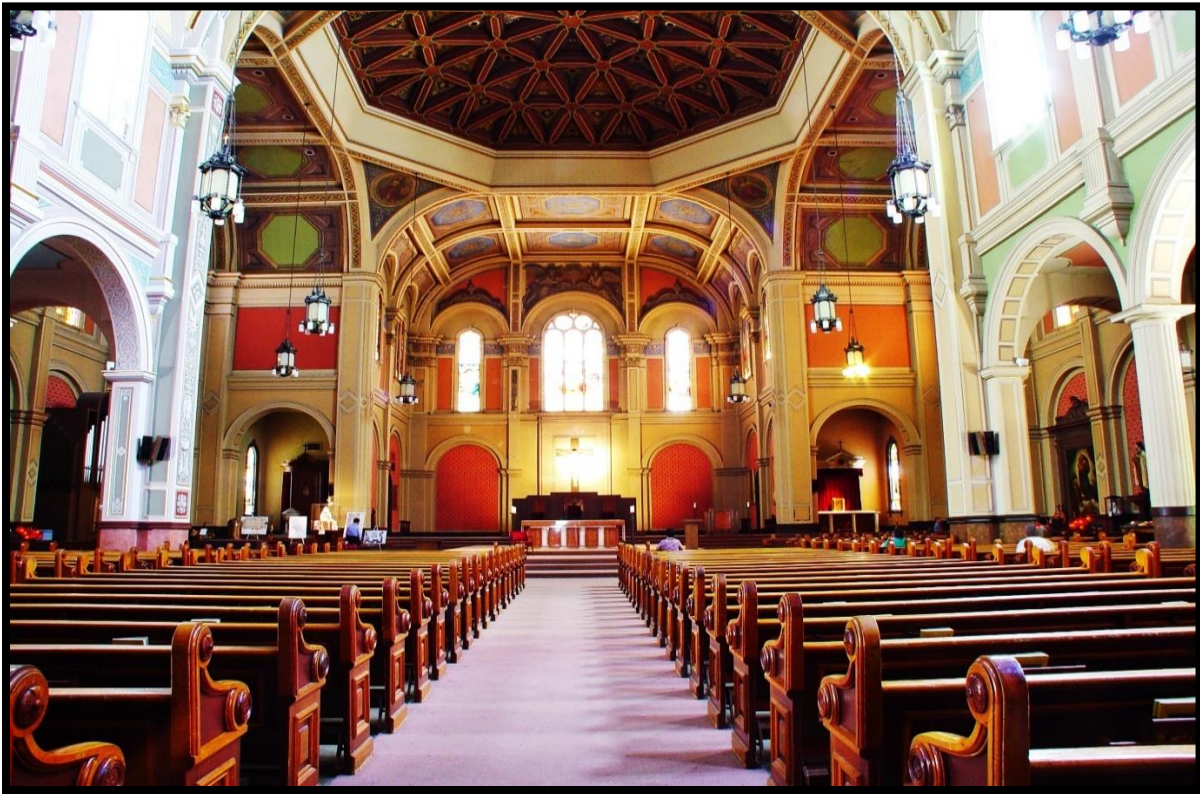


Photo by John E Boll

The Sacramento Cathedral in the 1980s

NAMED PASTOR OF OROVILLE

On January 21, 1983, Bishop Francis A Quinn who was now bishop of the Diocese of Sacramento appointed Father Dwyer pastor of Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish in Oroville. Father Dwyer spent five years as pastor of the Oroville parish until May 8, 1988. He enjoyed his time at this parish and kept in close contact with his good friend and neighbor, Father Thomas Marshall, who was pastor of Saint Joseph Parish in Marysville. They often spent their day off together.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Thomas the Apostle Church, Oroville

FINAL PARISH, SAINT DOMINIC, COLFAX

Father Dwyer's final parish assignment was Saint Dominic Parish in Colfax and probably the parish where he excelled the most, touching many lives in this parish. According to diocesan documents, Father Dwyer was appointed administrator of Saint Dominic Parish, not pastor. For this reason, one of Father Dermot's priest friends said that when someone called the parish asking to speak to the pastor, Father Dermot would say amusingly, "I am sorry, the pastor is not here."

TESTIMONY OF PARISHIONERS

Sheila Shelton, a religious education teacher, Eucharistic minister, and youth group director, said she remembers well the first Mass Father Dwyer celebrated at Saint Dominic Parish. "The first thing he told us was we are special, unique and priceless. Father sees the best in us. He loves his people." She went on to say that his sense of humor is contagious. "You may be crying when you come through the door, but you'll be laughing when you leave."

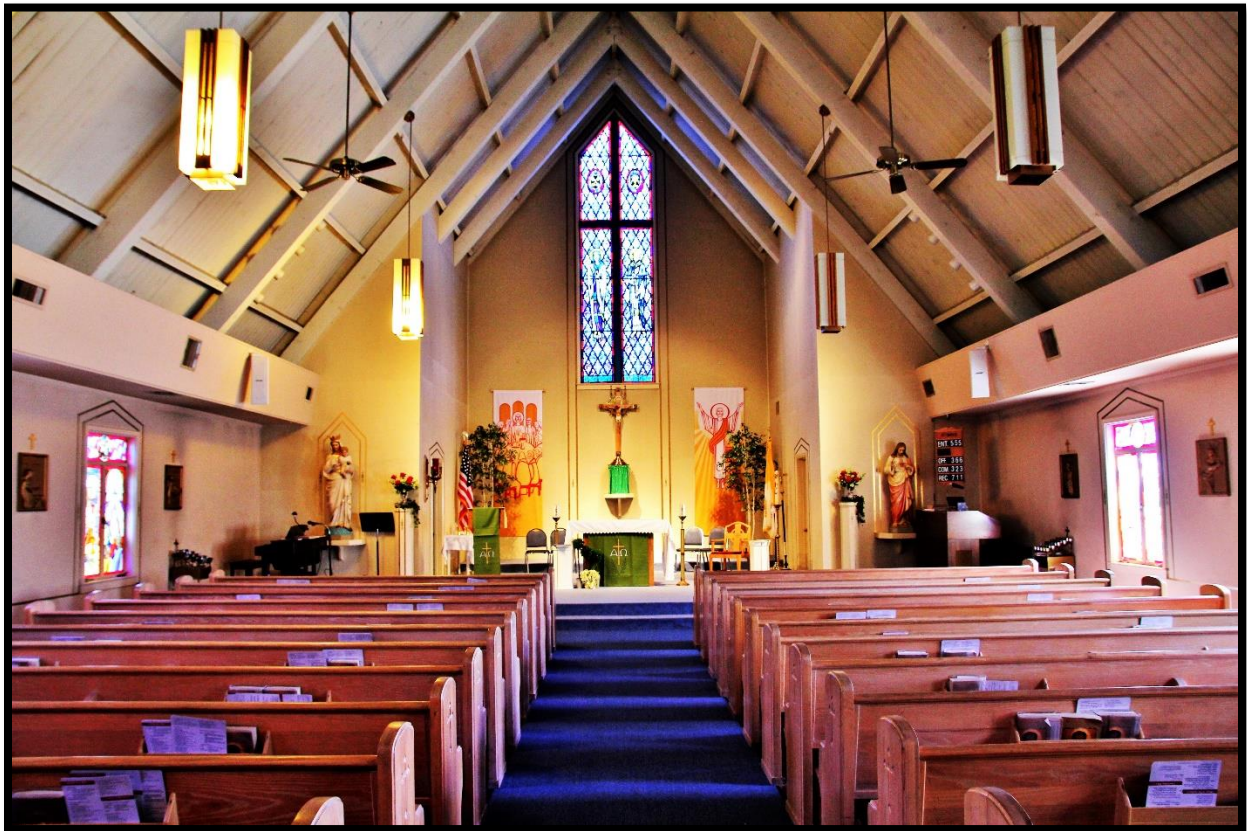


Photo by John E Boll

Saint Dominic Church, Colfax

After Father Dwyer arrived in the parish, the enrollment in religious education programs increased significantly. "He made the children, our youth, realize how important they are to him," Shelton said.

During the time of Father Dwyer's presence in the parish, two young men and one young woman from the parish went on to vocations in religious life.

Casey Haas, a parishioner of Saint Dominic Parish when Father Dwyer arrived, said that after his wife died, Father Dermot asked if he would create a Marian Garden by the church which Casey did do and planted the garden with roses. He said, "Father is a teacher who found that creating a rose garden by the church would be good therapy for me. He teaches Catholics who thought they knew their faith about their faith, and he does it in language a layperson can understand."

Casey recalled a homily in which Father Dwyer held up an acorn and spoke of the tremendous potential of "the smallest of things, filled with the grace of God," become something more.

Another longtime friend of Father Dwyer was Father John Hannan who said, "Father Dwyer's preaching always emphasized "the unconditional love that God has for each of us. He loved to visit the sick and he was always ready to respond to anyone who wanted to talk with him about a problem. He loved presiding at the Eucharist and enjoyed any meeting with people where he could talk with them about the Catholic faith."

Fathers Dwyer and Hannan became friends when Father Dermot was pastor of Alturas and Father John was pastor of Susanville. "Being an extrovert," said Father Hannan, "Father Dermot found the small town of Alturas difficult because he wanted to be around more people. Later, I would visit him in Colfax. His door was always open to priests and parishioners. He was very hospitable and very welcoming."

Father Patrick O'Connor attended the seminary in Thurles, Ireland with Father Dwyer and said Father Dwyer "was simply a delightful person to have as a friend."

FATHER DWYER RETIRES FROM PARISH MINISTRY

After 41 years of active ministry in the Diocese of Sacramento, Father Dermot Dwyer retired from parish ministry on June 30, 2003, at the age of 80. He was a gifted teacher who often relied on tangible things like an image of the Holy Family in a stained-glass window, a fallen acorn he picked up from the ground, or his own unfailing presence at children's religious education classes – to teach lessons about the Catholic faith.

Father Dwyer suffered from emphysema which made it difficult for him to breathe. After he retired from Saint Dominic Parish in Colfax, he moved to the home of his friend Deacon Don DeHaven in Sacramento. Deacon Don took care of Father Dermot for the next two years until Father Dermot closed his eyes in death.

THE DEATH OF FATHER DWYER AND FUNERAL MASS

Father Jeremiah Dermot Dwyer died on Saturday, May 7, 2005, from complications due to emphysema. Auxiliary Bishop Richard Garcia of the Diocese of Sacramento was the main celebrant of the Funeral Mass for Father Dwyer at Holy Family Church in Citrus Heights where Father Dwyer had served as a parochial vicar for three years. Bishop Garcia was joined by the priests of the diocese and Father Dwyer's many friends who came together to pray for their brother and friend and commend him to the Lord.



+ Bishop Richard J Garcia

BURIAL OF FATHER DWYER

After the Funeral Mass, the body of Father Dwyer was taken in procession to the Priests' Section of Calvary Cemetery in Citrus Heights for burial. After the Prayers of Committal were offered to the Lord, the casket was lowered into the grave to await the resurrection of the dead when the Lord Jesus Christ will return as the Risen Lord in glory.



Headstone of Father Dermot Dwyer

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As the life of Dermot Dwyer unfolded over the years, it is obvious that he was raised in a “very Catholic family.” It is surprising to know that after Dermot graduated from Irish grammar school, at the young age of about 15, he headed to England to begin working in a steel factory. While he labored in England, it became clear to him that he wanted to be a priest. He would have to do a lot of remedial work before the seminary would accept him to begin studies for the priesthood. So, he began studies that would prepare himself to enter the seminary.

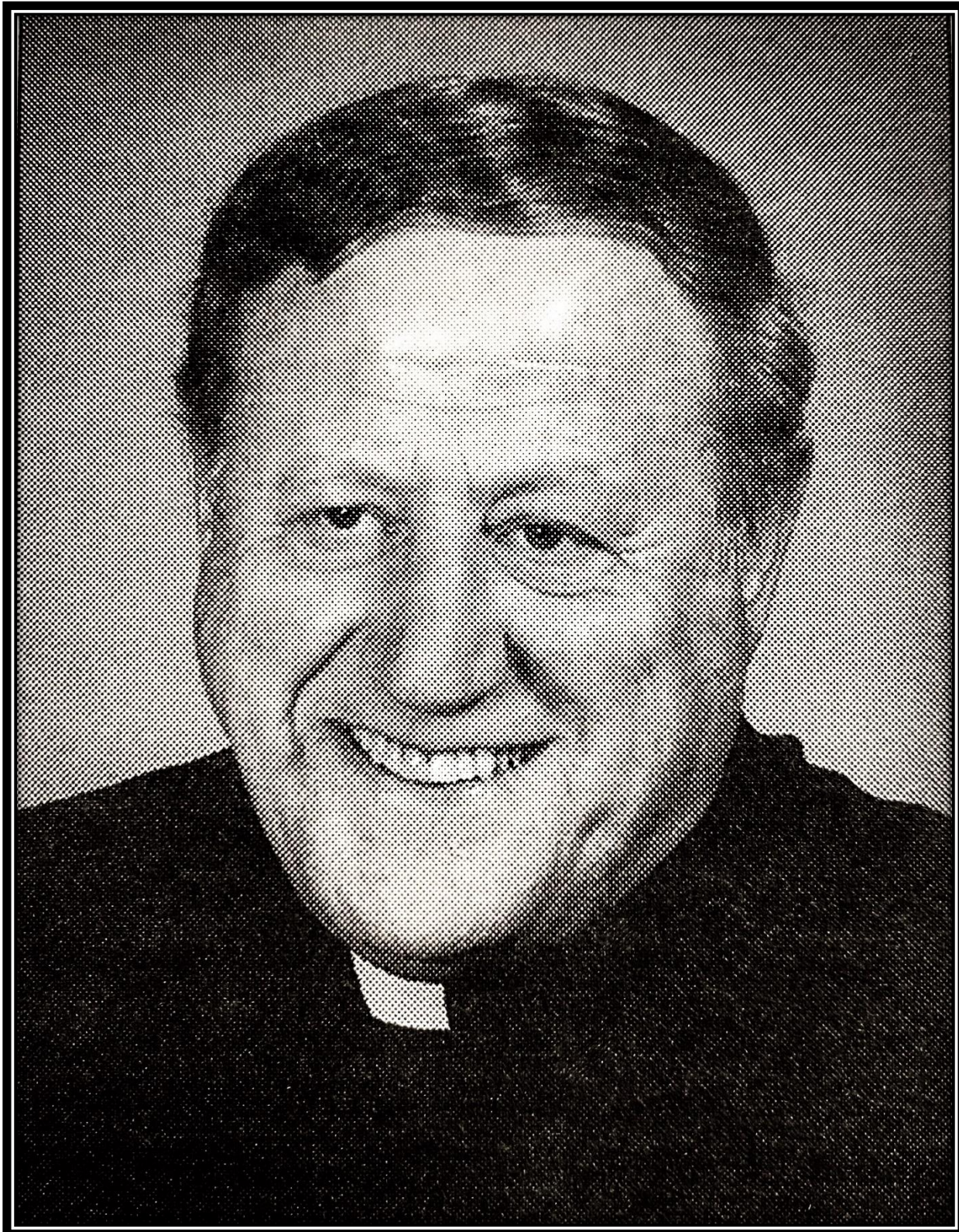
Dermot was 39 years of age when he was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Sacramento, thanks to the encouragement given to him by Monsignor Thomas Kirby of Sacramento.

Father Dermot had an outgoing personality and was always ready to listen to people when they needed to unburden the struggles of their lives. He always encouraged people by reminding them about how much God loves them. He was a natural teacher who loved to talk to people about the Lord. Like Jesus, he used concrete, everyday stories and events in people’s lives to teach the deeper truths about life and what our destiny is in God’s plan for us.

While he was assigned to the Cathedral in Sacramento, he began a course for young adults on the Catholic faith and his approach to the Gospel attracted many young people who came every week to sit at the feet of the master storyteller and teacher.

Father Dermot touched the lives of untold numbers of people and drew them into a closer relationship with Jesus, the Master. The Diocese of Sacramento was blessed to have such a gifted priest, teacher and preacher of the Gospel of Christ. Thank you, Father Dermot, for being a wonderful instrument in the hands of God to teach God’s People about the mysteries of the Kingdom of God!

*Lord God, giver of every grace and blessing,
We thank you for the gift
of Father Jeremiah Dermot Dwyer
whom you called to be a priest to serve
the People of the Diocese of Sacramento.
Bring him now to the joy of your Kingdom so he
may be fully alive in you forever. Amen*



Father Jeremiah Dermot Dwyer