

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

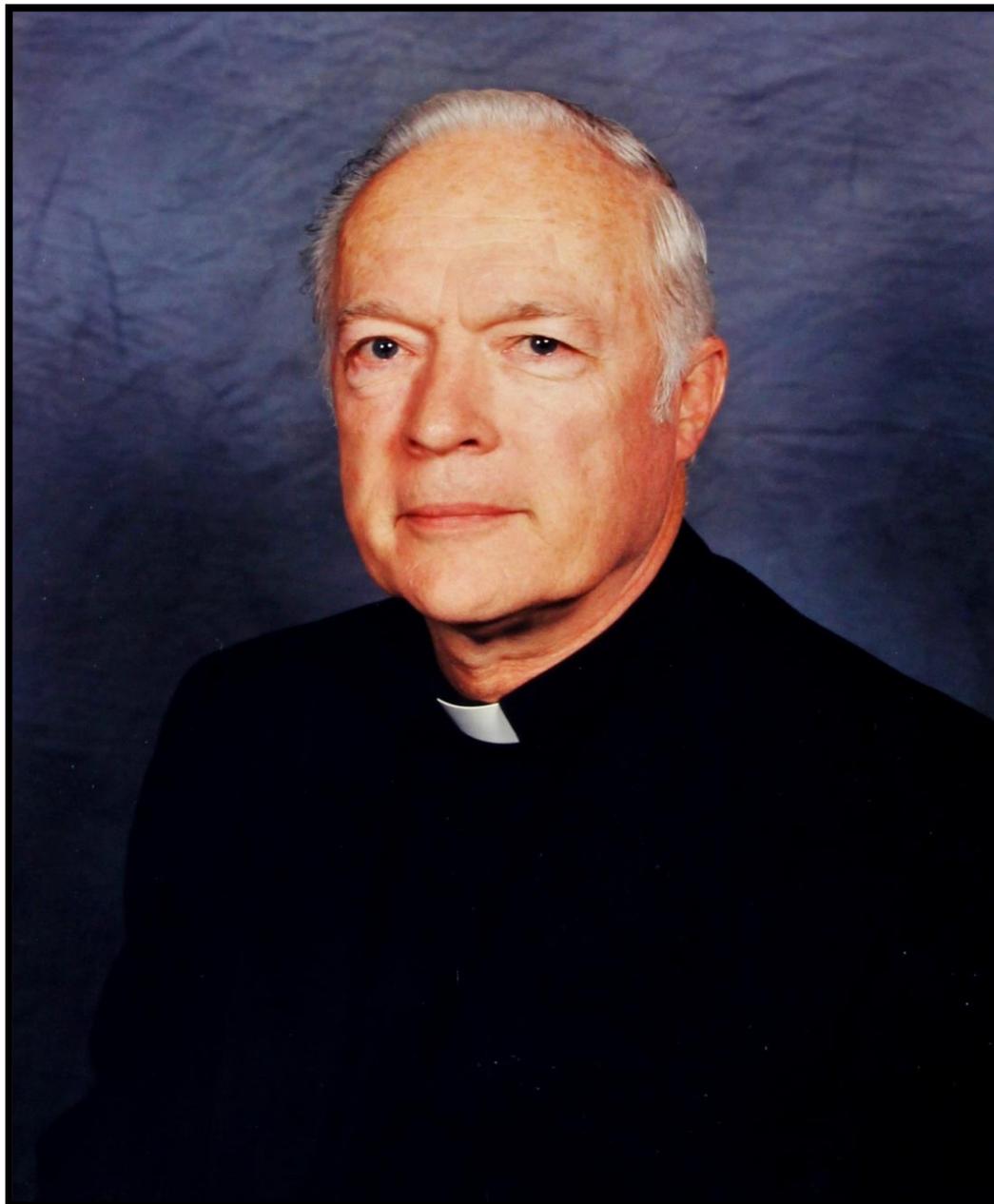
Vol 3

Father John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist

No 20

MONSIGNOR JAMES FRANCIS CHURCH Native Son and Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

By Father John E Boll
May 2015



Monsignor James Francis Church

James Francis Church was born January 26, 1932 in Lodi, California. He was the firstborn child of James Church and Wilma Newington. Jim's grandfather, James I and his father, James II, had grown up in New Plymouth, Idaho where the family was involved in dairy farming and growing alfalfa, wheat, corn and onions. These were depression years in the United States.

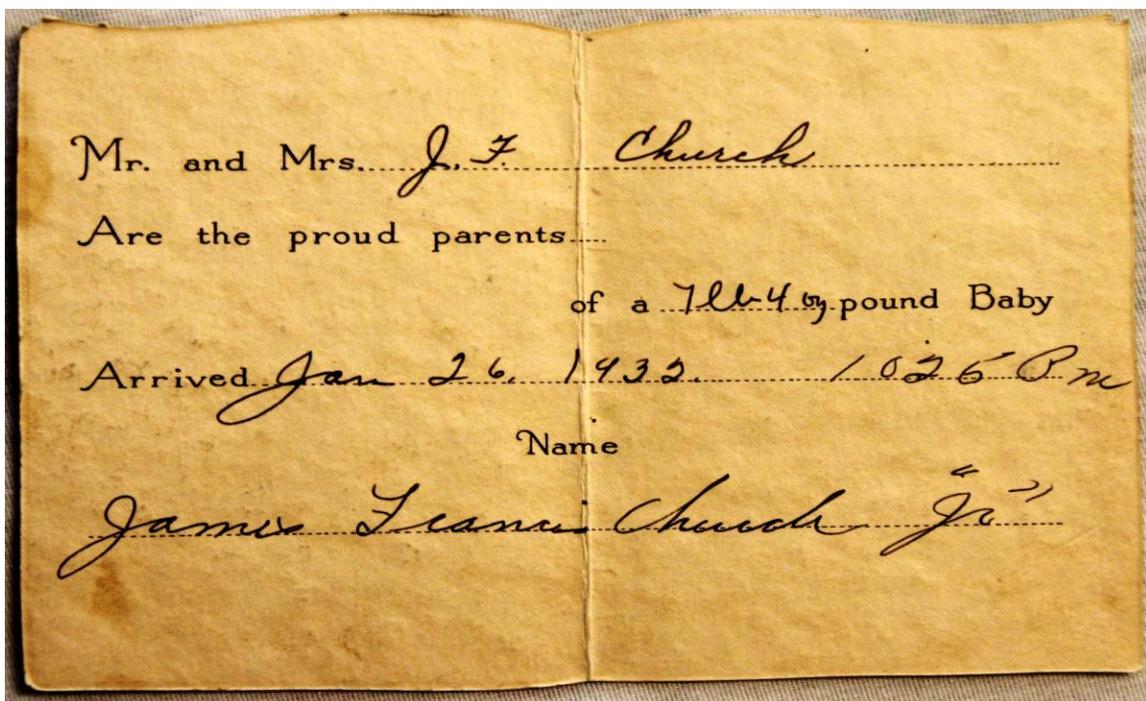
Jim's father attended the University of Idaho and then went to Lewiston, Idaho to play baseball. Sacramento drafted him to play for the Sacramento Solons minor league baseball team. After breaking his ankle while preparing for the baseball season, Jim was dropped from the team.

James Church and Wilma Newington Marry

Jim Church met Wilma "Billie" Newington in Sacramento through a customer at Union Oil Company. The customer's wife was Billie's sister. Jim and Billie began to date and were married on Easter Sunday, April 5, 1931, in Sacramento's Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. Jim was driving truck out of Sacramento when a gasoline dealership became available. He took over the dealership in Lodi and he and Billie took up residence there.

From Lodi, the Church family moved to Vacaville for a couple years. After President Franklin D Roosevelt was elected, the President established the 40 hour work week for the first time. Jim's Union Oil representative told the workers to write down 40 hours on their timesheet but they would still have to work 10 to 14 hours a day to make deliveries. On that day, Jim handed in his keys and quit his job. He was a man of principle; he did not cheat his employer nor would he participate in the dishonesty of his employer.

Jim and Billie Church Become Parents of Three Children



Document courtesy of the Church Family

Announcement of the Birth of James Francis Church, Jr in 1932

Jim's wife Billie had three children in three years. Their firstborn son James was born in Lodi; Catherine Mae was born in Vacaville; and Elizabeth Marie was born at Providence Hospital,

Oakland. The physical and psychological toll on Billie giving birth to three children so close together was the probable cause of her post-partum depression. In the hope of starting a new life and the need for family to help with the children, the Church family returned to Idaho. Billie's health did not improve and she died in Idaho. Little Jim was only three years old when his mother died.

James Church Marries Mary Driscoll



Photo courtesy of the Church Family

Bishop Edward Kelly officiates at the wedding of James Church and Mary Driscoll in 1940

Mary Driscoll, Jim's future second mother, had been a top student in the local Catholic High School in Boise and became the secretary of Bishop Edward Kelly, bishop of Idaho. Mary and the bishop wrote a column for the local Catholic newspaper. She was the actual author of the articles that answered questions sent in by the readers. Mary wrote under the penname of Father John.

Jim Church knew Mary Driscoll since she was a very young girl. They used to ride the same school bus. When Mary came home on the weekends from Boise, she went out with James and they began to date. They were married in January 1940 at the Cathedral in Boise, Idaho by Bishop Kelly.

The Church Family Returns to Sacramento

Jim and Mary and the three children moved to Sacramento. Emmett Reagan, a local Sacramentan, owned a number of bars in the Capital City and an oil company in Roseville. He

hired Jim to drive a fuel delivery truck, a job which he held for a number of years. Mr Church also worked on oil ships in Stockton, Oakland and San Francisco during World War II.

The Church Family Expands in Number



Photo courtesy of the Church Family

James, Catherine and Elizabeth in 1939

Jim and Mary Church enlarged the family until they had 8 boys and 6 girls. Mr Church lived to the age of 99 and 10 months and Jim's mother Mary has a clear mind, is active and going strong at nearly 98 years of age.

Jim Church's Schooling

Young Jim Church attended primary school in Fruitland, Idaho for his first two years. After moving to Sacramento in 1940, he attended Immaculate Conception Parish School in the Oak Park area of Sacramento until he graduated from grammar school. Jim had great athletic potential and excelled in the parochial league in football, basketball and baseball.

Christian Brothers High School Class of 1950

In 1946, Jim entered Christian Brothers High School as a freshman and attended all four years at CB, graduating in 1950. He earned seven varsity letters, competing in basketball as a forward, baseball as a pitcher and an outfielder, and as an end in football.

During his high school senior year, Jim led the Christian Brothers *Gaels* to the city high school basketball championship, scoring 168 points in 20 games. He was the only *Gael* selected to be on the All-City Basketball Team that season. In the 1950 baseball season, Jim batted 429, had 6 wins and 1 loss, striking out 48 players while walking only 12. He was the unanimous choice of the Sacramento Bee and Sacramento Union All-City Baseball Team.

Besides excelling in sports, Jim was an outstanding student in both scholastics and student government. He was a school principal's dream of a model student. He carried a grade average between 3.6 and 4.0 all four years at CB. Jim was a class officer in his freshman and sophomore years, a student-body officer his junior year and student-body president during the spring semester of his senior year.

The Beginnings of a Vocation to the Priesthood

Jim had thought about the priesthood a little bit. One summer the parish held a summer school for students and the Sisters told Jim that one day he would be a great baseball player. A Maryknoll priest who had served in China told Jim he should consider the priesthood. That started him thinking. In 1950, Christian Brothers had a retreat given by a Franciscan priest. The

Franciscan asked if anyone wanted to talk about priesthood he would be available. Jim decided to talk to the Franciscan who suggested that he check out the seminary.

In the meantime, Father Jim Mulligan who helped with the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), offered to take any young men to visit the seminary. Jim visited Saint Joseph Seminary in Mountain View a couple of times and then began praying, asking Mary to help him discern if he should become a priest.

Jim Enters Saint Joseph Seminary in Mountain View



Photo courtesy of the Church family

Jim entered Saint Joseph Seminary as a college freshman in the fall of 1950. A number of good athletes entered the seminary that year and Jim was one of them. Math and science were his primary interests and he excelled in them. Jim had the highest scores in the class in these subjects. After two years at Saint Joseph Seminary, Jim moved to Saint Patrick Seminary, Menlo Park, for the next six years.

A Budding Baseball Career

Jim Church played a lot of sports in the seminary and had a great time. In the summers he was part of a baseball league in Northern California and played semi-professional baseball. Major league scouts Joe Devine of the Yankees and Bernie De Viveras of the Tigers spoke with Jim's father regarding the future of young Jim in baseball. When they found out he was in the seminary, they wanted Mr Church's assurance that should his son decide to try out for professional baseball, they would be contacted. But Jim, Jr was interested in only one team, the Padres, not the San Diego Padres but the priest padres.

Jim with his Father and Grandmother at St Joseph Seminary 1952

James Church is ordained a Priest in 1958

James Church was ordained a priest on June 14, 1958 by Bishop Joseph McGucken in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. His first assignment for only a few months was Holy Rosary Parish in Woodland where he filled in for the vacationing pastor, Monsignor John Tumulty.

His first permanent assignment was to Saint Isidore Parish in Yuba City where he worked with Father Bernard (Barney) McElwee who was pastor. Father Jim ministered in Yuba City from August 1, 1958 to June 30, 1960. During that time the present metal church was built.

Father Church says that Bishop McGucken would not allow the parish to install air conditioning and he made some comments about that decision. Soon after, Bishop McGucken called Father Jim to his office and assigned him to teach at Christian Brothers High School.



Photo courtesy of the Church Family

James Church is ordained a Priest by Bishop Joseph McGucken in June 1958

Father Church Assigned to Teach at his Alma Mater, Christian Brothers High School

Father Church taught at Christian Brothers High School for seven years. During this time, he lived in residence for a brief time at Sacred Heart Church and then moved to All Hallows rectory where he resided for two years during the pastorate of Father John Maguire. From 1962 to 1967 he lived in residence at Immaculate Conception Parish.

Summer Classes

In the summers, Father Church attended classes in colleges and universities around the country and when he returned in the fall he never knew where he would be assigned. Monsignor James Poole, Superintendent of Catholic Schools, acted as a guide to Father Church in his educational career.

In the meantime, the Vatican was trying to appoint Monsignor Poole a bishop. Father Church says Monsignor Poole received the invitation to be bishop of Boise but he did not want to accept the position. Bishop Armstrong tried to convince Poole to accept but he was definite about not being a bishop and declined the appointment.

Father Church was appointed to teaching positions in whatever school he was needed. He served as a teacher at Saint Pius X Seminary from 1969 to 1973.

Assistant Superintendent of Catholic School

Monsignor Poole asked Father Church to work in the Catholic School Department and he was appointed Assistant Superintendent of Catholic Schools, a position he held for a number of

years. During those years he lived in residence at the Cathedral, Saint Paul Parish, Saint Peter Parish and Saint Anne Parish. At this point, Father Church was interested in getting back to parish work and he told the bishop: "If I wanted to be a teacher all my life I would have become a Jesuit." Soon after, he received an appointment to his first pastorate.

Named Monsignor

Toward the end of Bishop Bell's tenure as Bishop of Sacramento, Father Church was honored by Pope Paul VI by being named a Monsignor. He was installed as a Monsignor by Bishop Alden Bell in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacramento on January 21, 1977, five days shy of his 45th birthday.

First Pastorate, Saint Peter Church, Sacramento



Monsignor Church was appointed to his first pastorate at Saint Peter Parish in Sacramento from 1983-1994. He enjoyed his eleven years at Saint Peter Church because he found the people and the religious sisters to be fine people.

Named Pastor of Saint Philomene Parish

Bishop William Weigand appointed Monsignor Church pastor of Saint Philomene Parish where he served from 1994 to 2000. While pastor of this parish, he was involved in the renovation of the church.

A Move to Saint Charles Parish

The next appointment for Monsignor Church was to Saint Charles parish in 2000 where he served for the next six years. He enjoyed the people of the parish and found the parish school to be very positive. The Sacred Heart Sisters who taught at the school had a conflict with the previous pastor and Monsignor Church believes he was sent there to pull the community back together.

Last Assignment, Saint Rose Parish

In 2006, Bishop Weigand accepted Monsignor Kavanagh's request to retire and asked Monsignor Church if he would serve as pastor of Saint Rose Parish. Monsignor Church was 75 at the time and ready to retire. The Diocesan Finance Department took the parish financial records hoping to figure out the realities of the parish. Monsignor Church invited Monsignor Kavanagh to continue living in residence at the rectory.

Monsignor Church Retires in 2014

In the summer of 2014, after talking with Monsignor Church's family, Bishop Soto asked Monsignor Church to step down from his role as pastor of Saint Rose Church. He moved to Saint Anthony Parish in the Pocket Area to be priest in residence. After a few months, with his family's encouragement, Monsignor Church moved to Mercy McMahon Terrace where he now lives.



Although this is not the place he chose to live, he says life at this Catholic retirement facility is OK.

On Sundays, Monsignor Church gathers with his family. His mother lives in her own home with some of her children living with her. She is very content surrounded by her many children and grandchildren who drop by daily to see her. She attends daily Mass at either Immaculate Conception or Sacred Heart Churches.



Photo courtesy of the Church Family

Little Jim at Two Years of Age

Final Thoughts

Having been a priest for 57 years, Monsignor James Church says he has had a peaceful experience as a priest. His life has been happy and he continues to enjoy a rich life with his extended family and his many friends made over a lifetime.

Monsignor Church has touched the lives of many people during a lifetime of ministry in the Sacramento Diocese. We are grateful for his witness and ministry and wish him blessings from God and continued love and support from his family and many friends.

AD MULTOS ANNOS!

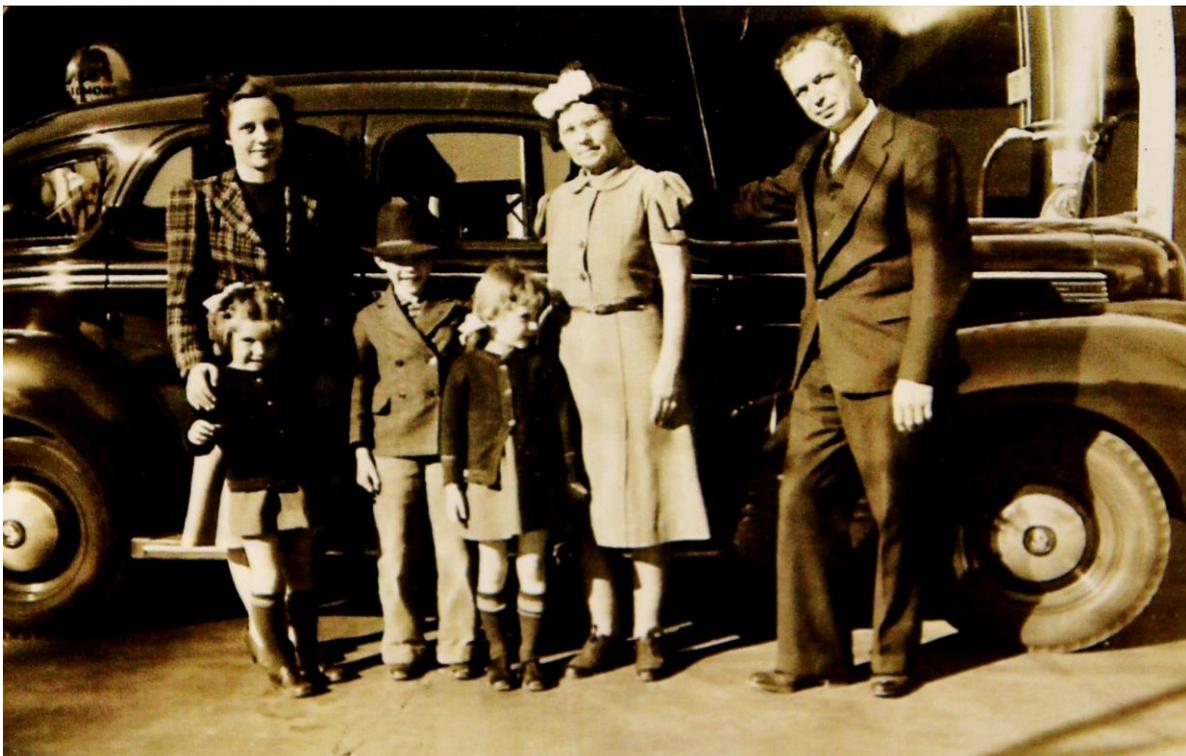


Photo courtesy of the Church Family

L-R, Mary Church, Betty, Jim, Cathy and Kate & David Newington, Great Uncle and Aunt, 1940



Father Ed Barden with Betty, Jim and Cathy



Senior at Christian Brothers 1950



Photo courtesy of the Church Family

First Priestly Blessing on Ordination Day 1958



Photo courtesy of the Church Family

Monsignor Church with his Parents, James and Mary Church, at his 35th Anniversary



Photo courtesy of the Church Family

Jim McNamara inducts Monsignor Church into Christian Brothers Hall of Fame in 1997

Diocesan Assignments 1958-2008

Ordained: June 14, 1958

Diocese of Sacramento by Bishop McGucken

1958	Holy Rosary Parish, Woodland	Asst. Pastor
1958-1960	St. Isidore Parish, Yuba City	Asst. Pastor
1960-1964	Bishop Armstrong High School: Faculty & Financial Administrator (1962-64)	
1960	<i>Sacred Heart, Sacramento</i>	<i>In Residence</i>
1960-1962	<i>All Hallows, Sacramento</i>	<i>In Residence</i>
1962-1965	<i>Immaculate Conception</i>	<i>In Residence</i>
1964-1967	St. Francis High School: Faculty & Financial Administrator,	
1966-1969	Diocesan School Board	
1965-1969	<i>St. Paul Parish, Sacramento</i>	<i>In Residence</i>
1967	Christian Brothers High School: Faculty & Counselor	
1968-1973	St. Pius X Seminary, Galt: Faculty & Financial Administrator	
1970-1983	Assistant Superintendent of Schools	
1972-1973	<i>Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament</i>	<i>In Residence</i>
1973-1975	<i>St. Paul Parish, Sacramento</i>	<i>In Residence</i>
1975-1978	<i>St. Peter Parish, Sacramento</i>	<i>In Residence</i>
1978-1981	<i>St. Anne Parish, Sacramento</i>	<i>In Residence</i>
1981-1983	<i>St. Paul Parish, Sacramento</i>	<i>In Residence</i>
1983-1994	St. Peter Parish, Sacramento	Pastor
1994-2000	St. Philomene Parish, Sacramento	Pastor
2000-2006	St. Charles Parish, Sacramento	Pastor
2006 —	St. Rose Parish, Sacramento	Pastor



Photo by John E Boll 2015

Monsignor Church with his Mother, Mary Church, at the Family home in Sacramento

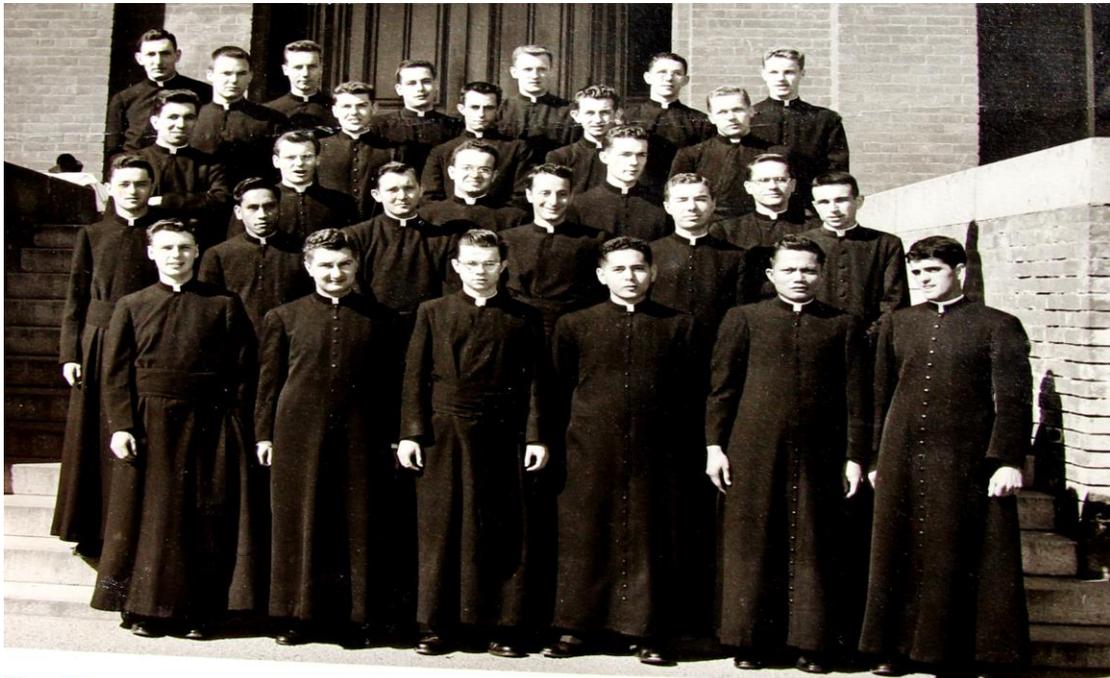


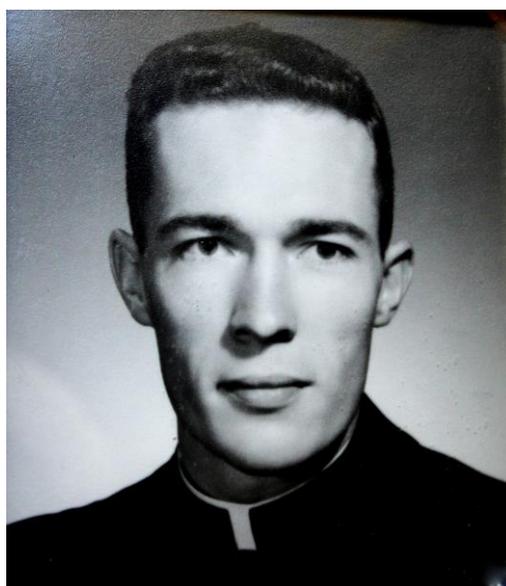
Photo courtesy of the Church Family

Jim Church's Seminary Class at Saint Patrick Seminary, Menlo Park



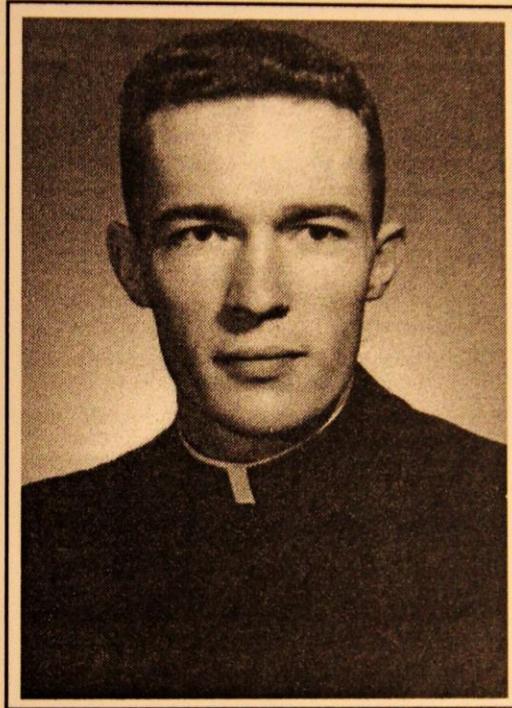
Photo courtesy of Church Family

Monsignor Church Celebrates Mass at Saint Peter Parish, Sacramento



Newly Ordained Father James Church

Monsignor James Church
Ordained to the Priesthood
June 14, 1958



GOLDEN JUBILEE CELEBRATION

June 14, 2008

Immaculate Conception Church
32nd Street & Broadway
Sacramento, California