

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

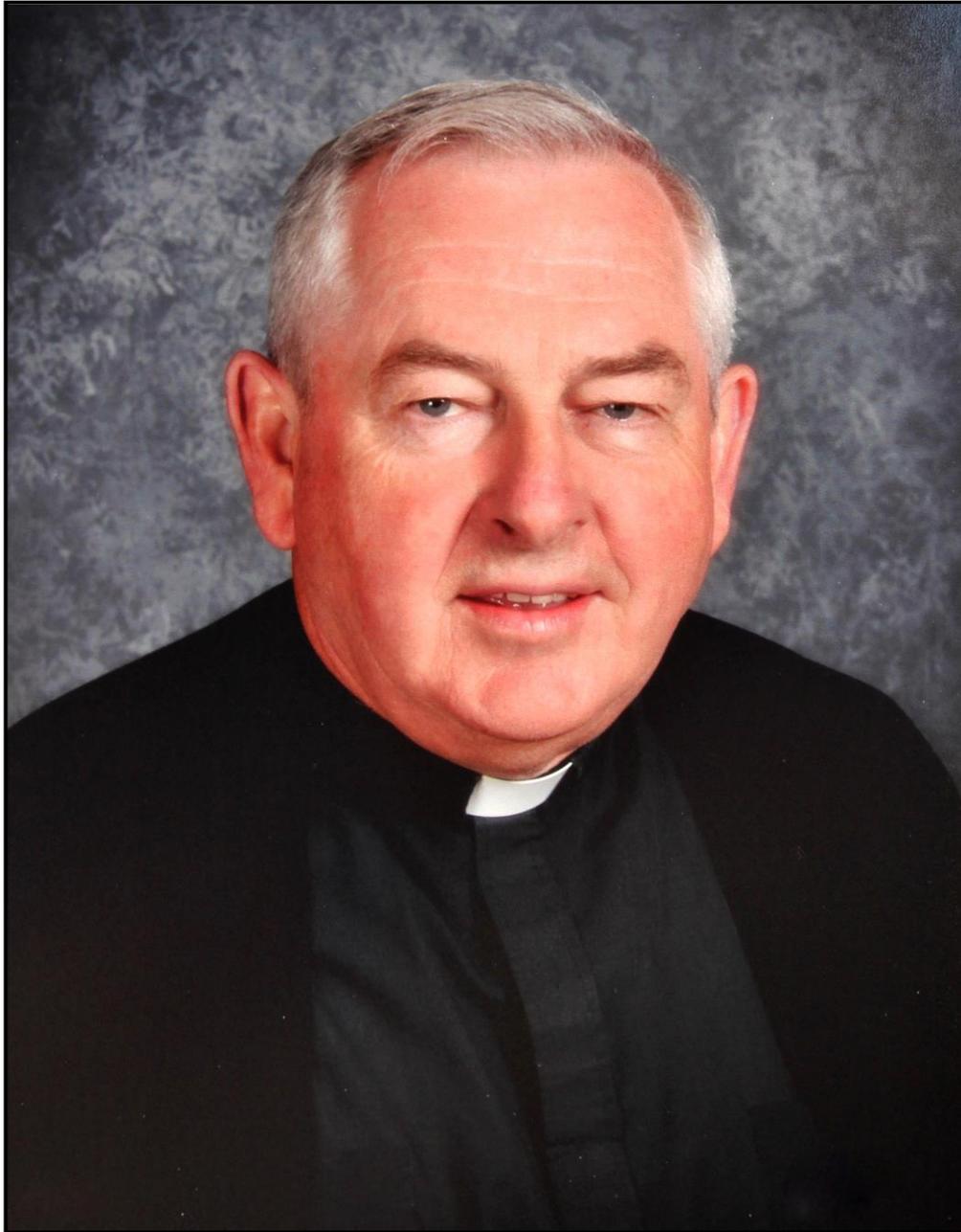
Vol 3

January 2016

No 22

MONSIGNOR ALBERT GERARD O'CONNOR Pastor Emeritus of Holy Spirit Parish, Sacramento

By Fr John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist



Monsignor Albert Gerard O'Connor

Albert Gerard O'Connor was born in a small town in Galway Ireland called Milltown, the youngest of six children born to Patrick O'Connor and Mary Catherine McGoldrick. Al's father Patrick was the local police sergeant and his mother Mary Catherine raised their six children. Al's father Patrick died suddenly in 1955, probably from a heart attack, as he walked down the street in Milltown. After Patrick's untimely death, Mary Catherine moved her family from Milltown and settled in Dromod, County Leitrim, where Al's mother was born and raised. Al attended grade school there for one year and then enrolled at Saint Jarlath College, Tuam where he spent his high school years and graduated in 1961.

Beginning Seminary Life

In the early 1960s, vocations to the priesthood were in the air. Young men thought about priesthood and so too did Al. He enrolled in All Hallows College, Dublin in 1961. The course of studies was 6 years and in his first year at All Hallows, Al met James Murphy who told him he was studying for the Diocese of Sacramento. Al thought to himself, "Maybe I should apply to Sacramento since my cousin, Monsignor John McGarry, is serving in the Sacramento Diocese." He made a request to the seminary president that he study for the Diocese of Sacramento and was accepted.

Father O'Connor Ordained a Priest

Al was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Sacramento on June 18, 1967 in the All Hallows Seminary chapel by Bishop John Scanlon, an alumnus of All Hallows and a priest of the Archdiocese of San Francisco who became bishop of the Diocese of Honolulu.

First Assignment

Father O'Connor left Ireland in September 1967 and arrived in Sacramento. He was assigned as a parochial vicar to Saint John Vianney Parish in Rancho Cordova where Monsignor Richard Dwyer was pastor. He spent two years in Rancho Cordova and then was assigned to Sacred Heart Parish, Sacramento where Monsignor Gerald O'Driscoll was pastor.

Appointed to Head the Marriage Tribunal

In January 1972, Bishop Bell asked Father O'Connor if he would take over the running of the Marriage Tribunal. This is not something he wanted to do but says "being dumb" he accepted the appointment. He spent more than six years in the Tribunal until he was assigned parish administrator of Immaculate Conception Parish in Sutter Creek where he spent two and a half happy years until Bishop Quinn, newly appointed bishop of Sacramento, asked him if he would take on the role of chancellor of the diocese. This again was not something Father Al wanted to do but he accepted the position and served as diocesan chancellor for the next six years.

Father O'Connor Named Monsignor and Appointed Chaplain to His Holiness in 1977

As Bishop Bell approached the age of 75 and prepared to retire as Bishop of Sacramento, he no doubt wanted to honor those priests who had borne the heat of the day in ministry and to thank his clerical staff who helped him carry out his duties as bishop.

In 1977, Pope Paul VI named 12 priests of the Diocese of Sacramento as Prelates of Honor of His Holiness and 7 priests as Chaplains of His Holiness. The new monsignori of the diocese were installed on Sunday, October 23, 1977 by Bishop Bell in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament.

Prelates of Honor of His Holiness

The 12 Prelates of Honor were Fathers William Daley, pastor of Saint Canice Parish, Nevada City; James Kenny, pastor of Saint John Parish, Carmichael, Francis Sullivan, pastor emeritus of Saint Joseph Parish, Yreka; Hugh McTague, pastor of Saint Robert Parish, Sacramento; William Horgan, pastor emeritus of Saint Mel Parish, Fair Oaks; James Corcoran, pastor of Saint Rose Parish, Roseville; Virgil Gabrielli, pastor of Saint Lawrence Parish, North Highlands; Raymond Rolf, pastor of the Cathedral; Edward Kavanagh, pastor of Saint Rose Parish, Sacramento; Edmund O'Neil, pastor of Holy Spirit Parish, Sacramento and Superintendent of Catholic Schools; Patrick Nolan, Director of Catholic Social Services; and Eymard Gallagher, pastor of Presentation Parish, Sacramento.

Chaplains of His Holiness

Those who were named Chaplains of His Holiness were Fathers Gerard Schons, Vicar for the Spanish Speaking; Valdemiro Fegundes, pastor of Saint Elizabeth Parish, Sacramento; James Church, assistant superintendent of Catholic Schools; Murrough Wallace, director of the Catholic Youth Organization and president of the Priests' Council; Russell Terra, director of Religious Education – CCD; James Kidder, secretary to Bishop Bell and Director of Vocations; and Albert O'Connor, Vice-Chancellor.

Appointed Chancellor of the Diocese

His term as chancellor was challenging and Monsignor Al learned a lot. He was involved in all matter of diocesan business. At that time the diocese was changing and many new things were introduced. For example, this was the time when the diocese established job descriptions, pay classifications and a retirement plan was introduced for lay employees.

In Residence

While Monsignor O'Connor was chancellor he lived in residence in Saint Joseph rectory in Elk Grove with Father Leo McAlister as pastor and later was transferred to Saint Mel Parish in Fair Oaks where Father Doheny was pastor.

Monsignor O'Connor Named Pastor of Elk Grove

In April 1886, Monsignor Al was appointed pastor of Saint Joseph Parish, Elk Grove and served there until July 2005. The Elk Grove assignment was very challenging. When he arrive in Elk Grove, the whole area had a population of 10,000 people and when he left 19 years later the population had grown to 135,000 people.

Establishment of the Laguna Parish Mission

This growth called for the establishment of a mission church in the Laguna area of the parish which Monsignor O'Connor established. This mission church two years later was established as Good Shepherd Parish in Laguna.



Photo by John E Boll 2010

Good Shepherd Church, Elk Grove

Building of Saint Paul Mission Church in Rancho Murieta

At the same time the Rancho Murieta area became a mission of the Elk Grove parish. Under Monsignor O'Connor's leadership, a new church and hall were built in Rancho Murieta in 2000. At the same time, the facilities at Saint Joseph Church had to be enlarged to meet the growing Catholic population in Elk Grove. It was a busy time raising money, building facilities and serving the pastoral needs of the people. Monsignor Al remembers that one Christmas he had to schedule 13 Masses to serve the sacramental needs of the parish community.



Photo by John E Boll 2014

Saint Vincent de Paul Mission Church, Rancho Murieta

Monsignor Renwald Lives in Residence

While serving as pastor of Saint Joseph Parish, Monsignor O'Connor says he had the great honor to reside with Monsignor Raymond Renwald in the parish rectory. Monsignor O'Connor had great admiration for Monsignor Renwald whom he regarded as the finest priest he ever met.

Pastor of Holy Spirit Parish, Sacramento

After serving Saint Joseph Parish for 19 years, Monsignor O'Connor was appointed pastor of Holy Spirit Parish in Sacramento's Land Park area in July 2005. Once again he was involved in renovation of the rectory, the parish school and the complete renovation of the parish church. The convent next to the school was in desperate need of repair as well. The whole sewer system of the convent had to be replaced. As it turned out, every parish building was renovated. When all that work was completed, Monsignor Al was tired and he decided it was time to retire. He says this was the best decision he ever made in his life.

Happiest Times of Ministry

Monsignor O'Connor's happiest times in his ministry were those of serving the people in a parish, either as associate or as pastor. For him, the people were always wonderful, supportive and helpful, and serving them was the joy of his life.



Photo by John E Boll 2012

Renovated Holy Spirit Church, Land Park Drive, Sacramento



Photo courtesy of Msgr Al O'Connor

Father Patrick O'Connor, Sister Teresa O'Connor and Monsignor Albert O'Connor

Monsignor Al says that leaving Ireland was difficult but he recalls that before he left his homeland, his brother John had already moved to New York and two of his sisters had left Ireland, one to New York and the other to London.

In Al's family, the first three children were girls, Maura, Veronica and Teresa. The first two sisters married and had families while Teresa became a nun. She went to New York, worked and became an American citizen and then returned to Ireland to enter religious life. She joined the Marist Sisters. After her religious profession, she was assigned to work in the United States in the city of Detroit. She has spent her entire ministry serving the Catholic community in America. She has now retired in Detroit where she continues to live with her religious community.

Monsignor Al's brother John immigrated to New York where he was employed by American Express. Over his career he has served all around the world and now lives in retirement in Chicago with his family.

Monsignor Al's brother Patrick entered Saint Patrick Seminary in Maynooth where he studied for the priesthood and was ordained in 1966 for the Archdiocese of Tuam. Father Pat has had many assignment in his nearly 50 years of priesthood in Ireland but now serves as pastor of Saint Mary Church in Mount Bellew, County Galway. He will retire on June 30, 2016 on his 50th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood.



Photo courtesy of Msgr Al O'Connor

The O'Connor Family: Monsignor Al, Veronica, Father Pat, Maura and John

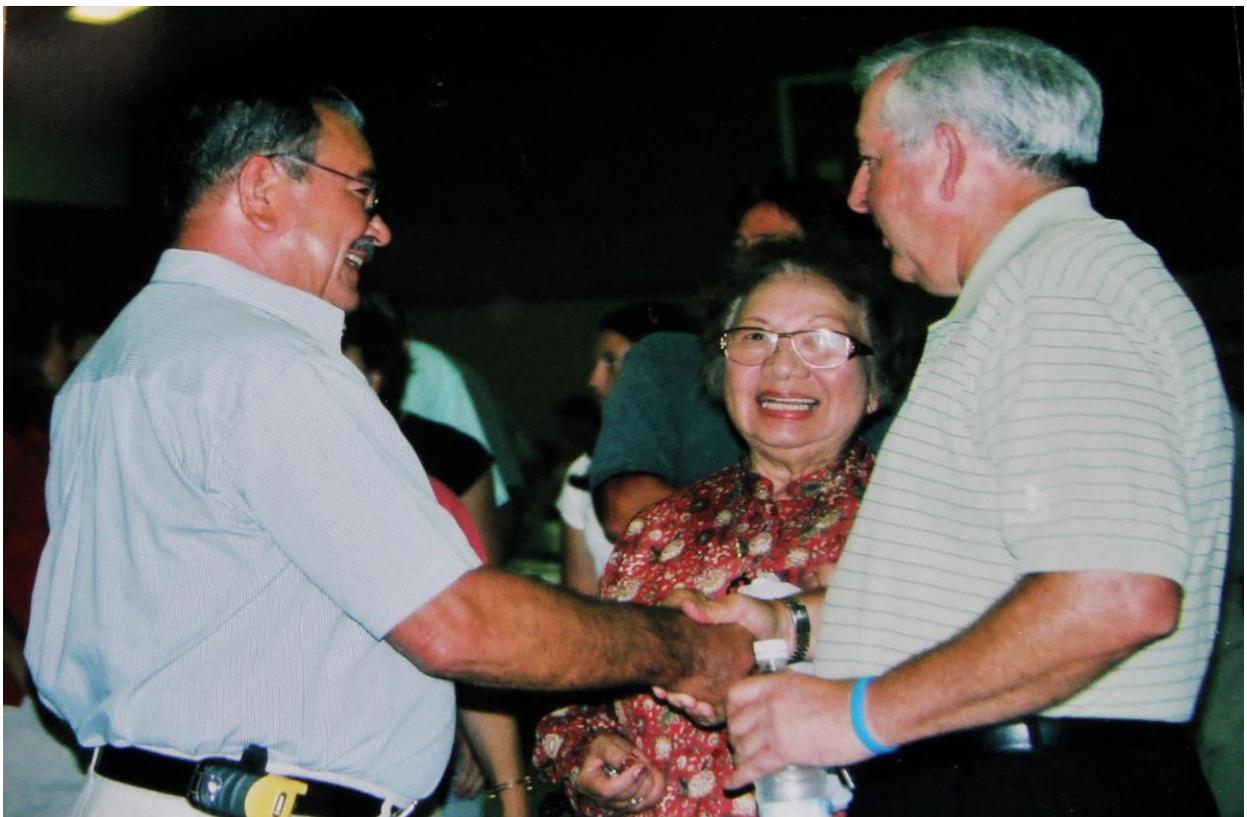


Photo courtesy of Msgr Al O'Connor

Farewell celebration for Monsignor O'Connor as he left Elk Grove in 2005

Because the Diocese of Sacramento had a history of many Irish priests serving this diocese, Monsignor Al felt very much at home when he arrived in Sacramento. There were many young priests in the diocese, many of whom attended All Hallows Seminary with Al. In the 1960s there were cheap flights to Ireland and Al was able to fly home to Ireland for vacation every year and has continued to do so for the past 48 years.

Monsignor O'Connor is thankful to the Diocese of Sacramento for accepting him for service in the diocese, paying for his education and allowing him to have a wonderful life of ministry to the Church of Sacramento. He has given of himself over these past 48 years so his ministry has been a win/win for himself and for the Church of Sacramento.

For the past five years, Monsignor O'Connor has lived at the Priests' Retirement Village in Citrus Heights and feels blessed to live with 17 other brother priests while still having the freedom of living in his own apartment. He is grateful to the Diocese of Sacramento for providing this beautiful retirement facility for our priests who choose to live in this fraternal community setting.

The Church of Sacramento is grateful to Monsignor Al for the nearly 50 years of ministry and leadership he has given this diocese and to Sacramento Diocesan Bishops Bell, Quinn, Weigand and Soto. We wish him good health and many happy years of retirement.

Ad Multos Annos!



Monsignor Al O'Connor in Retirement in 2016