

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

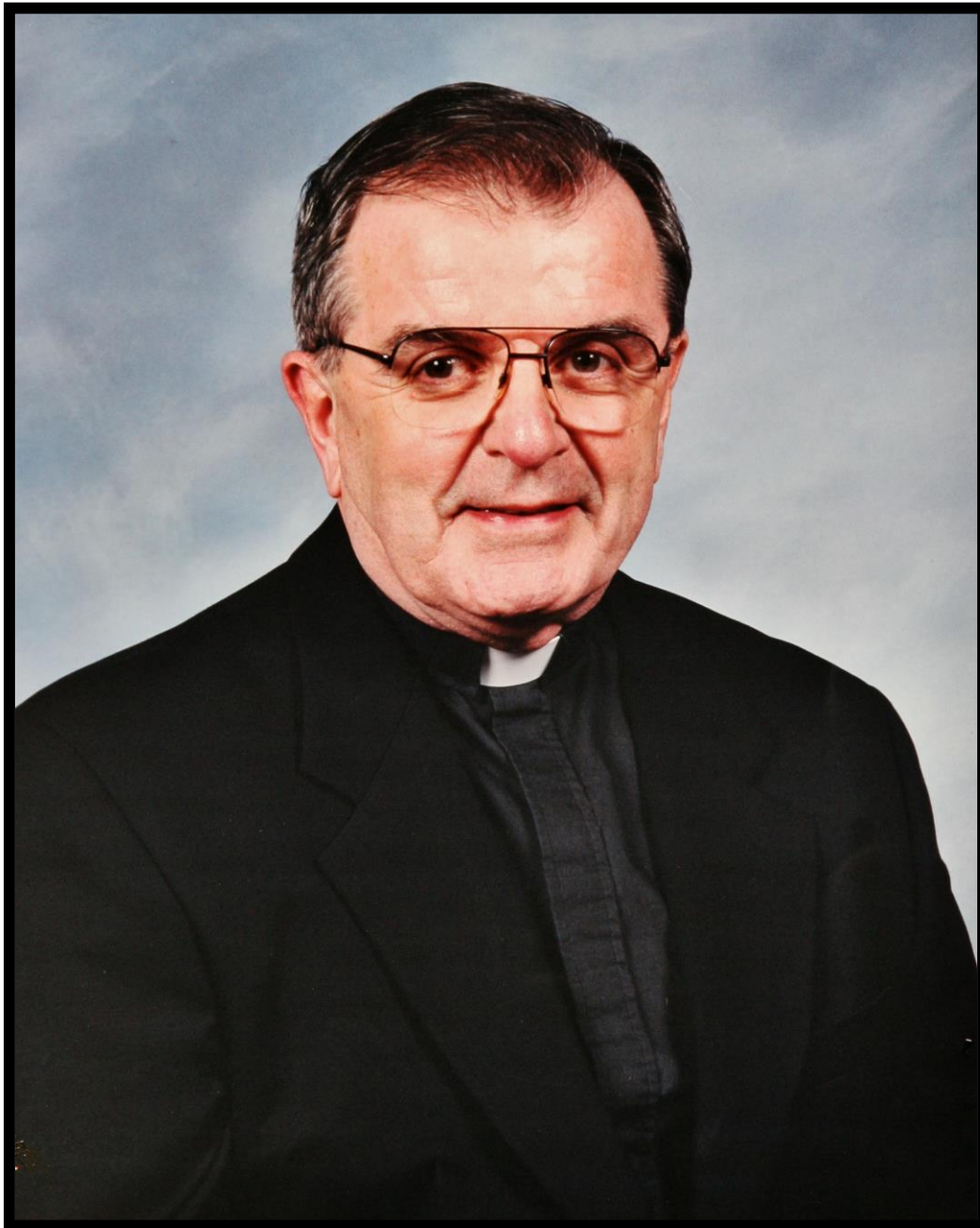
Vol 3

November 2013

No 7

FATHER JOHN PATRICK SULLIVAN Pastor Emeritus of Saint Patrick Parish, Placerville

Interview by Father John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist



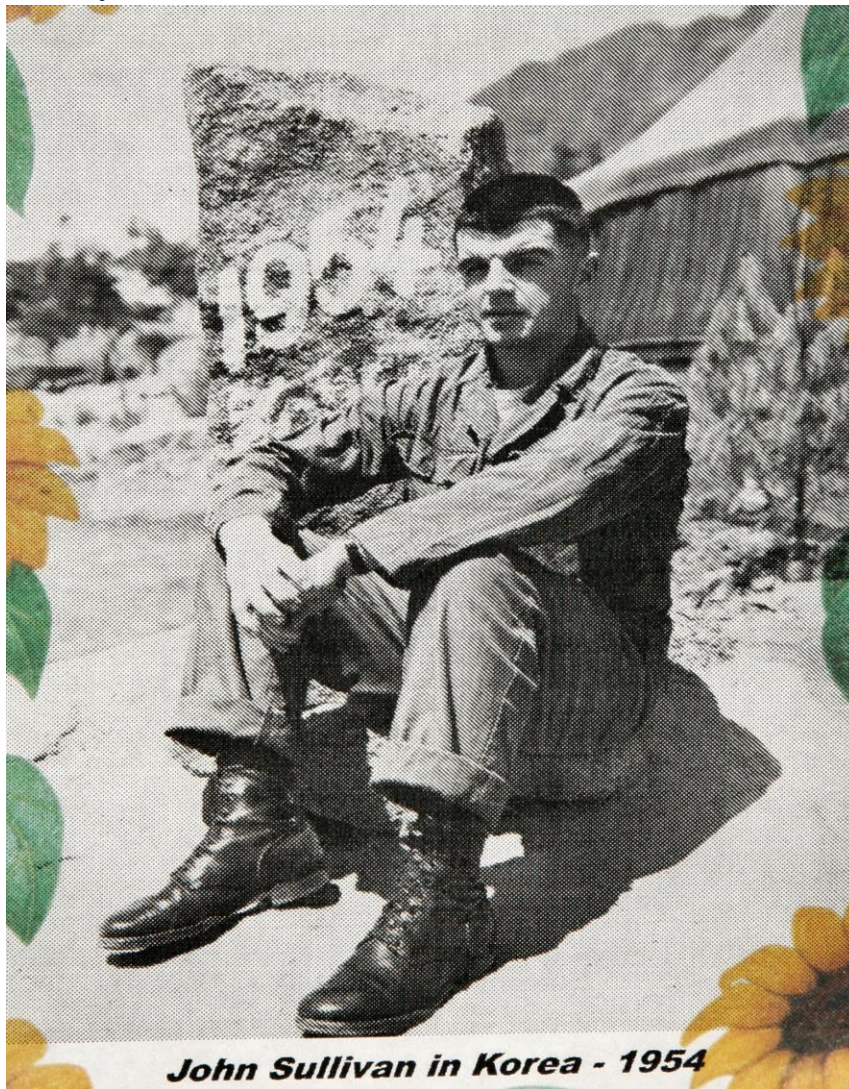
Father John Patrick Sullivan

John Patrick Sullivan was born June 30, 1933 in Lodi, California, the fifth of seven children born to Eugene Sullivan and Anne Farrell. The family lived mid-way between Lodi and Galt on a dairy farm that also included vineyards. John's brothers and sisters include Eugene, William, Margaret, Sheila, John, Timothy and Terese.

School Days

John began school at Oakview Elementary School and then attended Galt High School. He graduated from high school in 1951 and registered for the draft. He was drafted a year later at the age of 19 and did his military training at Camp Roberts. He served in the Army Medical Corps in Korea during the Korean conflict in the first half of the 1950s.

Military Service in Korea



There was a cease fire in Korea just before John arrived there. He says his job in Korea was more like a mini chaplain because the soldiers who came for medical attention told the medical corps all their problems. John served in Korea until February 1955 when he returned to California.

John's parents were not in good physical condition and since he was the last of the children living at home he took care of them. He started working for the Crane Company, a wholesale plumbing business, where he was employed for a year and a half. He then took a job at McClellan Field in Sacramento as a data processor for the next seven years.

Beginning of Seminary Life

John's mother died in 1960 which relieved him of some stress. His father sold the ranch and had sufficient funds to take care of himself financially. In 1963 John made a Cursillo with Father Gene Lucas and Father Anton Pollard, OFM. The Cursillo enabled him to come to grips with his life. The Lord was saying to him, "John, do something with your life!"



Father Cletus LaMere, SDS was the vocation director for the Diocese of Sacramento. He met with John and recommended that he go to Saint Nazianz Seminary in Milwaukee to do his senior year over in order to catch up on Latin and Greek. John was 31 years of age and had served two years in Korea. Having to return to high school was very difficult for him. Much later with a twinkle in his eye he told Father Cletus he would never forgive him for sending him back to high school.

John Transfers to St Patrick Seminary

The Salvatorians had a college named Mount Saint Paul in Waukesha, WI and John attended college there. He graduated from Mount Saint Paul in 1969 and transferred to Saint Patrick Seminary in Menlo Park. Saint Patrick was going through a major revision and seminary life was in flux. He

finished his first year of theology and as he began his second year he felt he could not do this anymore. He spoke with the rector Father James Laubacker and told him he probably would not continue. Father Laubacker told John that there were other options for him. John decided to see what the “other options” would be.

Father Sullivan Ordained a Priest

During his third year, John lived at Saint Timothy Parish and commuted three days a week to the seminary. At the end of his second year of theology he was ordained a deacon at the age of 38 and enjoyed his year at the parish. On December 16, 1972, John was ordained a priest by Bishop Alden J Bell in the Sacramento Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament.

First Assignment

Father John’s first assignment was Saint Basil Parish in Vallejo where Monsignor John Terwilliger was pastor. About a month after Father John’s arrival at the parish, Father Michael McFadden was assigned to the parish and Fathers John and Michael worked together for two years at Saint Basil Parish.

First Appointment as Pastor

In October 1974, Father John was appointed pastor of Sacred Heart Parish, Fort Jones after being ordained only 22 months. Bishop Bell felt that because John was 40, he was ready to take on Sacred Heart Parish; but the real truth was that Bishop Bell could not get anyone else to go there! Father John went to Fort Jones to check out the parish and immediately fell in love with

the area. He served as pastor of Fort Jones for eleven years, three months and 15 days. He loved the parish and the people even though he had to deal with some very cold and bitter winters.



Photo from Diocesan Archives

Sacred Heart Church, Fort Jones

A Move to Colusa

After 11 years in Fort Jones, Father John applied for Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Colusa and was appointed its pastor in February 1986. He served as Colusa's pastor for nine years and in May 1995 he was named pastor of Saint Patrick Parish, Placerville. Father John says that Colusa was a tough parish to pastor. He found the Colusa Hispanic community to be very positive and John did his best to support them even though his ability to speak Spanish was not strong. It was in Colusa that he began to learn Spanish with help from a parishioner who gave him Spanish lessons.

His Years as Pastor of Placerville

Father Sullivan arrived in Placerville on May 1, 1995 and served as pastor until December 1, 2000. He went to Mexico for six weeks to study Spanish which gave him a good start in learning the language. A parishioner tutored him twice a week so he could celebrate the weekly Sunday Spanish Mass.



Photo by John Boll 2012

Interior of St Patrick Church, Placerville

Father Sullivan liked Placerville because he found it interesting since there were many different kinds of people living in the community. During his pastorate, the parish converted the former sisters' convent into a maternity home for unwed mothers-to-be. The parish also started a ministry to the homeless of Placerville by obtaining property east of the city which was funded by El Dorado County. The county put up the building and the parish has been feeding the poor there ever since. Saint Patrick Parish continues to feed 250 to 300 homeless people every night at this dining facility.

Father John had a number of assistants during his time in Placerville. His first parochial vicar was Father Bob Taylor, SJ followed Father Rolan Pabellon, Father Tex Sentino and seminary interns Steve Foppiano, Hernando Gomez-Amaya and Oscar Figueroa.

Retirement followed by Heart Surgery

At the age of 67, Father Sullivan decided it was time to retire from active ministry. Without knowing it, he needed by-pass surgery. He felt tired all the time but thought it was caused by the process of aging. After he retired he went through some medical tests and found out he needed by-pass surgery. He had the surgery in April 2001 and felt much better immediately after. It took him a year to regain his full strength and to feel healthy again.

A Move to Holy Trinity Parish to Live in Residence



Photo by John E Boll, 2012

Interior of Holy Trinity Church, El Dorado Hills – Cameron Park

Father John moved to Holy Trinity Parish in December 2000 at the invitation of Monsignor James Kidder. After moving to the parish Father John helped with parish Masses and other ministries. Monsignor Kidder offered to give him board and room in exchange for his help with Sunday Masses. Father John lived at Holy Trinity Parish for six years and when he felt it was time for a change he moved to Holy Family Parish, Citrus Heights in 2006 at the invitation of Father Michael Kiernan. He helped at the parish and remained at Holy Family Parish until May 2010 when he moved to the Priests' Retirement Village.

Life at the Priests' Retirement Village

Living at the Priests' Retirement Village was a good move for Father John. He found the living conditions comfortable and friendship with fellow priests enjoyable. Farm boy at heart, he created a summer garden that produces tomatoes, carrots, squash and other vegetables. He was the first coordinator or "mayor" of the Priests' Village for two years.

A Move to the Chateau on Capitol Avenue

On June 15, 2015, Father John moved to the *Chateau on Capitol Avenue* on the corner of 27th and Capitol Avenue, an area of Sacramento he always liked. He continues to celebrate Sunday Mass at Saint Lawrence Church in North Highlands, a weekly Mass for the Sisters of Mercy in Auburn, on occasion at Saint Francis Church two blocks away, and ministers to Catholics at *The Chateau*.

Thanks to Father Sullivan for his Years of Service

Even though Father John started his studies for the priesthood as an “older student,” he persevered in his desire to be a priest and to serve the People of God. For the past forty years he has ministered in Vallejo by the Bay, the Siskiyou Mountains, the Sacramento Valley and the Sierra foothills. Thank you, Father John, for the gift of your life of service to the Church of Sacramento and we wish you continued good health and an ongoing green thumb as you prepare to plant the seeds of another plentiful harvest.

AD MULTOS ANNOS!



Photo by John E Boll, 2013

St John Vianney Priests' Retirement Village, Citrus Heights