

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

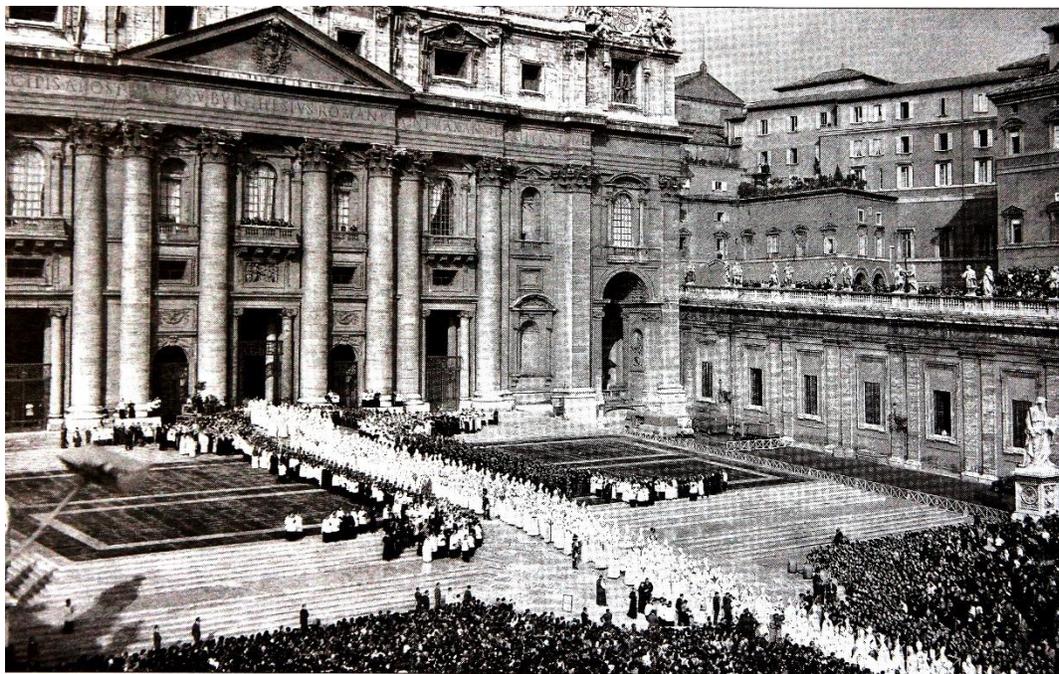
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VATICAN II WAS MOST MEMORABLE EVENT FOR BISHOP ALDEN BELL

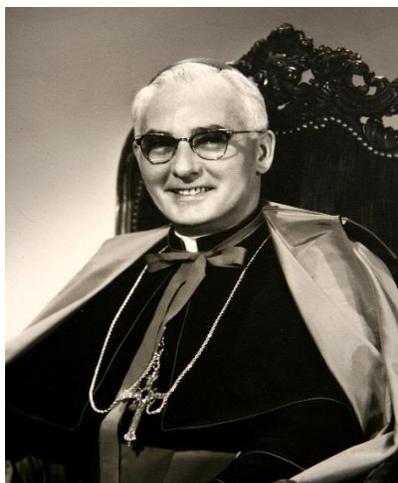
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White-clad prelates walk into St. Peter's Basilica on Oct. 11, 1962, to open the Second Vatican Council.

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The most memorable event in this century's Catholicism was the Vatican Council which met under Pope John XXIII in September of 1962 and closed under Pope Paul VI in December 1965.



Bishop Alden J Bell

Bishop Bell was only four months in the Sacramento Diocese when he was called to Rome with the other bishops of the world to begin the first of the four arduous sessions of the Council. Early in the first session he sent back to the people of the Sacramento Diocese his impressions of this historic assembly. They were published in the Herald:

“No words can adequately describe the spectacular opening day ceremony, my first view of Pope John XXIII and the realization that we were part of the total assembly of all the Catholic bishops.”

Back at his desk in Sacramento by mid-December, 1962, he talked to a Herald reporter about his experiences in Rome:

“The most vivid and lasting impression one receives from attending at the Second Vatican Council is the full evidence it displayed of the vitality and catholicity of the Catholic Church.

“At each session I was impressed by the vitality of the Church. Here was an organization close to 2,000 years old, rising up with intense interest to face challenges presented by new conditions around the world.

“The council displayed a readiness to meet what the modern day presents, a readiness to adapt to the time without failing the teachings of Christ. This vitality was a source of great satisfaction.”

“The evidence of the Church’s universality,” Bishop Bell remarked, “was truly striking. Here were bishops, spiritual leaders of their people, representing all races and all nations under the sun.

“When people in Rome witnessed each morning the river of purple flowing through St Peter’s entrance, they could not but be impressed.

“The variations in language, differences in clothing and numerous Rites by which they performed the sacred ceremonies offered a kaleidoscopic view of the whole world.”

Council sessions opened each day with the celebration of Mass. Seven Rites other than the Roman were used in the celebration.

“We are accustomed to Latin,” Bishop Bell stated, “but here we saw ancient Rites in different languages. These ancient Rites still in existence illustrate that any present change into the vernacular would not be without precedent.”



The dominant figure of Pope John inspired the entire Council proceedings. “I noted,” Bishop Bell commented, “that the Pope appeared in the Council wearing a mitre, identifying himself with his fellow bishops, and not the tiara, symbol of his supreme pontifical power.

“This obviously was done to show himself as one of us. He made a point of addressing the group as ‘fellow bishops’.”

Bishop Bell was present along with other members of the American Hierarchy at a special audience with the Holy Father. There the Pontiff emphasized his gratitude to the people of the United States for their loyalty to the Holy See and their generosity to the needs of the Church throughout the world.

He charged the American bishops to be sure they personally conveyed this gratitude to their people.

Commenting on the Pope's health following his recent illness, Bishop Bell remarked: "The Holy Father still needs our prayers. He is carrying a tremendous burden and he needs all possible strength to carry his council project to completion."



Photo from the Catholic Herald

Bishops Alden Bell, Hugh Donohue and Leo Maher at the Tomb of Pope John XXIII

Since Vatican II

Structural changes in the diocese

Many of the more profound changes that took place in the Sacramento diocese, and other dioceses, since the Vatican Council went unnoticed by the public generally because they were institutional changes, addressing housekeeping problems. Most of them resulted from the Vatican II concept of collegiality which called on Church leaders to share authority and responsibility in a spirit of brotherhood. Following is a list of such structural changes that took place in the Sacramento diocese under Bishop Alden J Bell, all of them with profound implications for the future of the diocese.

- Formation of a diocesan liturgical commission of priests, sisters and laity to advise the bishop on liturgical reform in the diocese. (1964)
- Formation of the Senate of Priests – a group of 20 priests elected to represent the clergy of the diocese and share in diocesan decision making (1966)
- Expansion of the diocesan board of education to include sisters and laity. (1966)
- Establishment of a personnel board to advise the bishop on all clerical appointments in the diocese (1968)

- Initiation of parish councils, groups of elected lay people to advise the pastor in matters concerning the mission of the parish. (1970)
- Establishment of a retirement fund for priests of the diocese, giving priests the opportunity and means of retiring at a reasonable age. (1970)
- Establishment of a system of due process through which anyone in the diocese may pursue the resolution of a grievance (1970)
- Establishment of a program of ongoing education through which priests and sisters may continually update their ministry training (1971)
- Establishment of the vicariate for the Spanish Speaking (1976) which replaced another office for the Spanish Speaking, the Department of Mexican Americans Affairs, established in 1970.
- Establishment of a separate office for vocations in the diocese to intensify the recruitment of vocations to the priesthood and religious life (1971)



Photo from the Catholic Herald

Priests Senate 1966

The Senate of Priests, a group of priests who dialogue with the bishop on pastoral matters, was instituted by Bishop Bell in 1966. Shown above are charter members of the senate during the meeting. Lf-Rt: Msgr Hugh McTague, Father Leo McAllister, Msgr James Mulligan (since laicized), Bishop Alden Bell, Msgr Raymond Rolf, Father George Schuster, SDS, Father Arnold Meagher (since laicized), Msgr Raymond Renwald, Father Joseph King, SJ. Not present for the photo were Father Vincent O'Reilly, and Father Charles Benken (since laicized).