

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 3

Father John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist

No 29

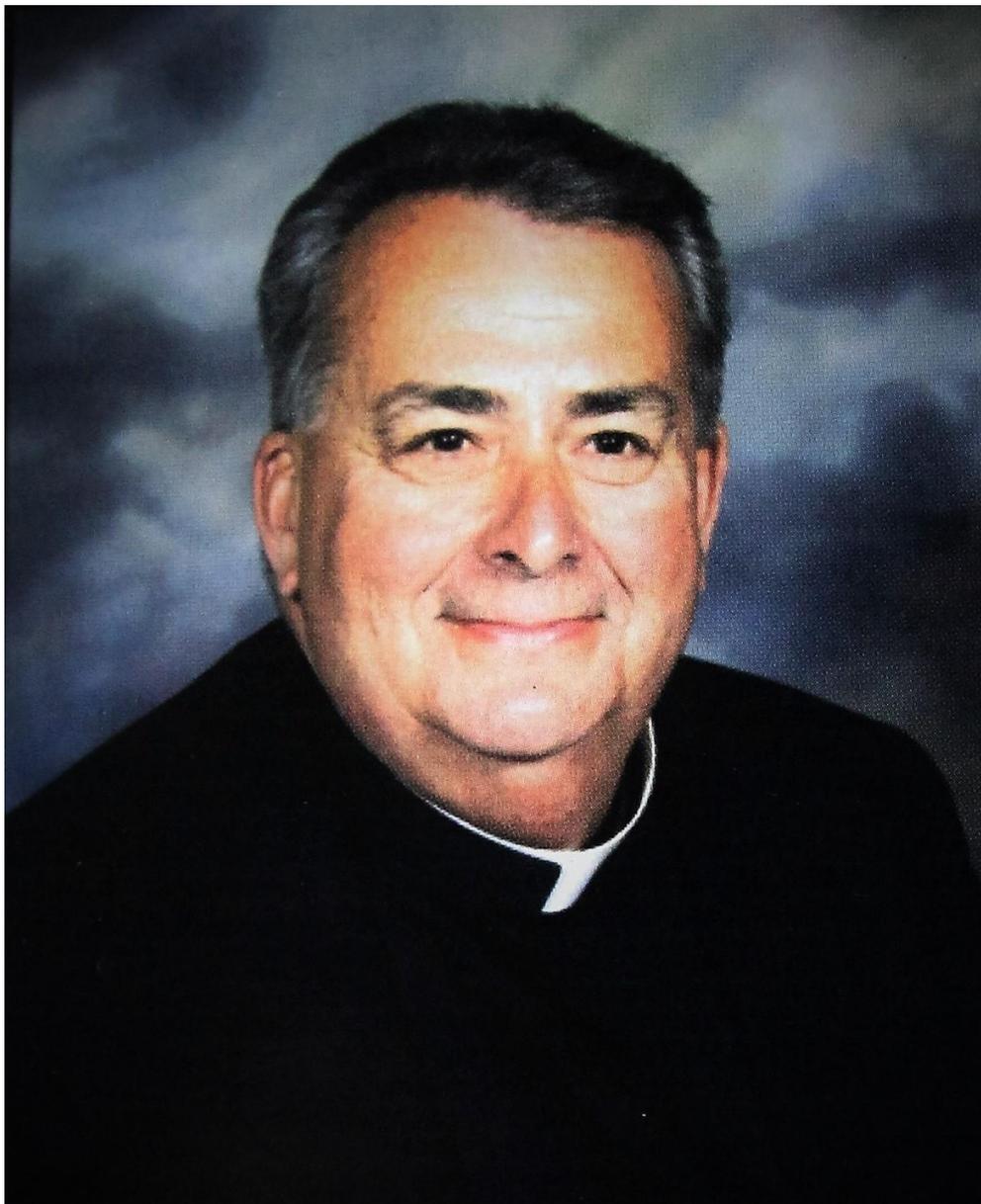
Father John Martin Lagomarsino, S.S.C.

Native Son of Sacramento

Member of the Missionary Society of Saint Columban

Retired Administrator, Saint John the Evangelist Church, Carmichael

July 2016



John Martin Lagomarsino was born on November 6, 1939 at Sutter Maternity Hospital in Sacramento. He is the middle child of three born to Louis Lawrence Lagomarsino and Helen Elizabeth Higgins. His older brother Paul Martin is a medical doctor, and his married sister is Lucia Elizabeth Foster.



John at two years of age

JOHN BEGINS HIS EDUCATION AT SACRED HEART SCHOOL

John began kindergarten in 1944 at Sacred Heart School in Sacramento and graduated from there at the end of eighth grade. In his nine years at the parish school, all his teachers were Mercy Sisters except in the fifth grade. John's teachers were Sister Mary Philomena in kindergarten; Sister Teresita, first grade; Sister Dymphna, second grade; Sister Mary Ignatius, third grade; Sister Perpetua, fourth grade; Mrs. Ashfield, fifth grade; Sister Mary Christopher, sixth grade; Sister Mary Damien (Sister Patricia Mulderrig), seventh grade; and Sister Mary Aquin, eighth grade.

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS HIGH SCHOOL

In the fall of 1953, John entered Christian Brothers High School on 21st and Broadway and attended there for two years. His mother had been a student at Dominican College in San Rafael and took five years of Latin in four years. She insisted that John take four years of Latin and Christian Brothers High School provided only two years of Latin, except for those students planning to enter either Christian Brothers Novitiate or the seminary. Father Morris O'Connor was the Latin teacher for the third and fourth year Latin students at Christian Brothers School.



Photo Courtesy of Christian Brothers High School

Christian Brothers High School, 21st and Broadway, Sacramento

JOHN TRANSFERS TO SACRAMENTO HIGH

John left Christian Brothers and transferred to Sacramento High School. He enjoyed his last two years of high school at Sacramento High because he reconnected with a lot of childhood friends at the school and his girlfriend was a student at Sac High.

SACRAMENTO CITY COLLEGE

After graduating from high school, John attended Sacramento Junior College (City College) and graduated in 1959 with an AA degree. He transferred to Sacramento State College and graduated in 1961 with a degree in history

JOINS THE PEACE CORPS

In March 1961, John heard President John Kennedy tell the nation he was creating a new service organization called the **Peace Corps**. The next morning, John wrote a letter to the Peace Corps requesting an application. His application was number 000693 which made him one of the first in the nation to apply to the Peace Corps. In June 1961, he received a six page telegram informing him that he was accepted into the Peace Corps.

PEACE CORPS TRAINING HELD AT PENN STATE

In August 1961, John left Sacramento for Penn State University where he received training to be a Peace Corps volunteer. In late September, after a reception at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco hosted by Ben Swig, the owner of the Fairmont, John flew to the Philippines on a *Slick Airline* prop plane. During the flight, the captain kept announcing that the passengers had to stay seated because the movement of the passengers was changing the pitch of the airplane causing it to drift off course. The plane landed on Wake Island and Guam because the plane carrying the men was ahead of a second plane carrying most of the women volunteers and both planes were supposed to land in the Philippines near the same time.

TRAINING IN THE PHILIPPINES

John's group was the first American Peace Corps volunteers to arrive in the Philippines. The volunteers were welcomed by the Vice President of the Philippines and after the reception, the Peace Corps volunteers left immediately for Los Baños, Rizal, the agricultural university of the Philippines where they were given two months of training in Filipino language and culture. John was then assigned to the Province of Negros Occidental and the village of Ilog. Three other male volunteers were assigned to this same village. The four men shared a house rented from the Dignadice Family.

The Village of Ilog

Ilog was a village of 1200 people and was divided half Catholic and half Protestant. Since John was the only Catholic among the four volunteers, he began attending daily Mass at a church served by the Columban Fathers. Father Bob Burke from Chicago was the pastor.

The Columban Fathers were welcoming to all four Peace Corps volunteers and had the only refrigerator in town. The priests' house was therefore a source of cold San Miguel beer and the three non-Catholic volunteers became very friendly with Father Burke. Because John attended daily Mass, the Protestants in town felt the need to invite the Protestant Peace Corps members to their church to counteract John's example of attending daily Mass.



Photo by John E Boll 2013

Manila Harbor, Philippines

THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN ILONGO

The Peace Corps volunteers were supposed to teach English and science in the local grammar school. In the school, children were taught in Ilongo for the first two grades and in the third grade English was the language used in school. Most of the children dropped out of school in third grade because they did not understand English. Eventually, the Peace Corps volunteers decided they could be of better service to the village by starting a camp for street boys which was named *Camp Brotherhood*. It was a respite station where the boys could get something to eat. This project took a lot of community organizing and fundraising but the camp was a tremendous success.

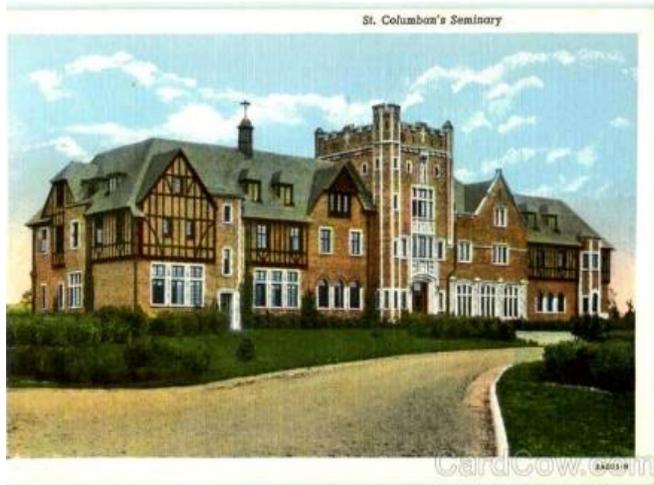
The volunteers usually ate after the boy campers and food was usually cold and unprotected from flies. As a result, a number of the volunteers contracted amoebic dysentery. One of the volunteers, David Mullholland, a volunteer from Quincy, MASS, and a graduate of Tufts University in Boston with a degree in journalism, got the disease and subsequently died at Clark AFB in Pangasinan. He was 24 years of age. His death was the source of sadness for the Peace Corps volunteers in Negros.

After two years in the Philippines, John returned home in June 1963 and submitted an application for admittance to the Columban community. He was accepted to the Columban College seminary in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin where he studied Latin. John had a wonderful Latin teacher named Father Michael Halford. Father Mike gave John individual classes and he learned more Latin in one year than in the previous four.

A YEAR OF COLUMBAN SPIRITUAL FORMATION

After one year of college in Oconomowoc, John's class was sent to Saint Columban College for a year of spiritual formation under the direction of Father Barney Toal. The group went through the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises which was the spiritual foundation for Columbans. Father Toal now resides in Bristle, Rhode Island where he is 100 years of age.

JOHN'S FORMATION CONTINUES



From there John entered the major seminary of Saint Columban in Milton, Massachusetts. The first two years focused on Thomistic philosophy. After the first year, John petitioned the rector that he skip a year before he lost his mind. The teaching was not good; the professor would read the Latin sentence and then translate. John says the Latin was very simple and anyone could translate it. He told the rector he could not take this for another year. Consequently, John was transferred to first theology.

Saint Columban Seminary, Milton, Massachusetts

John transferred to Saint John Archdiocesan Seminary in Brookline, Mass. The cardinal's house was at one end of the seminary property. After his first year of theology, John had to return to Saint Columban in Milton. After second theology, the Columban staff decided to send the students back to Saint John Seminary in Brookline. During the first semester of fourth theology, the Columbans made the decision to provide a half year pastoral assignment for the fourth year theologians.

PASTORAL SEMESTER DURING DIACONATE YEAR

After his ordination to the diaconate in December 1969, John went to Saint Thomas in the Virgin Islands for five months. There were eight deacons and three priests living in two houses in the Virgin Islands. Six lived in one house and two deacons and a priest in the second house. Meals were taken together. The deacons taught catechetics at the Catholic high school in Charlotte Amalie. On weekends the deacons alternated preaching at the cathedral on the island of Saint John and on the British Virgin Island of Tortola.

By the time Lent began, John was going crazy living with six guys, two to a room. His roommate was spotless and John was the opposite. John came up with a partial solution that provided him some solitude. He took the Blessed Sacrament with him by ferry to Saint John Island where the Columbans had a chapel. He led the Stations of the Cross, gave a homily and ended with Benediction. He slept in the sacristy on Friday night and then had Saturday morning to himself at the beach. If he was preaching that weekend at one of the churches, he would stay on at the chapel and return to his Columban community Sunday evening on Saint Thomas Island.

ORDINATION TO THE MINISTERIAL PRIESTHOOD

In May 1970, John returned to Sacramento in preparation for his ordination at Sacred Heart Church by Bishop Alden Bell. He was ordained a priest on June 13, 1970 on the feast of Saint Anthony. After his ordination, he spent time with his family and in September returned to the Philippines to do parish work in Negros Occidental. He attended language school for six months to learn Ilongo. He lived at the Irish Redemptorist monastery in Bacolod City and after completing his language course, he was assigned to Isabela. His pastor was Father Barney Callanan. It was a wonderful experience for Father John and his ability to speak Ilongo greatly improved. He was able to communicate well with the people.

ASSIGNMENTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

After two years in Isabela, Father John was assigned as an assistant to the church in the town of Kabankalan in Negros. For six months he worked as a priest at a sugar mill in Daconcogon. The sugar mill was started by the local bishop to help alleviate injustice to the workers caused by the greed of some landowners. Much of Father John's work in Southern Negros was focused on preaching against the unjust social conditions in Negros. Because of the focus on social justice, many of the Columbans were labeled Communists or agitators by the ruling class. It was a very tense time and situation.

Father John took on the assignment of being president of Binalbagan Catholic College. He served in that role for two years.

After doing various ministries in the Philippines, Father John felt the need for renewal and went to the Jesuit retreat house in Manila where he made a directed retreat using the Ignatian Exercises. This was a life changing experience for him. Upon his return to Negros, he was asked to be the bursar at the Columban central house in Negros. After a year, he applied to the Center for Religious Development in Cambridge, MASS and was accepted to participate in a practicum in spiritual direction. During that year of studies, John earned a master's degree at the Jesuit Weston School of Theology in Cambridge, MASS.

Before beginning this course, Father John had to do a course in Clinical Pastoral Education in the Martinez Veterans Hospital in California. A classmate, Columban Father Brendan O'Sullivan, asked John to return to the Philippines but instead of going to Negros, he went to Ozamis City on the Island of Mindanao to become spiritual director to the Columban overseas training program. Father John was director for two Australian seminarians taking their year of overseas training in Mindanao. He was also asked to serve as a resource to the other priests on the island by offering directed retreats and days of recollection.

RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES

After two years in Mindanao, Father John returned to the US and his provincial asked him to begin studies in accounting so he could take over the office of treasurer for the Columban region of the United States. John spent two years at Creighton University in Omaha to learn accounting.

Upon completion of his studies, Father John became treasurer of the Columbans in the US for 7 years. In March 1982, he received a telephone call that his mother Helen died in her sleep in Sacramento. He had the opportunity to be with his parents the weekend before and he knew how ill his mother was.

Father John flew home to Sacramento to celebrate his mother's Funeral Mass at Sacred Heart Parish. Seeing how bereft his father was, John suggested that he and his father take a trip to Italy in the fall. While touring Rome, John and his father stayed in the Columban House on Corso Trieste in Rome. They set out for Assisi to see the Franciscan sites in and around Assisi. They then took the train to Genoa to visit the family ancestral homeland. John rented a car and drove south to the village of Lagomarsino.



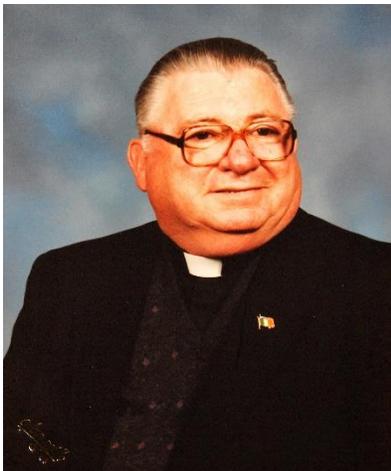
Louis Lagomarsino with some residents of the Village of Lagomarsino, Italy

Because the 90 year old patriarch of the family was making wine at that moment, he could not see John and his father immediately. While waiting, John crossed the ravine and took a photo of the village. Years later, Donald Pagano, a parishioner of Saint John the Evangelist Church in Carmichael, offered to make a watercolor painting from the photo. Below is a copy of that water color painting.



Painting courtesy of Fr John Lagomarsino

The Village of Lagomarsino, Italy



Father Declan O'Sullivan

In 1988, Father John's provincial asked him to move to Quincy, MASS to manage the Columban house in Boston. Father John's 82 year old father Louis was living in Carmichael. John felt he needed to stay in the Sacramento area to be close to his father. He asked his provincial for permission to work in a parish in the Sacramento area. Bishop Quinn welcomed Father John and Monsignor Walton said there were a couple of parish openings. Father John was assigned to Saint John the Evangelist Parish in Carmichael where he worked with Father Declan O'Sullivan from 1991 until Father O'Sullivan died on July 31, 1995.

NAMED ADMINISTRATOR OF SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST PARISH

In December 1995, Bishop Weigand called Father Lagomarsino and asked why he had not applied for the pastorate of Saint John Parish. He told the bishop he did not want to be pastor of the parish. Bishop Weigand told Father John that he wanted him to take the parish. John agreed to serve as administrator since he was not a diocesan priest. He had ten happy years serving as parish administrator of Saint John the Evangelist parish until 2005 when he retired at the age of 65.

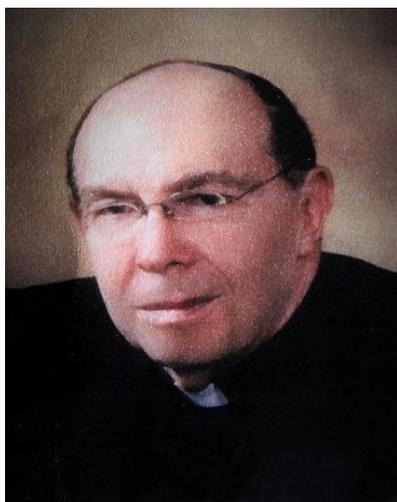


Photo by John E Boll 2014

Saint John the Evangelist Church, Carmichael

SABBATICAL AT NORTH AMERICAN COLLEGE IN ROME

In 2001, Father Lagomarsino took a semester sabbatical at the Pontifical North American College in Rome. He loved his sabbatical, especially the class on liturgy taught by Father Paul Cioffi, SJ.



Father Paul Cioffi, SJ
Professor of Liturgy
Pontifical North American College, Rome

John thoroughly enjoyed his time in Rome seeing the sights, eating great Italian food and enjoying the delicious *gelato* ice cream for which Italy is famous.



Photo by John E Boll 2012

Saint Peter Basilica, Rome

RETIREMENT IN CITRUS HEIGHTS

Father John is a native son of Sacramento and when he retired he decided to remain in the Sacramento area. Since he is not a diocesan priest, he knew he was not eligible to move into the Priests' Retirement Village in Citrus Heights so he did the next best thing; he found an apartment in the Crosswood area about a half mile away from the Priests' Village. He has been living in an apartment at Crosswoods ever since he retired.

Father John is now 76 years of age and until recently has been able to celebrate Mass for the Sisters of Mercy in Auburn and the Fijian Catholic community in Sacramento. He now needs oxygen 24 hours a day and carrying an oxygen tank wherever he goes has curtailed his ability to minister. He hopes to get a mobile oxygen machine which weighs only 4 pounds. That will enable him to get around and resume some ministry again.

FATHER JOHN'S LIFE OF MINISTRY

Father John believes he has been greatly blessed. He grew up in a wonderful family and continues to enjoy his many friends. He has traveled to many places on the earth, experienced many cultures and has Columban confreres on almost every continent of the world. For a number of years he was part of a priest support group in the Diocese of Sacramento which he enjoyed. In a sentence, he simply says "It has been a wonderful life."

Photos of Father John and his Family on Life's Journey



Father John's father Louis Lagomarsino at age 2



Father John's father Louis Lagomarsino



Basilica of Saint Columbano, Bobbio, Italy
Crypt of Saint Columban is located in this Basilica



The Church at Lagomarsino, Italy



L-R Father John, his sister Lucia, and his brother Paul

FINAL THOUGHTS

Father John Lagomarsino is a native son of Sacramento. When he heard about President Kennedy's proposal to start the *Peace Corps*, he was one of the first to apply for acceptance. It was during his two years in the Philippines that his desire to become a priest was nurtured with the help of the local Columban priests in Negros. He pursued his dream and for the past 46 years has ministered to people all over the world. Father John returned to Sacramento to look after his father and his Aunt Rose. As a result, Sacramento has been blessed with his presence and his ministry for the past 21 years.

We wish Father John Martin Lagomarsino every blessing from the Lord as he continues his journey with us here in Sacramento, his home town. John, we wish you

AD MULTOS ANNOS!



Photo by John E Boll 2014

A Citrus Heights Sunset

Published with the permission of Father John Lagomarsino