

# SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 5

Father John E Boll

No 38

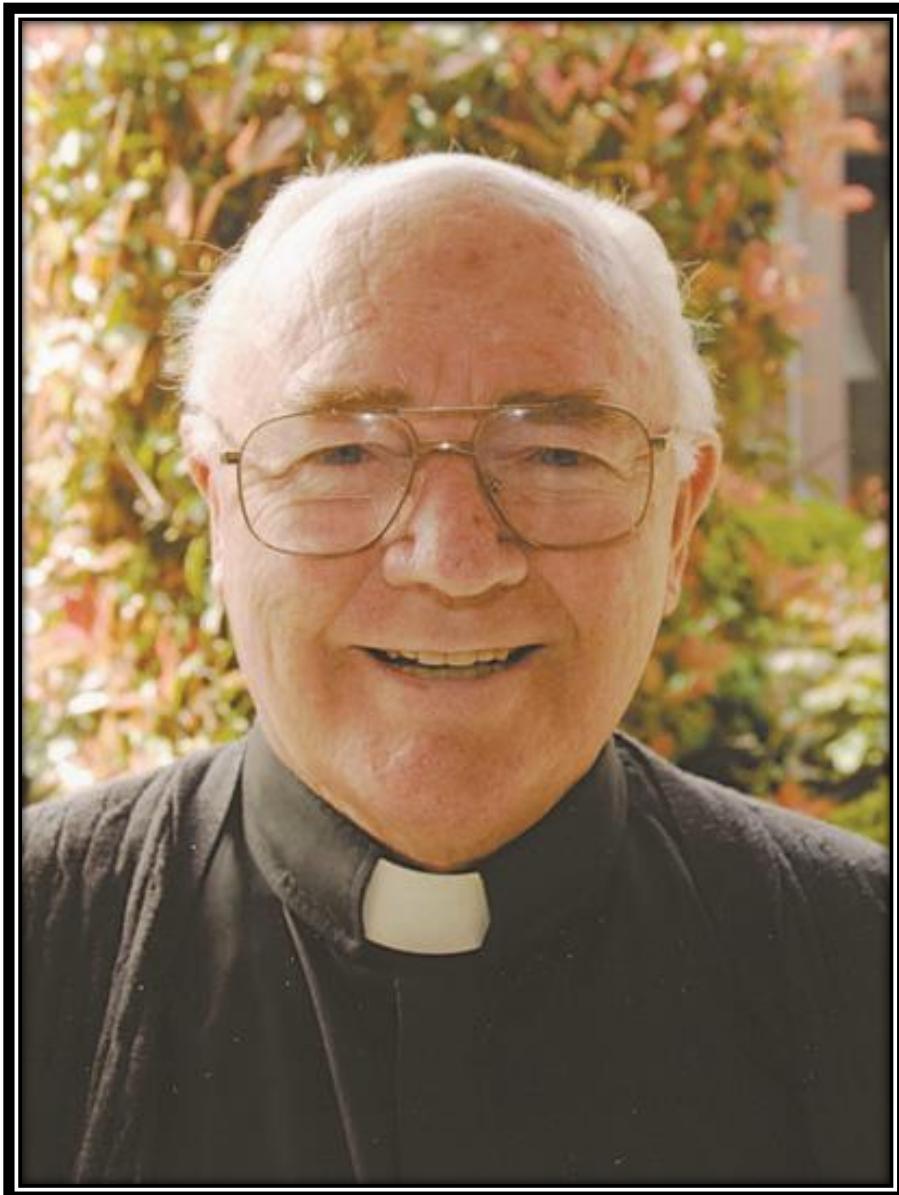
## *Father Leo McAllister*

Native Son of Aclare, County Sligo, Ireland

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor of Our Lady of the Assumption Parish, Carmichael, California

September 10, 1929 – February 10, 2005



**Leo McAllister was born on September 10, 1929** at Aclare, County Sligo, Ireland, son of Martin McAllister and Mary Anne Cunney, one of nine McAllister children. Three days after his birth, he was baptized at Kilmactigue Church, Aclare, County Sligo.

### **BEGINS HIS EDUCATION**

Leo began his primary education in 1935 at Castlerock National School and then from 1943 to 1948 he attended St Muredach College, Ballina, County Mayo.

### **ENTERS SAINT JOHN SEMINARY, WATERFORD**

He entered Saint John Seminary in Waterford in 1948 where he began his theological studies until June 1954. Deciding to become a priest was difficult for Leo, not because he lacked the will to serve God, but in part, because of the sacrifice it would require of his family, which included nine children.

Prior to his 1954 ordination at Saint John Seminary in Waterford, he decided to leave the seminary and went to tell his favorite professor the news. When the professor questioned his decision, Leo told the priest he felt he "was not good enough to be a priest," to which the professor responded, "Nobody is good enough to be a priest." Leo said "I was under the impression that I had to pretend to be better than everyone else. I'm not very good at pretense. So, after a long discussion, I felt that if I can be myself as a priest, I have no problem with that."

### **ORDAINED A PRIEST FOR SACRAMENTO**



Leo McAllister was ordained a priest on June 17, 1954 in Saint Holy Trinity Cathedral, Waterford, Ireland for the Diocese of Sacramento by Bishop Daniel Cohalan, bishop of Waterford.

After spending time with his family in Ireland, it was time for Father Leo to leave his family and the land of his birth and head west for the Diocese of Sacramento and his new life in California.

Photo taken from the website of Holy Trinity Cathedral, Waterford

**Holy Trinity Cathedral, Waterford, Ireland**

## BEGINNING MINISTRY IN SACRAMENTO

In October 1954, Father McAllister began his priestly ministry at Immaculate Conception Parish in Sacramento as an assistant priest to Father Patrick J O'Sullivan who was pastor. Father Leo was then assigned as chaplain to the County Hospital on Stockton Boulevard, now the UC Davis Teaching Hospital, from October 1955 to April 1956.



Photo by John E Boll

## Immaculate Conception Church, Sacramento

## ASSIGNED TO ASSUMPTION PARISH, TRUCKEE

His next assigned was to Assumption Parish in Truckee as assistant to Father Patrick J O'Neill in April 1956. He served this parish for two years until July 1958.



Assumption Church, Truckee

## **NEXT ASSIGNMENT, CATHEDRAL OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT**

After his two years in Truckee as assistant, Father Leo was next assigned to the Cathedral in downtown Sacramento from July 1958 to September 1963. His pastor was Monsignor Raymond Renwald who served as rector of the Cathedral for 17 years, 1951 to 1968. Father McAllister became a great friend of Monsignor Renwald and later invited him to live in residence at Saint Joseph Parish in Elk Grove where he lived for a number of years until his health began to fail.

Father Leo served as a chaplain to the National Guard in the Sacramento-Roseville area from July 15, 1960 to November 1, 1962.

## **DIOCESAN DIRECTOR OF THE CATHOLIC YOUTH ORGANIZATION**

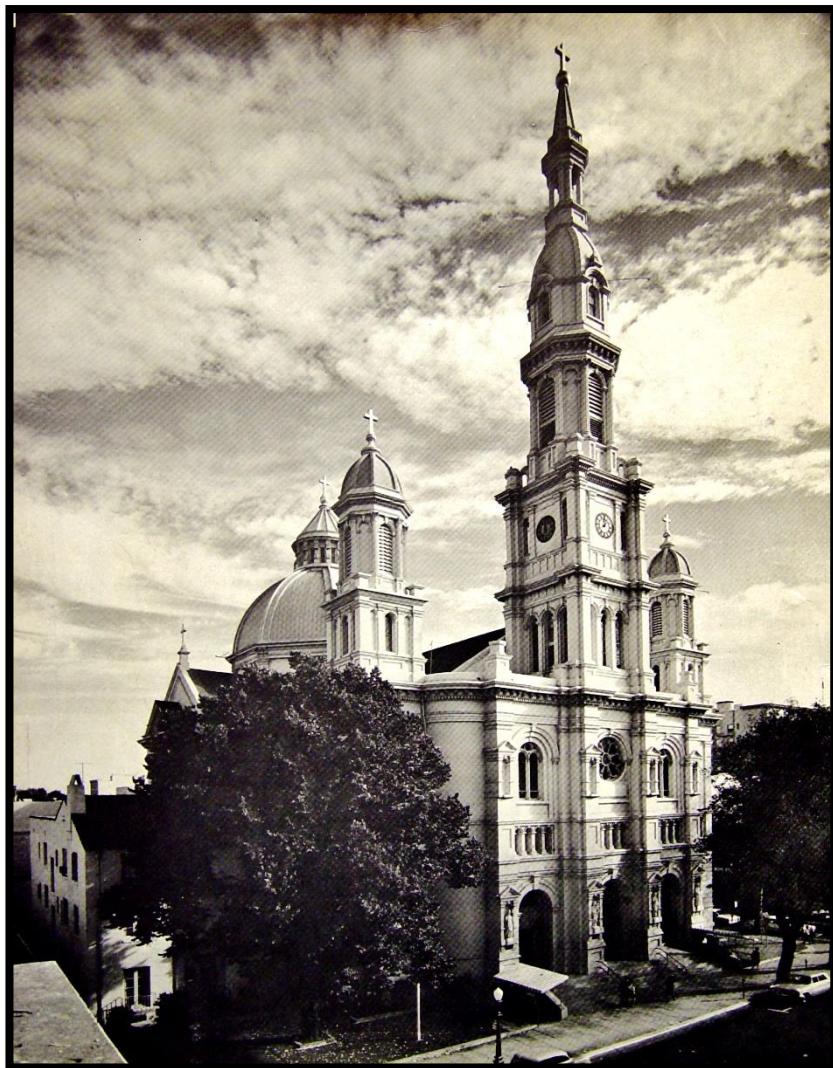


Photo from the Diocesan Archives

### **Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament**

Father Dan Madigan says that people may be learning for the first time the role Father McAllister played in launching the Sacramento Food Bank in 1976. Father Madigan was the founder and president of the organization but credits Father McAllister with “coming up with the idea.” “He had a great heart for the poor,” Father Madigan said. “Father McAllister was easy to follow

In 1963, Bishop Alden J Bell appointed Father McAllister diocesan director of the Catholic Youth Organization, a position he held for five years until 1968.

With his outgoing and friendly personality, Father Leo was an obvious choice for this position as CYO director. During his years in youth ministry, he continued living in residence at the Cathedral since his office was in the lower level of the Cathedral.

## **PASTOR OF IMMACULATE CONCEPTION PARISH**

Father McAllister's first pastorate was Immaculate Conception Parish in Sacramento beginning on September 4, 1968.

because he left behind such a positive feeling about the priesthood.” Father McAllister ended his pastorate at Immaculate Conception Parish on December 1, 1975.

### **CHAPLAIN TO THE CALIFORNIA STATE ASSEMBLY AND STATE SENATE**

While carrying on his parish duties, Father McAllister also served both the California State Assembly and the State Senate as their chaplain. Joseph McElligott remembers Father McAllister from the years he served as chaplain of the state Assembly from 1968 to 1976 and as chaplain of the state Senate from 1986 to 1988. During much of that time Mr. McElligott worked as director of the division of education for the California Catholic Conference.

Father McAllister “would alert legislators about things of importance to the poor but was careful not to overstep his bounds,” McElligott said. “His influence was by example and his vision of God as a loving God.” He said the affable Irish born priest who seldom forgot a name, was appreciated among legislators for the “little bit of mirth he put in his prayers.”



Photo by John E Boll

**California State Capitol, Sacramento**

### **NAMED PASTOR OF SAINT JOSEPH PARISH, ELK GROVE**

On the first day of December in 1975, Father McAllister was named pastor of Saint Joseph Parish in Elk Grove. When he arrived at the parish, Elk Grove was still a rather small rural community. Gradually, Elk Grove began to grow with the arrival of people from the greater San Francisco Bay Area and beyond. As the parish community grew, Father Leo saw the need to build an education

wing where religious education for the children of the parish could take place. That wing was built during Father McAllister's time as pastor.

As new parishioners arrived, Father Leo spent his time and energy visiting new parish families to welcome them to the city and parish. These new parishioners felt very much welcomed to the parish and appreciated the home visits of Father Leo. He continued as pastor of Elk Grove for ten and a half years until April 13, 1986.



Photo by John E Boll

#### Saint Joseph Church, Elk Grove

#### APPOINTED DIOCESAN DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

In the early days of Bishop Francis A Quinn's ministry as bishop of Sacramento, he appointed Father Leo McAllister director of Diocesan Development and as pastor of Saint Joseph Parish in the small town of Clarksburg.

In 1986, Father McAllister had to step down from his pastorate in Elk Grove to begin his new work as director of Diocesan Development. At the same time, he was appointed pastor of the small parish of Saint Joseph in Clarksburg on April 30, 1986.

As it turned out, Father McAllister did not enjoy the work of diocesan development and when the opportunity arose, he went back to full-time parish ministry. In the meantime, he continued on as pastor of the Clarksburg and director of development until November 7, 1989.

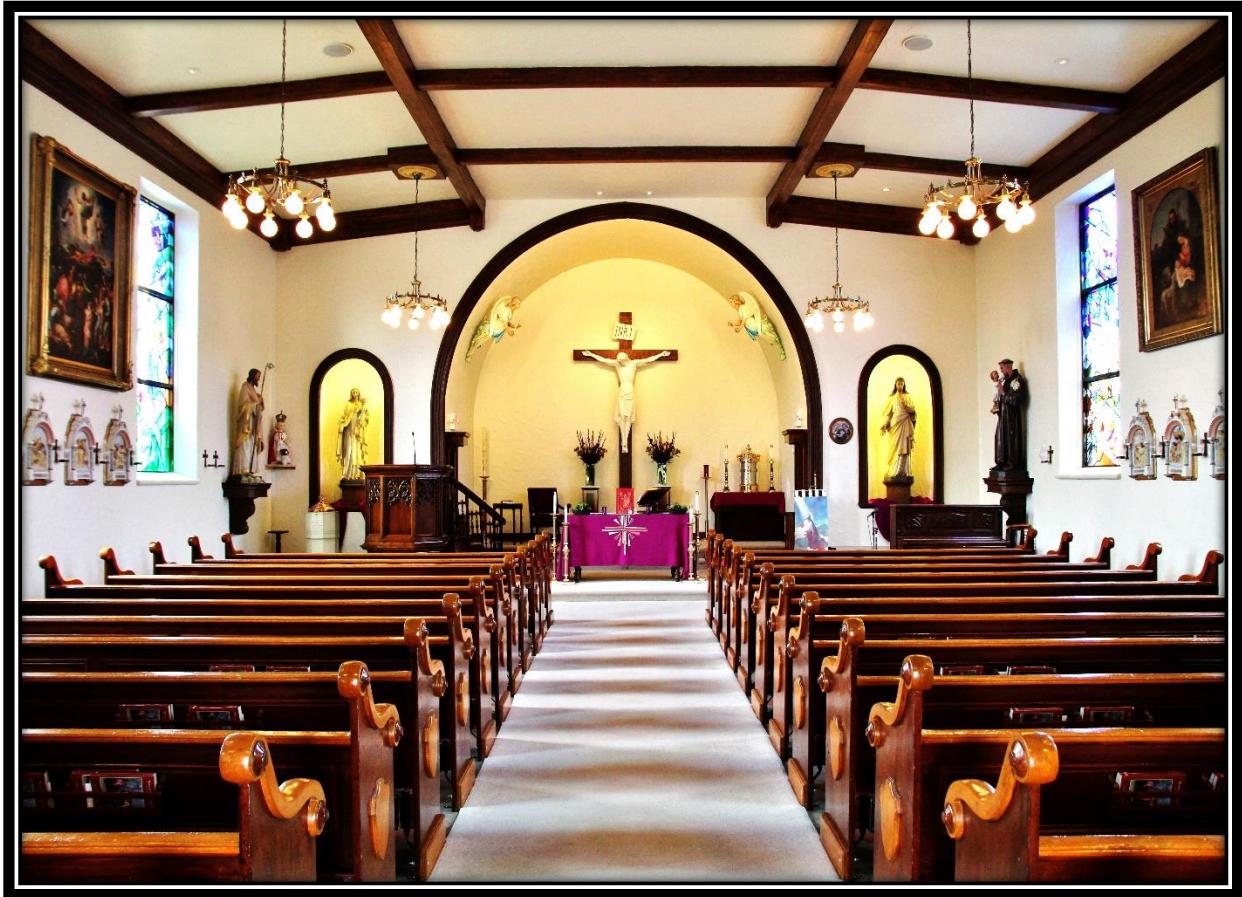


Photo by John E Boll

### Saint Joseph Church, Clarksburg

#### PASTOR OF OUR LADY OF THE ASSUMPTION PARISH

On September 9, 1989, Father McAllister was appointed pastor of Our Lady of the Assumption Parish in Carmichael. This parish, located on Cottage Way in Carmichael, was established in 1952. It had a parish school and good parish facilities.

Father Leo was very friendly and outgoing and enjoyed being with people. In his Sunday homilies at Mass, he always spoke of God's love for His people and encouraged parishioners as they continued on their journey of faith.

Donna Eaddy who initially worked as the parish housekeeper and then as parish wedding coordinator before becoming pastoral associate in the parish said of Father McAllister, "He was a friend to the wealthy and because of them he was able to help the poor. Taking care of the poor was everything to him." She said Father Leo always made it clear that all calls to the parish received a personal response. He also found time to care for several elderly priests when they became ill.

Theresa Sparks, principal of Our Lady of the Assumption School, said the students, many of whom Father McAllister had baptized or presided at their parents' weddings, were "the joy of his life."

"The children had such a sense of what he had done for their lives in making God so reachable for them," she said.



Photo by John E Boll

### **Our Lady of the Assumption Church, Carmichael**

Geraldine McInerney, religious education director at the parish, said Father McAllister's dream was to create an adult religious education program that focused on topics from theology and Scripture to stress management and care of the elderly. "Father McAllister was the most incredible man in identifying gifts in people and bringing them to fruition," she said.

#### **DEATH OF FATHER McALLISTER**

Father McAllister was suddenly stricken with a heart infection and was rushed to Mercy Hospital in Sacramento where he died on February 10, 2005 at the age of 75. He had been pastor of Our Lady of the Assumption Parish for 15 years.

#### **FUNERAL MASS**

The Funeral Mass for Father McAllister was held at Our Lady of the Assumption Church, Carmichael, on February 16 with Bishop William Weigand presiding and Auxiliary Bishop Richard Garcia as the main celebrant at the Mass.

Father Ignatius Haran, life-long friend of Father McAllister, was the homilist at the Mass. He said Father Leo had great love for people of all faiths in the Diocese of Sacramento where he served

for the past 51 years. He was way ahead of his time when it came to ecumenism. He was not a canon lawyer or a liturgist, but he did know people and their needs."

In an interview with *The Catholic Herald*, Father Haran said that for his lifelong friend there was "no such thing as Catholic, Jewish, Protestant. Everyone was the same."

Father Leo and Father Ignatius attended elementary school together in Aclare, County Sligo in Ireland where both born. Father Haran remembers the "tall, slender, red-headed kid with all the freckles" who later "took me under his wing as mentor and advisor."

#### **FATHER McALLISTER LAID TO REST**

After the Funeral Mass at Our Lady of the Assumption Church, the body of Father McAllister was taken to Calvary Cemetery for burial to await the resurrection of the dead when the Lord Jesus returns in glory.



Photo by John E Boll

**Headstone of Father Leo McAllister, Calvary Cemetery, Sacramento**

#### **IN MEMORIAM**

We must be grateful to Leo McAllister's favorite professor who helped him see that he could be himself and be a good priest. Father Leo had a natural talent to relate to people of all ages, whether they were wealthy or poor, Jewish or Catholic, Protestant or no religion. He was a man of laughter, humor and joy and because of his joyful spirit, he became an instrument in God's hands to proclaim the Kingdom of Life and Joy to all he met.

During his half century as a priest of Sacramento, he served not only as an assistant and a pastor but also as a hospital chaplain, chaplain to the National Guard and Sacramento Fire Department, diocesan director of the CYO, diocesan director of the Holy Name Society, pro-synodal judge in the Marriage Tribunal, member of the Priests' Senate, chaplain to the State Assembly and State Senate and dean of the American River Deanery.

The Diocese of Sacramento was blessed to have Father McAllister as one of its priests. He touched the lives of thousands of people as was evident at his Funeral Mass when Our Lady of the Assumption Church was filled to overflowing. Just about everyone who ever met Father Leo considered him a good friend. The list of friends included the poor and abandoned, state legislators, fellow priests, longtime parishioners and school children, all people he loved equally and unconditionally. We were blessed to have Father McAllister journey with us on our way to the Kingdom of God. May he now be at rest in the loving embrace of God.



*Eternal rest grant to Father Leo, O Lord,  
May he rest in peace.  
Amen*