

# SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

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Father John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist

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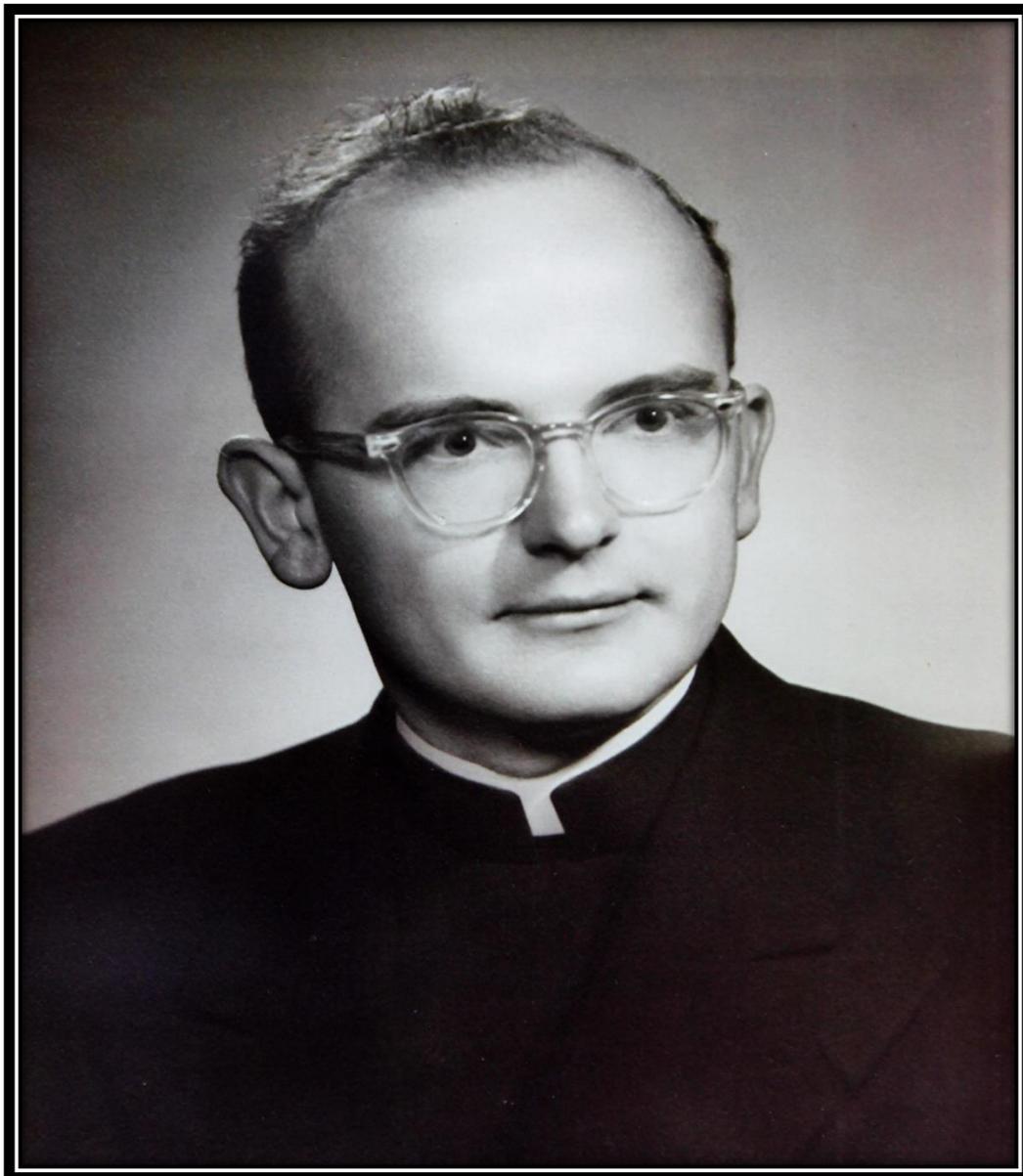
*Father William Russell Slakey*

Native Son of Sacramento

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Secretary to the Bishop and Director of Cemeteries

September 19, 1928 – May 15, 1963



**William Russell Slakey** was born on September 19, 1928, the third of six children born to Roger Slakey and Marie Hannah. The children in the family are Marilyn, Roger, Jr, William, Thomas and Robert - twins, and Noel. The Slakeys were parishioners of Holy Spirit Parish in Sacramento.

### **ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AT IMMACULATE CONCEPTION PARISH SCHOOL**

Bill attended Immaculate Conception Elementary School in Sacramento during his grammar school years, graduating from the parish school in 1942.

### **ATTENDS SAINT ANTHONY SEMINARY**



Photo taken from the web

**Saint Anthony Franciscan Seminary, Santa Barbara, CA**

In the fall of 1942, Bill attended Christian Brothers high school for his freshman year. He then decided to enter Saint Anthony Franciscan Seminary in Santa Barbara for the rest of his high school years.

After graduating high school from Saint Anthony Seminary, Bill decided priesthood was not his vocation and returned home to Sacramento. In the fall of 1946 he went to Sacramento City College for his freshman year.

### **COLLEGE YEARS**



**Saint Mary College, Moraga**

photo from college website

During his freshman year at Sacramento City College, Bill became active in the Sacramento Newman Club. After his first year of college in Sacramento, he transferred to Saint Mary's College in Moraga where his father served on the Board of Regents. He attended there for two years and then decided to return to the seminary. He was accepted to Saint Patrick Seminary in Menlo Park his senior year as a student for the Diocese of Sacramento.

### **SAINT PATRICK SEMINARY, MENLO PARK**



**Saint Patrick Seminary, Menlo Park, CA**

During the summers while a student at Saint Patrick Seminary, Bill went to Mexico to study Spanish and became fluent in the language. He loved the Mexican people. Bills' brother Bob recalls that when he lived in Redding 1957 – 1959, he had an employee who came from Chile with his wife. Bill came to visit Bob at his office and met "Tatto." After Bill left, Tatto commented to Bob that Bill was the first Gringo he had met in the United States who spoke Spanish like a native. Had Tatto not seen Bill in person, he would swear he was talking to a native Mexican.

After his four years of theological studies at Saint Patrick Seminary, Bill Slakey was ordained a priest by Bishop Robert Armstrong on March 26, 1955 in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Sacramento together with his classmate Gene Lucas.

### **FATHER SLAKEY APPOINTED TO WOODLAND**

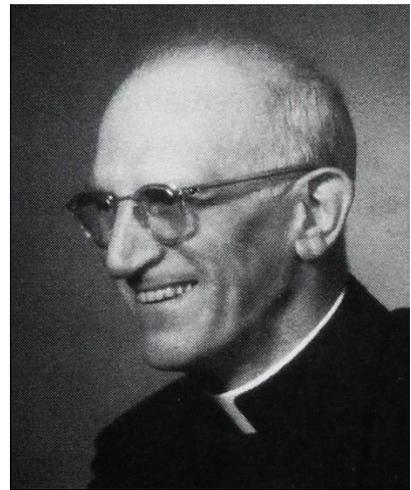
Father Bill's first assignment as a priest was to Holy Rosary Parish in Woodland to serve as an assistant priest to Monsignor John Tumulty.

Father Slakey, fluent in Spanish, enjoyed working with the Hispanic community in the Woodland area. He occasionally celebrated Masses in Spanish at farm labor camps in Yolo County.

Father Slakey was instrumental in organizing the Hispanic community to build a chapel in honor Our Lady of Guadalupe in the small village of Yolo, not far from Woodland. He purchased a wood altar made in Mexico and transported it to Yolo where it served as the altar for the newly constructed chapel. Father Bill felt the building of the Yolo chapel was one of his happiest achievements in the first years of his priesthood.

The altar was dedicated to his grandmother, Johanna Hannah.

Father Bill's first pastor, Monsignor John Tumulty, was pastor when the new church in Woodland was built in 1949.



**Monsignor John Tumulty**



Photo by John E Boll 2012

**Our Lady of Guadalupe Chapel, Yolo**



**The carved wood altar provided by Father Slakey for Our Lady of Guadalupe Chapel in Yolo**

Bishop Joseph McGucken appointed Father Slakey as his personal secretary. After the bishop was appointed archbishop of San Francisco, his successor in Sacramento, Bishop Alden J Bell, asked Father Slakey to continue serving as bishop's secretary. In addition to his duties as secretary, Father Bill was appointed diocesan director of Catholic Cemeteries and he also helped in the Diocesan Tribunal to resolve marriage cases presented to the Tribunal for annulment.

After his transfer to the Bishop's Office, Father Bill continued his association with the Hispanic community and took a leading role in the Cursillo movement, having become a cursillista himself. During this time, Father Slakey lived in residence at the Bishop's Residence at 4300 Fair Oaks Boulevard in East Sacramento.

#### **SUDDEN DEATH OF FATHER SLAKEY**

May 15, 1963, Father Slakey joined his brother priests for a day of recollection at Christ the King Retreat Center in Citrus Heights. On his way home, he stopped by Calvary Cemetery and then started to drive to Christian Brothers High School for an evening event. On the way, not far from Presentation Church, Father Bill suffered a massive heart attack. He was able to pull his car to the

side of the road and stop. He was found slumped over the wheel of his car along the highway. Father Slakey was only 34 years of age at the time of his death.

### **THE FUNERAL**

People from all stations in life crowded into the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament to participate in the Pontifical Requiem Mass for Father William Slakey, a native son of Sacramento.

Bishop Alden Bell was the celebrant of the Mass and Archbishop Joseph T McGucken of San Francisco presided in the sanctuary. Hundreds of priests and laity from near and far attended Father Slakey's Funeral Mass.

All of Father Slakey's Saint Patrick Seminary classmates who were part of the 1955 ordination class were in attendance. Serving as subdeacon at the Mass was Father Eugene Lucas, assistant at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Sacramento, who was ordained with Father Slakey on March 26, 1955, in the Cathedral.

Scattered throughout the Cathedral, both at Monday's Mass and at the Office of the Dead and rosary on Sunday night, were hundreds of Spanish-speaking people with whom Father Slakey had worked closely throughout his short priestly life.

The homilist at the Mass was Monsignor Patrick A McHugh, pastor of Holy Spirit Parish, a close family friend who had known the Father Slakey since he was a young boy.

Serving as deacon at the Mass was Father Keith Kenny, a contemporary who was ordained one year earlier than Father Slakey. The assistant priest to the Archbishop was Monsignor Raymond Renwald and the Archbishop's chaplains were Monsignors Maurice O'Connor and Thomas Kirby. Monsignor Cornelius Higgins was assistant priest to Bishop Bell, and the master of ceremonies for the Mass was Father Leo McAllister.



**Father Slakey's Headstone**

## BURIAL AT SAINT MARY CEMETERY



Photo by John E Boll

### **Saint Mary Cemetery, Sacramento**

After the Funeral Mass, Father Slakey's body was taken in procession to Saint Mary Cemetery and interred in the Priests' Plot of the cemetery. Funeral arrangements were handled by the W.F. Gormley and Sons Funeral Home.

### **ARCHIVIST'S COMMENT**

I remember well the day Father Slakey died. I was about to finish my first year college at Saint Pius X Seminary in Galt in 1963. All of us seminarians were shocked by Father Slakey's death, that such a young and vibrant priest was so suddenly taken from our midst. Father Bill had such an enthusiastic and energetic apostolic spirit that he simply wore himself out to the point that his heart could not continue the hectic pace of life that he lived. He served only eight years in ministry when he died alone in his car on his way to Christian Brothers high school.

Father Slakey is still remembered with great affection by his family, the senior priests of our diocese who knew him, and the many people whose lives Father Bill touched. He was taken too soon from our midst but he achieved much good for the Kingdom of God in a short time.

Thank you, Father Bill, for your love of and dedication to the Lord and for the generous ministry you gave to the People of God in the Diocese of Sacramento.

Rest now in Peace!

## Photos from Father Bill Slakey's Life's Journey



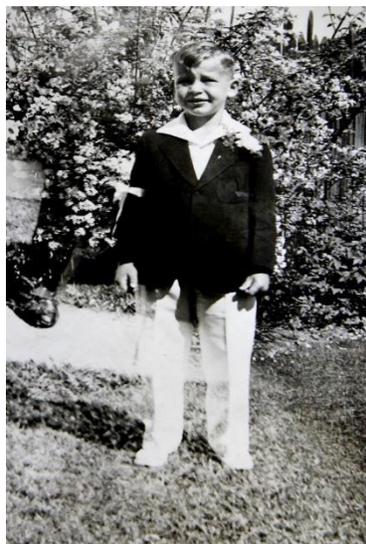
Bill as a Baby



Roger, Jr,

Bill

Marilyn



Bill's First Communion



**The Slakeys, back row: Marie, mother, Marilyn, sister;  
Middle row: Brothers Roger, Bob, Bill and Tom; Front - Noel**



**Slakey Brothers as Mass Servers, L-R, Bill, Tom, Roger and Bob**



**Seminarian Bill Slakey's Room at Saint Patrick Seminary, Menlo Park**

..TO THEE, O LORD, I RECOMMEND MY  
PARENTS, BROTHERS AND SISTER,  
RELATIVES AND FRIENDS, LIVING OR  
DEAD, WHO HAVE DONE GOOD TO ME  
FOR THY SAKE. O JESUS, BLESS ALL  
THOSE WHO HAVE HELPED ME TO THY  
HOLY ALTAR.."

**A REMEMBRANCE**

**OF MY**

**ORDINATION**

**CATHEDRAL OF THE  
BLESSED SACRAMENT**

**SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA**

**MARCH 26, 1955**

**FIRST SOLEMN MASS**

**HOLY SPIRIT CHURCH**

**MARCH 27, 1955**

**REV. WILLIAM R. SLAKEY**

..O MARY, MOTHER OF GOOD COUNSEL.  
PROTECT AND COUNSEL ME IN THE SER-  
VICE OF THY DIVINE SON.."

**Father Bill's Ordination Card**

*Special thanks to Robert Slakey, Father Bill Slakey's brother, for providing photos of Father Bill's life  
and for making corrections to the text to insure the accuracy of the story of his brother's life.*