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FATHER LAWRENCE KENNEDY SACRAMENTO'S FIRST DOMESTIC PRELATE

By Father John Dwyer, printed May 13, 1976 in the *Catholic Herald*

Toward the end of 1866, Bishop O'Connell of Marysville received a letter from All Hallows asking him for a favor. Would he release the student, Lawrence Kennedy, from the Vicariate so that young Kennedy could be sent to St Sulpice in Paris to prepare for future service on the faculty of All Hallows? Bishop O'Connell replied that much as he would like to do the All Hallows faculty a favor, he himself needed someone in the diocese to serve as a theologian and he really couldn't release Kennedy. But a second letter came from All Hallows asking Bishop O'Connell to reconsider. In desperation, torn between the huge debt of gratitude he owed the seminary and his own need, the bishop consented and finally admitted that he might as well as he didn't even have the money to pay for Kennedy's passage to Marysville.

The All Hallows authorities quickly transferred young Kennedy to St Sulpice in Paris where he spent the spring semester of 1867. But by the time his newly ordained classmates were ready to leave for America in August, 1867, Lawrence Kennedy had changed his own mind about the whole plan and accompanied Fathers Claire, Coleman and Grace en route to Marysville.

Bishop O'Connell was overjoyed. He ordained Lawrence Kennedy a subdeacon, then a deacon, and on "All Hallows Day," November 1, 1867, he ordained him a priest of the Vicariate in the Marysville cathedral. His first assignment was at St Joseph Cathedral, Marysville where he stayed until March 1868, when he was transferred to Grass Valley as an assistant to Father Dalton. His stay of four years in Grass Valley was unusually long for those days, but the Bishop wanted him close to Marysville so he could consult with him on his many problems. When Father Kennedy was moved in 1872, it was to Oroville as pastor, again a place of easy access to Marysville. Father Kennedy remained in Oroville for two years.

In 1874, Bishop O'Connell was faced with the collapse of the only institution of learning for boys in the diocese, St Joseph College in Rohnerville. In 1873, there had been 100 students, several seminarians and four priests on the faculty. Time for opening of school in 1874 found only one priest, three seminarians and 18 students. Bishop O'Connell felt that in view of this crisis he could no longer be selfish in regard to young Father Kennedy's talents; therefore he transferred him to the Rohnerville College where he remained on the faculty until the school closed down in 1879.

During the years when the Precious Blood Fathers had the college at Rohnerville, they served several small communities in the area, such as Table Bluff, Rohnerville and Ferndale. It was in this last place then that Father Kennedy took up his residence in 1879 when the college closed. He remained in Ferndale for the rest of Bishop O'Connell's days. Thus he was far from the scene

of excitement when Bishop Manogue came as coadjutor in 1881, when Bishop O'Connell retired in 1884, and when the See was moved from Grass Valley to Sacramento in 1886.



Photo from Diocesan Archives

**Monsignor Lawrence Kennedy, Vicar General
Pastor of St Bernard Parish, Eureka**

However, when Father John Sheridan of Eureka died on July 4, 1892 after a 10 year pastorate, it was Father Kennedy who was the bishop's choice to succeed him in Eureka. Father Kennedy remained as pastor of Eureka for 32 years. It was during these years that his reputation as a scholar became well known. When his classmate became the Bishop of Sacramento in 1895, Bishop Grace remembered well the ability of Lawrence Kennedy. He was put in charge of the matrimonial curia for the Sacramento Diocese. In September 1911, when Father Lynch of Grass Valley died, the position of Vicar General of the diocese was vacant. Bishop Grace lost no time in giving the post to Father Kennedy.

In 1917, on the occasion of Father Kennedy's golden jubilee, Bishop Grace requested of Rome

that the faithful priest be made a Domestic Prelate to his Holiness Benedict XV. The following August in 1918, the ceremony of investiture, which was done by Archbishop Hanna of San Francisco, was one of the great ecclesiastical celebrations ever witnessed in Eureka. Monsignor Kennedy was the first priest of the old Grass Valley Diocese and the first priest of the Sacramento Diocese to be thus honored.

Besides his service to the diocese, there was also a 32 year apostolate to the city of Eureka, and 45 years to Humboldt County. It was Father Kennedy who built the beautiful St Bernard Church, brought the Sisters of St Joseph to Eureka and opened his extensive educational program, as well as the hospital.

In spite of his talents and accomplishments, Monsignor Kennedy was as modest as he was learned, and he never publicly exploited this brilliance of intellect. He shunned the limelight always, yet he was sought out because of his wisdom.

When he died at the age of 81 on May 10, 1924, his funeral was a magnificent tribute to a pioneer priest whose priesthood spanned 57 years, who served under four bishops, O'Connell, Manogue, Grace and Keane, whose influence was felt throughout the Sacramento Diocese and whose memory is held in benediction.



Photo by John E Boll 2013

St Bernard Church, Eureka
Built by Monsignor Lawrence Kennedy