

# SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

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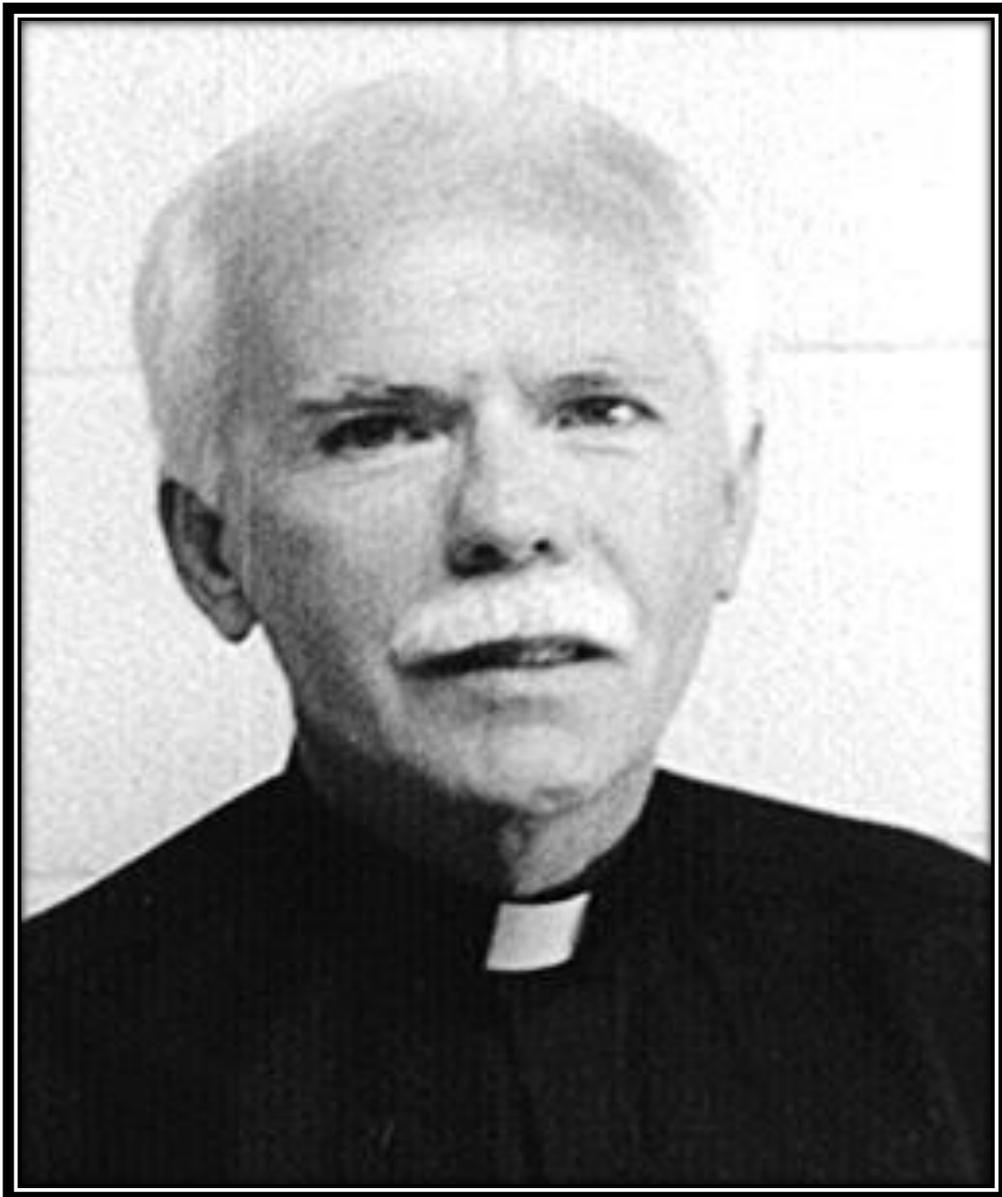
## *Father Walter Dev Burke*

Native Son of Scranton, Pennsylvania

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor Emeritus of Saint John Parish, Quincy, California

February 6, 1934 -- June 2, 2006



**Walter Dev Burke was born on February 6, 1934 in Scranton, Pennsylvania,** one of five children born to Edward J Burke and Katherine T de Varona. He grew up in the company of priests who were family members and friends of his father. Dev would often accompany his father to visit a priest friend who was a teacher at the seminary. “The priestly life appealed to me – the discipline and comradery seemed to combine the best of both worlds,” he said in 1999. “It was a chance to channel energy to people in a spiritual setting.”

### **DEV’S EARLY DAYS**

While he considered religious life as early as age 14, Dev’s parents felt he was too young to make such a commitment so he found himself entering the Army while yet in college. He then traveled extensively in Europe and lived for a time in London and Paris before returning to the United States and moving to Nevada City in the early 1970s. He trained as a personnel management specialist and later became a hairdresser, a trade he worked in for twenty-five years.

### **A TIME TO FOLLOW HIS HEART**

In his forties, Dev became active at Saint Canice Parish in Nevada City, teaching CCD, singing in the choir, and serving as a lector. He was put on a committee to welcome a Redemptorist missionary coming to the parish to give a mission. Dev and the Redemptorist priest became friends and Dev told him he was positive he had a vocation and regretted having waited so long to do something about it. The Redemptorist suggested he apply to the Redemptorists’ vocation program and Dev did just that. He was accepted into the Most Holy Redeemer Redemptorist Congregation in 1981 and remained with them until 1984 when he decided to leave the congregation.

### **A SWITCH TO THE DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO**



Photo by John E Boll

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

Seven weeks after leaving the Redemptorists, Dev entered Saint Joseph College in Mountain View for studies for the priesthood for the Sacramento Diocese. He later entered Saint Patrick Seminary to begin his theological studies where he earned a Master of Divinity degree in 1990.

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

Dev was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Sacramento by Bishop William K Weigand on May 5, 1990 in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. Father Dev had some interest in serving the deaf and had some ability in sign language. He also had beginning skill in speaking Spanish.

### **FIRST ASSIGNMENTS AND PASTORATE**

Father Burke's first assignment after ordination was as parochial vicar of Saint Isidore Parish in Yuba City from 1990 to 1993. In 1993, he was appointed to his first pastorate at Saint Francis Parish in Burney and its two missions of Fall River Mills and Bieber where he served until 1996.

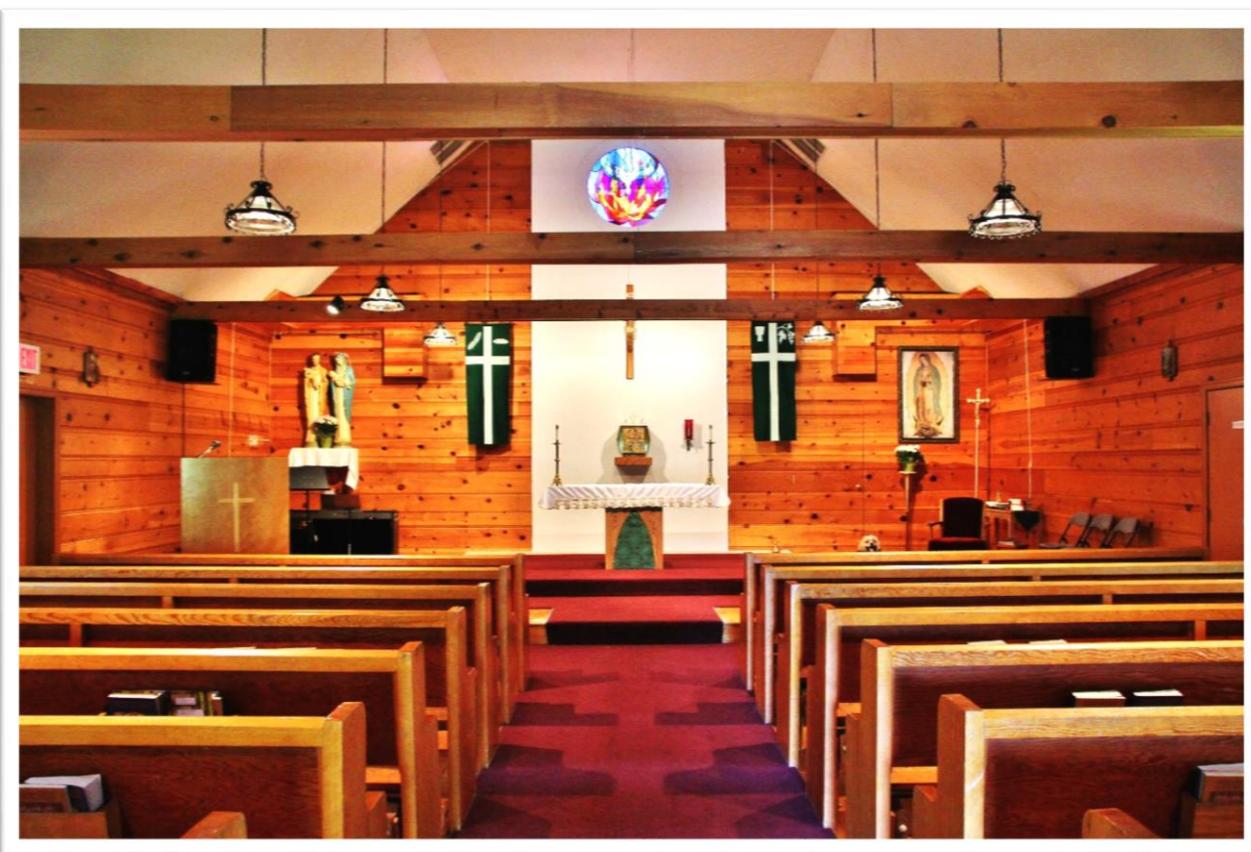


Photo by John E Boll

**Saint Francis of Assisi Parish, Burney, CA**

### **AN UNFORGETTABLE MOMENT**

One unforgettable moment at Burney was one Christmas Eve when he fell on the ice and broke a rib. But it was Christmas Eve and he proceeded to drive through a blizzard to celebrate Christmas Mass at Saint Stephen mission church in Bieber 43 miles away.

Father Burke also served as parochial vicar at Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Redding from 1996 to 1997. As he looked forward to retirement in 1999, he told the Herald that being a priest was a

gift of a lifetime. “There is a great joy and privilege in being at the altar, helping people realize how much God loves them.”



Photo by John E Boll

### St Stephen Church, Beiber, CA

#### PASTOR OF QUINCY

Prior to his retirement, Father Burke served as pastor of Saint John Parish in Quincy from October 17, 1997 to June 1, 1999. A focus of his ministry there was bringing the parish community together following a succession of different pastors in the years before he arrived. He said “We needed to develop a sense of unity. People will do anything when you let them know that it’s their church and we can do things together.”



Photo by John E Boll

### Saint John Parish, Quincy, CA

One example was giving a face lift to the small hall that was used as the teen center and was in great need of repair. Father Burke set about organizing an adult painting party to fix it up.

At Saint Anthony Mission Church in Greenville, he helped start a bilingual Mass and the celebration of feast days such as Our Lady of Guadalupe. He was also very involved in visiting the elderly and the sick.

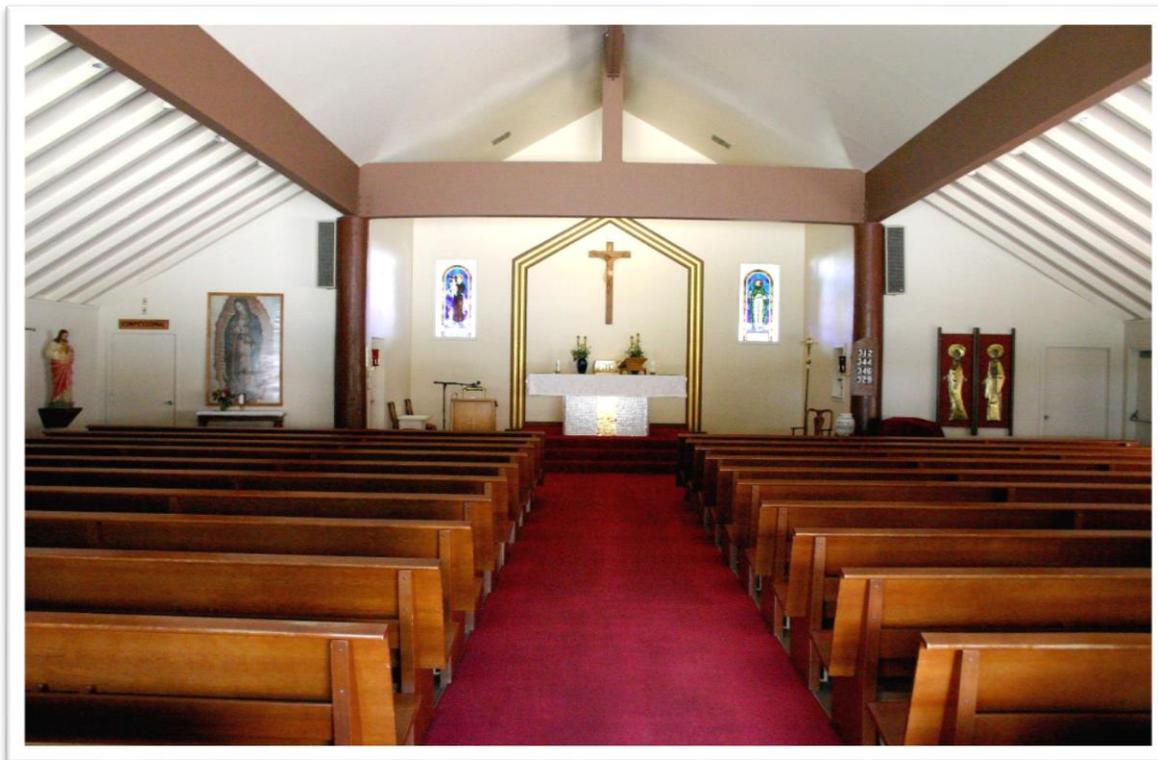


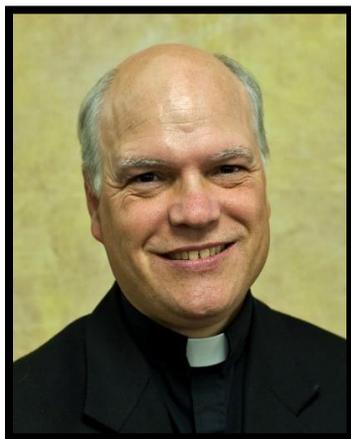
Photo by John E Boll

### Saint Anthony Mission Church, Greenville

#### AFTER RETIREMENT, IRELAND

After his retirement in 1999, Father Dev moved to Ireland where he lived until his death. He was stricken with a brain tumor on June 2, 2006 which ended his life.

#### MEMORIAL MASS FOR FATHER BURKE



Bishop William Weigand celebrated a Memorial Mass for Father Walter Dev Burke on June 19, 2006 in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. **Father Eric Lofgren** was the homilist. He said Father Burke was a priest who brought joy to people's lives. He believed a priest's mission is to care for people "not because of what they have done but simply because they are human beings. He felt that as a priest he was called to express above all else that God is forgiving, that he must affirm, give support and counsel. A priest is also called to give hope to those in despair and to comfort the afflicted, all in the name of Jesus. Father Dev had this vision and lived this vision to the best of his ability."

## **FATHER DEV SPEAKS**

Before he was accepted by the Diocese of Sacramento to begin his studies, the Vocation Office asked Dev why he wanted to be a priest. Here is Father Dev in his own words:

*“I want to bring a sense of joy to people, to let them know how much God loves them. Amazing how many haven’t the vaguest notion of their worth, haven’t any idea that someone, somewhere cares. Not because of what they’ve done or haven’t done, but simply because they are.*

*A priest, I believe, must develop the ability to roll with the punches, to step outside his own problems, to forget himself, or at least use his experience for the good of others. I want to share my belief that God is forgiving above all else. I want to affirm, support, counsel, give hope to those in despair, and comfort the afflicted, all in the name of Jesus, a good friend of mine. Amen.”*

## **ARCHIVIST’S REFLECTION**

From his early youth, Dev Burke wanted to be a priest but at age 14, his parents thought he was too young to make that decision. It was not until he was 50 years of age did he enter the seminary to pursue his dream. It would be six years later that Bishop Weigand ordained him a priest at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament.

Father Dev said it was a great joy for him to be at the altar leading the people in the celebration of the Eucharist and helping them to know how much God loves them. He spent all the days of his ministerial life bringing a sense of joy to people, reminding them just how much God loves them simply because they are God’s people. Father Dev knew that at the heart of the Good News of Jesus is God’s loving forgiveness above all else. Father Dev touched the lives of his people and gave them hope because God loves them.

After he retired in 1999, he wanted to live his last days on the Emerald Isle of Ireland. He enjoyed six years of retirement in Ireland and on June 2, 2006, he was stricken by the effects of a sudden brain tumor that ended his life. His body was laid to rest in Ireland to await the Lord’s returns.

We may not have known Father Dev very well because his assignments were in the mountains of the diocese and his time with us in the Sacramento diocese was relatively short. But his ministry touched those given to him for his pastoral care. He was a man who knew the mercy of God and preached that mercy. May the God who loved Dev into life now sustain him in that love forever!



*Lord, Father Dev proclaimed your love  
and mercy for the human race.  
He served you well and we ask you to bring  
him safely home to the fullness of life  
in your holy presence.*

*Grant eternal life to Father Dev, O Lord,  
and let perpetual light shine upon him.  
My his soul and the souls of all the faithful  
departed through the mercy of God  
rest in Peace.*

*Amen*