

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

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Father John E Boll

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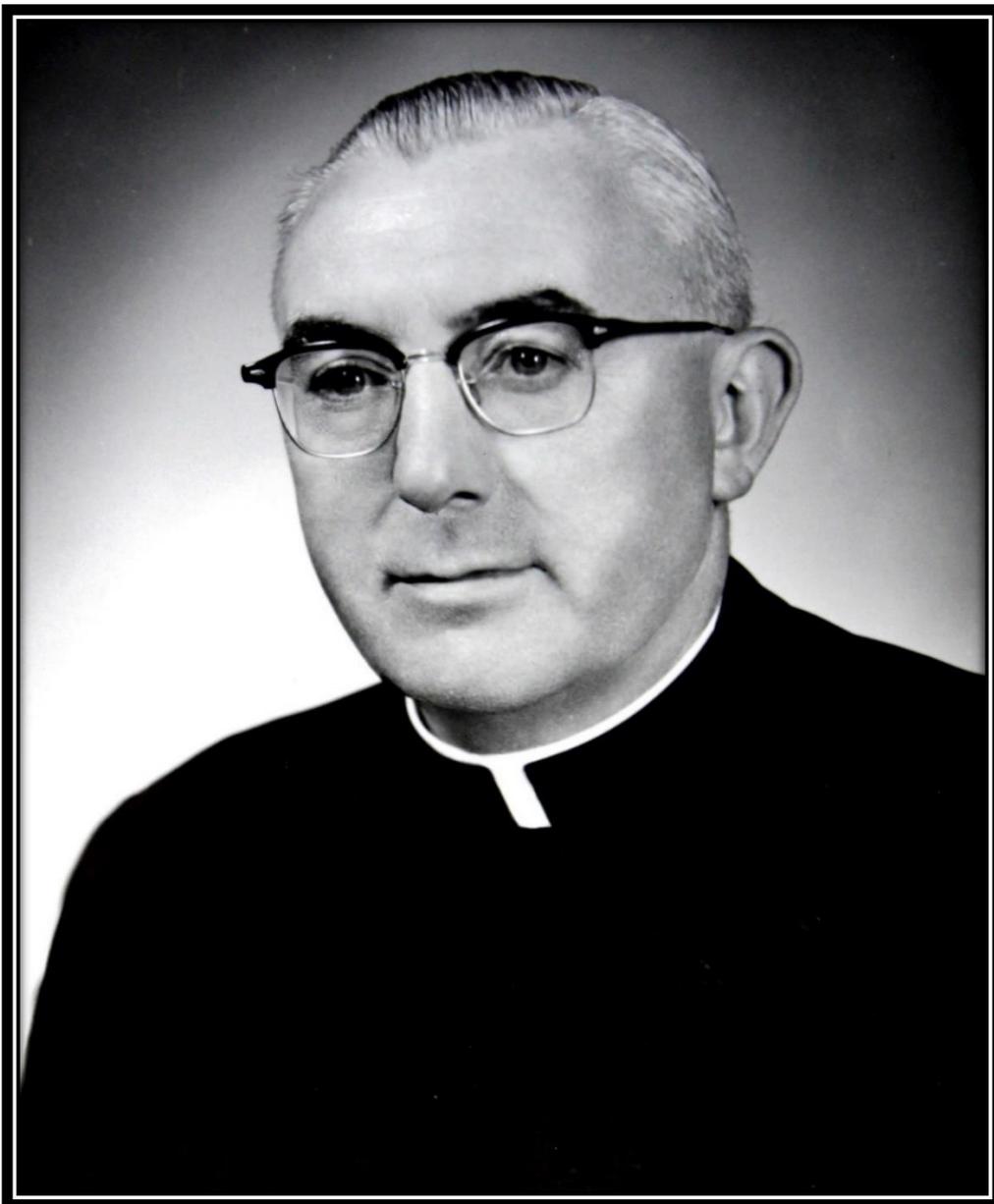
Monsignor Cornelius Patrick Higgins

Native Son of Cork, Ireland

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor Emeritus of Saint Paul Parish, Knights Landing

August 29, 1917 – May 11, 2001



Cornelius Patrick Higgins was born on August 29, 1917 in Cork City, Ireland, the son of John Higgins and Mary Murphy. He began his education at Christian Brothers North Monastery in Cork from 1924 to 1930. For secondary school, he continued his education with the Christian Brothers from 1930 to 1936. He then entered All Hallows College in Dublin and while living there he attended classes at the National University from 1936 to 1939 and then did his theological studies at All Hallows College Seminary from 1939 to 1944.

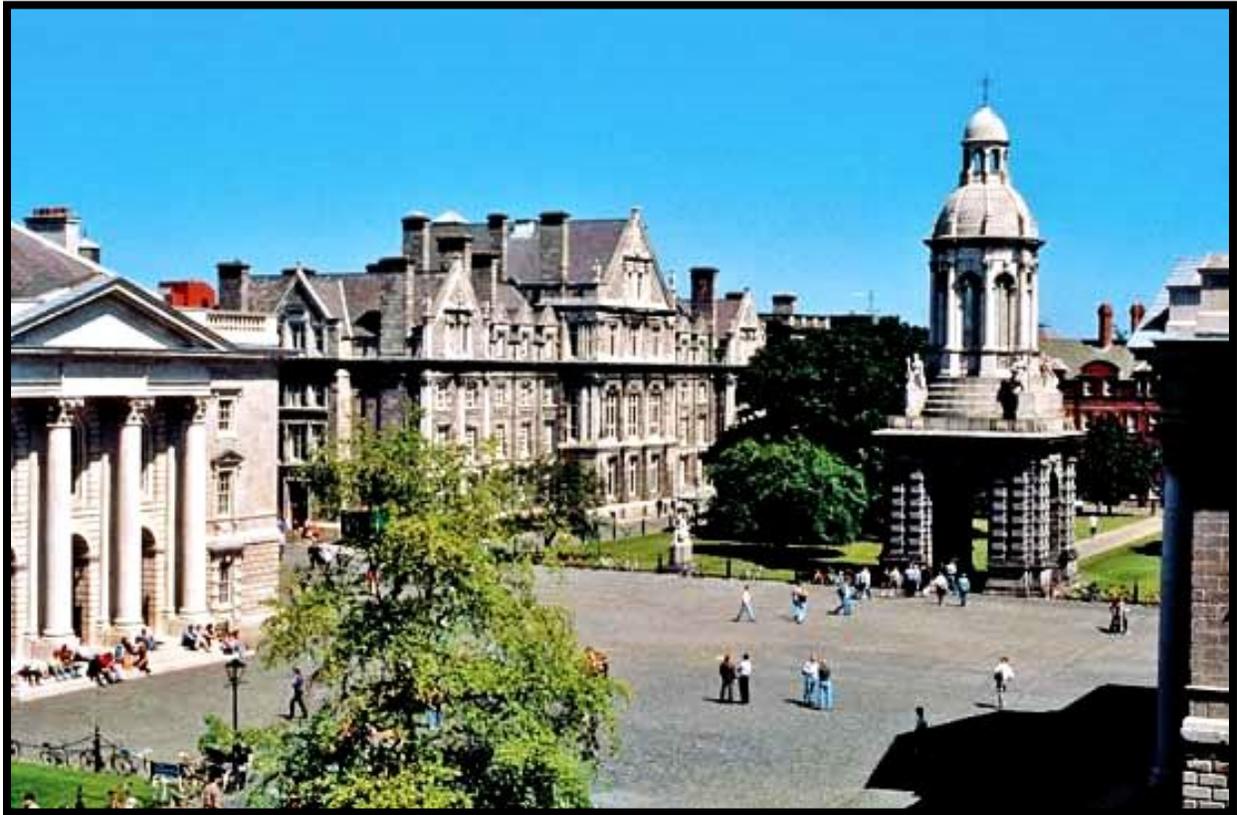


Photo from National University Website

National University, Dublin, Ireland

ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

Cornelius was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Sacramento on June 24, 1944 in All Hallows College chapel, Dublin by Bishop Denis Moynihan, Bishop of Kerry. After his ordination Father Higgins continued his studies in Ireland.

GRADUATE STUDIES

Newly ordained Father Higgins continued his studies after ordination and earned a Master's Degree in Education in 1944 from University College in Dublin. He then began his studies for a Licentiate Degree in Canon Law from Saint Patrick College, Maynooth, and received his JCL degree in 1946.



Photo from the Maynooth website

Saint Patrick College, Maynooth, Ireland

BEGINNING MINISTRY IN SACRAMENTO

Father Con began his priestly ministry as assistant priest at Immaculate Conception Church in Sacramento from January 1947 to October 1948. Because of his degree in canon law, he was called to the Diocesan Marriage Tribunal where he worked for ten years, October 1948 to October 1958. He lived in residence during this time at Sacred Heart Parish rectory in Sacramento.

NAMED PAPAL CHAMBERLAIN

After twelve years since he was ordained a priest, Father Higgins was named Papal Chamberlain on April 30, 1959 by Pope John XXIII with the title of monsignor and six years later on July 21, 1965, he was named Domestic Prelate by Pope Paul VI.

APPOINTED CHANCELLOR OF THE DIOCESE

Father Higgins was next appointed Chancellor of the Diocese of Sacramento by Bishop Joseph McGucken on October 28, 1958, a position he would hold for many years.

FOUNDING PASTOR OF PRESENTATION PARISH

On February 16, 1961, Monsignor Higgins was appointed founding pastor of Presentation Parish in Sacramento while continuing to serve as chancellor of the diocese. He served as pastor of the parish for seven years until September 4, 1968.

A founding pastor has to begin forming a new parish community without many resources. Finding a place to celebrate Sunday Mass was his first challenge. Sunday Masses began to be held first in a bowling alley and then at Lombard Funeral Home on Auburn Boulevard.



Photo by John E Boll

Presentation Parish Hall was used for Sunday Mass for many years



Photo from Presentation Parish Archives

Presentation Parish and School Staff in the 1960s

As was common in the 1960s, a new parish began with a parish school and a parish hall where Sunday Mass was celebrated. Monsignor Higgins was able to secure the Presentation Sisters from Cork, Ireland to teach at the new parish school and the parish was named for Our Lady in honor of the Presentation Sisters who would teach and administer the school for 30 years.

IN RESIDENCE AT THE BISHOP'S HOUSE

On September 4, 1968, Monsignor Higgins stepped down as pastor of Presentation Parish and took up residence at the Bishop's House on Fair Oaks Boulevard in East Sacramento. He continued working full time as chancellor of the diocese with residence at the Bishop's House until July 28, 1974.

NAMED PASTOR OF FAIR OAKS

Bishop Alden J Bell appointed Monsignor Higgins pastor of Saint Mel Parish in Fair Oaks on July 28, 1974 where he remained as pastor until July 28, 1976, succeeding Father William Horgan who retired from his pastorate in Fair Oaks. During these two years, Monsignor Higgins continued as diocesan chancellor.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Mel Church, Fair Oaks

RESIDENCE AT THE BISHOP'S HOUSE

Once again, Monsignor Higgins stepped down as pastor of Saint Mel Parish on July 28, 1976 and took up residence at the Bishop's House on Fair Oaks Boulevard while continuing as chancellor of the diocese until January 1, 1980. With the appointment of Bishop Francis Quinn as the new ordinary of the Diocese of Sacramento after the retirement of Bishop Bell, there were some changes in diocesan staffing and Monsignor Higgins returned to parish life as full-time pastor once again.

PASTOR OF SAINT PAUL PARISH, KNIGHTS LANDING

Upon stepping down from his long-held position as chancellor at the age of 63, Monsignor Higgins was appointed pastor of Saint Paul Parish in Knights Landing. His sister Bridget dedicated her life to taking care of her brother and prepared his meals and cleaned the rectory in all the parishes where he served. She went with him to Knights Landing to be his housekeeper.

Monsignor Higgins served as pastor of Knights Landing and its mission church of Saint Agnes in Zamora for five years. He retired from parish ministry on September 1, 1985 at the age of 68 and was named Pastor Emeritus of Saint Paul Church, Knights Landing, on September 24, 1985.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Paul Church, Knights Landing

SERVED MANY DIOCESAN MINISTRIES

Monsignor Higgins served many roles in ministry during his life as a priest. From 1948 to 1958 he was secretary to the Matrimonial Tribunal. From 1952 to 1966 he was diocesan director of the Holy Name Societies in the diocese. He served as the diocesan director of Catholic Relief Services, member of the Commission for Sacred Music, member of the Board of Clergy Examiners, Chancellor of the diocese, Director of Catholic Action, Director of the Legion of Decency, Vicar for Religious for 12 years, member of the Board of Consultors for 13 years and spiritual director of the Sacramento *Comitium* of the Legion of Mary.



Photo from the Diocesan Archives

**Monsignor Higgins receives Catholic Relief Services' Outstanding Achievement Award
L-R, Monsignor Higgins, Archbishop Joseph McGucken and Bishop Edward Swanstrom,
Executive Director of CRS**

At the regional planning meeting for the 1976 American Catholic Overseas Appeal of Catholic Relief Services held in San Francisco on February 6, 1976, Monsignor Higgins received an Outstanding Achievement Award for his many years of service as the CRS director for the Diocese of Sacramento.

Giving the award were Archbishop Joseph T McGucken of San Francisco and Bishop Edward E Swanstrom, Executive Director of CRS.

COMMENTS BY BROTHER PRIESTS

Monsignor Robert Walton who was Vicar General of the diocese and worked with Monsignor Higgins in the Bishop's Office, said this of Monsignor Higgins, "He was a zealous teacher of Christ the Truth. He loved to talk about the things of God, even at some length, and he did so with knowledge, piety and deep conviction. He spoke with enthusiasm and a sense of pride in the classes he gave to those baptized and received into the church at Easter in Presentation Church." Monsignor Walton went on to say, "I am sure that you noticed that his proclamation lived in his life. From his lips came not only the Word of God which is found in Scripture, but a word from God out of a heart that was filled with the experience of God within him."

Monsignor Higgins guided Monsignor Walton in his own life and priestly vocation as a young man. He noted that many of the years Monsignor Higgins served as chancellor “were quite difficult and personally challenging. It was a time of great change and transition in the church, but through it all, he strove to combine sincerity of heart with a sense of duty to the church as the embodiment of Christ the Way.”

Father John Grace, pastor emeritus of Saint Theresa Parish in South Lake Tahoe, called Monsignor Higgins “an able financial manager for the diocese who was very exacting, responsible and conscientious in overseeing a tremendous amount of building and progress on the parish level.”

Deacon Michael Donovan who knew Monsignor Higgins since 1948, and whose five children graduated from Presentation School, recalled how the Monsignor “lived the priesthood as a seven-day-a-week ministry because he was totally committed to it. He always had two jobs, chancellor and pastor, but he would walk the parish neighborhood on many evenings so he could catch parishioners at home. He gave the feeling that he was a man of God. He would keep his message very basic and teach by example.”

Father Michael Carroll knew Monsignor Higgins since 1970. He said that when Monsignor Higgins moved to Presentation Parish in retirement, he celebrated Mass, ministered to the convalescent homes and helped with RCIA classes until he fell and broke his hand. “He was a blessing to all of us. He always had a story to tell and a great sense of humor. He was a spiritual father to me and to all the parishioners.”

Following his injury, Monsignor Higgins set up a small altar in his rectory living quarters where he celebrated Mass, his rosary and breviary always close at hand. Parishioners volunteered to be with him every day when he celebrated Mass in his living quarters in rectory.

DEATH COMES TO MONSIGNOR HIGGINS

Monsignor Cornelius Higgins died in Presentation parish rectory on May 11, 2001 at the age of 83, in the parish he founded in 1961 and where he served for seven years.

FUNERAL MASS

Bishop William K Weigand presided at the Funeral Mass for Monsignor Higgins in Presentation Church where he was remembered for his “love, reverence and devotion to the Mass and the sacraments and his steadfast promotion of the spiritual life.”

After the Mass, the body of Monsignor Higgins was taken to Calvary Cemetery in East Sacramento where it was laid to rest until the Lord returns to raise all the dead from their graves.



**Headstone of Monsignor Cornelius Patrick Higgins
Calvary Cemetery, Sacramento**

IN MEMORIAM

As a young priest, Father Higgins was afflicted with tuberculosis and had to go for treatment to be cured before he could return to active ministry. Because of his degree in canon law, after only a few years as an assistant in his first parish, he was transferred to the Diocesan Tribunal to work on marriage cases and then later was advanced to chancellor of the diocese.

Monsignor Higgins worked in the Bishop's Office for most of his priesthood. During those years, he also served as pastor of three different parishes, Presentation Parish as founding pastor, Saint Mel Parish in Fair Oaks, and in the latter years of his priesthood, pastor of Saint Paul Parish, Knights Landing.

Monsignor Higgins' sister Bridget never married but dedicated her life to caring for her brother. Having the pastor's sister living in the rectory as the cook and housekeeper might have been good for him, this arrangement was sometimes difficult for the assistant priests. But Bridget was a great help to her brother Con over the years of his ministry.

Monsignor Higgins served four of the bishops of the Diocese of Sacramento in the Bishop's Office over the years: Bishop Armstrong, Bishop McGucken, Bishop Bell and Bishop Quinn. Because of his many years of service to the bishops and the diocese, he knew just about everything and everyone in the diocese which was a great help to the bishops in overseeing the many aspects of diocesan life.

From the list of ministries listed in this biography, we can see what a pivotal role Monsignor Higgins played in the diocese. In addition to all his diocesan work, he also served a pastor of busy parishes. He was fortunate to have good assistant priests who covered much of the pastoral work of the parish while he was helping the bishop in the Chancery Office.

Thanks to the generous and welcoming spirit of Father Michael Carroll who welcomed Monsignor Higgins back to Presentation Parish in his last years of life. Monsignor Higgins was able to end his last days in Presentation rectory which he had built as the founding pastor. He breathed his last breath in the place he loved surrounded by the people who loved him.

The Church of Sacramento is grateful to have had a giant of a priest who gave his life, his love and his energy to building up the people of God in this diocese. We trust that Monsignor Con is now fully alive in the joy of the Lord!



Give me Men to Match my Mountains