

# SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 5

Father John E Boll

No 48

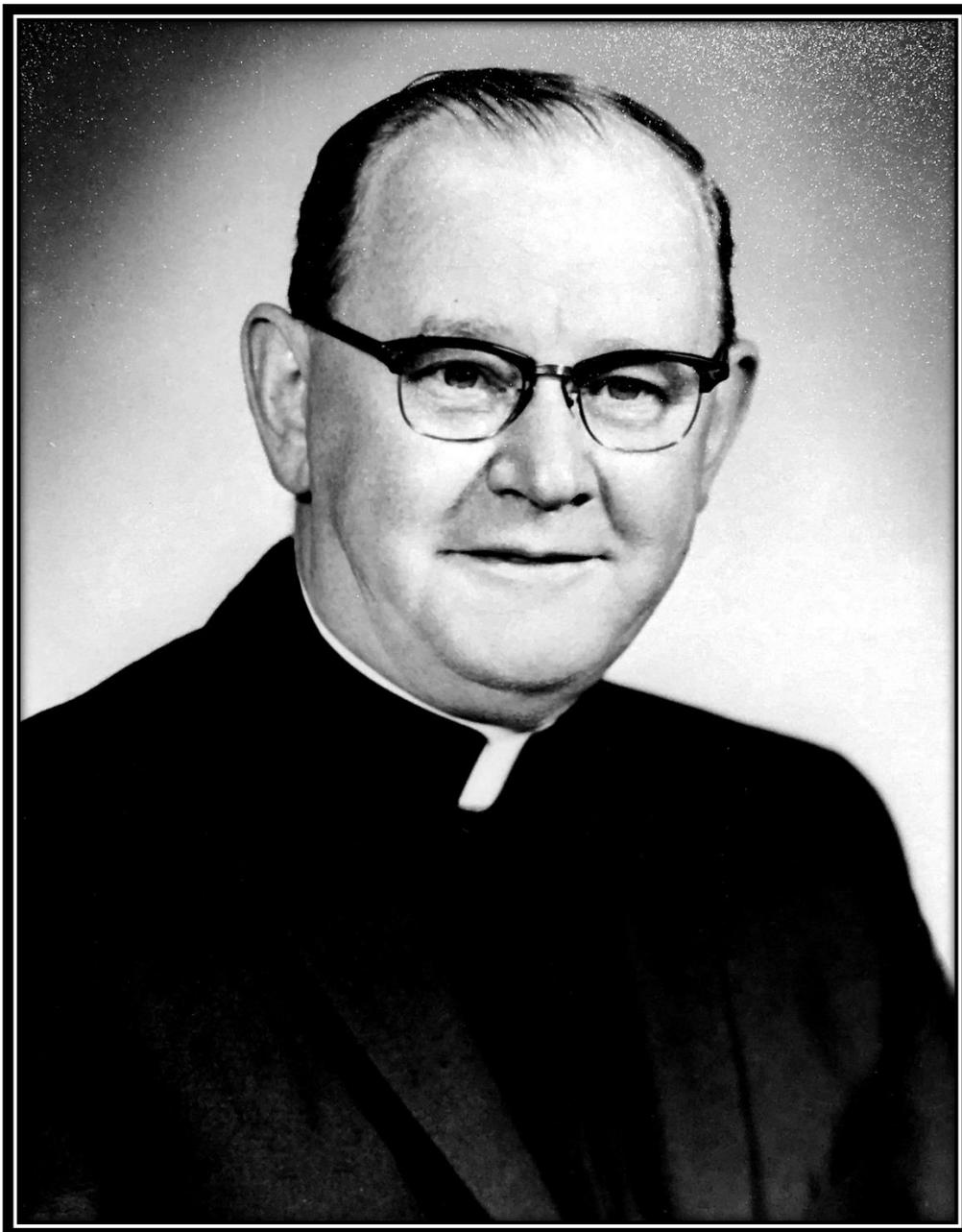
## *Monsignor Thomas Augustine Kirby*

Native Son of Tralee, County Kerry, Ireland

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor of Saint Basil the Great Parish, Vallejo, California

August 27, 1905 – December 25, 1991



**Thomas Augustine Kirby**, son of Thomas Kirby and Mary McQuinn, was born on August 27, 1905 in Tralee, County Kerry, Ireland. He was baptized the next day at Saint John Church in Tralee. He was blessed to have three sisters, two who became Sisters of Mercy and one a member of the Presentation Sisters. His only brother was Gerard who married and had a family.

### **BEGINNING OF SCHOOLING**

Young Tom began his primary education at Saint Mary's School, Moyderwell, Tralee and then on to the Christian Brothers School. He continued with the Christian Brothers for his secondary schooling and then on to Mount Melleray College, County Waterford.

### **BEGINS HIS THEOLOGICAL TRAINING**

After working a few years in the business world, Tom entered Saint Patrick Seminary in Thurles, Ireland, in October 1929 where he began his theological training for the priesthood. He was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Sacramento on June 23, 1935 at Saint Patrick Seminary Chapel, Maynooth, Ireland, by Bishop Francis J Wall, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Dublin.



Photo from Maynooth website

### **Saint Patrick College, Maynooth, Ireland**

### **FIRST ASSIGNMENT TO REDDING**

Newly arrived Father Kirby was given his first assignment as assistant priest of Saint Joseph Parish in Redding on January 16, 1936. His time in Redding was cut short because he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. On February 10, 1937, he was admitted to DeWitt Hospital in Weimar which

was located between Auburn and Colfax. He remained a patient at that hospital for a year until May 1938 when his treatment for tuberculosis cured him of the disease.



Photo taken from the Web

### **Dewitt Hospital, Weimar, California**

#### **ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF SAINT PATRICK'S HOME, SACRAMENTO**

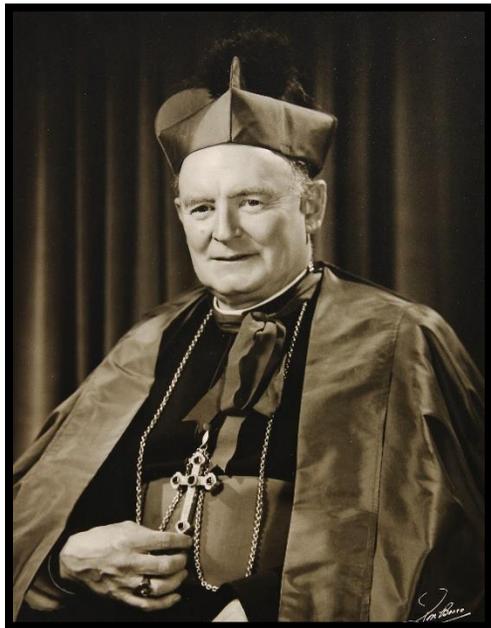
After leaving DeWitt Hospital in May 1938, Father Kirby was appointed assistant director of Saint Patrick's Home on Franklin Boulevard in Sacramento. He served in this role until 1940.



Photo by John E Boll

### **Saint Patrick's Home, Sacramento**

## SECRETARY TO BISHOP ARMSTRONG



**Bishop Robert J Armstrong  
Fourth Bishop of Sacramento**

On March 20, 1940, Bishop Armstrong appointed Father Kirby to be his secretary, a position he held until 1944 when he was advanced to the position of Vice-Chancellor of the Diocese of Sacramento.

During all the years Father Kirby served in the Diocesan Chancery Office, he also served as Director of Catholic Cemeteries for the Diocese of Sacramento and was responsible for the development of Saint Mary and Calvary Cemeteries.

## NAMED PAPAL CHAMBERLAIN

A year and a half after Father Kirby was appointed Vice-Chancellor of the diocese, on September 25, 1945, Pope Pius XII appointed him to the rank of Papal Chamberlain, making him a monsignor. On January 16, 1954, he was named a Domestic Prelate.

## LETTERS OF CONGRATULATIONS

Upon publication that Father Kirby was named a monsignor, Auxiliary Bishop Joseph McGucken wrote to him on March 5, 1954, saying,

Dear Monsignor:

It has been on my mind for several days to send you my very sincere and heartfelt felicitations on your elevation to the prelaty. You certainly deserve well of all the Bishops of the State, and your intelligent and distinguished work has well merited this honor. May God give you many years to enjoy it.

Yours devotedly,  
+ Joseph T McGucken  
Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles  
Vicar General

Monsignor Kirby received a second letter from Auxiliary Bishop Timothy Manning of Los Angeles dated March 2, 1954, saying,

Dear Monsignor Kirby:

My profound felicitations on the admirable promotion to the sacred prelaty. It is so well merited. May you wear it long, and may it reflect in the joy of all your friends.

Very sincerely yours,  
+ Timothy Manning  
Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles



Photo by the Sacramento Bee

Pope Pius XII named Fathers Thomas Kirby and Gerald O'Driscoll monsignors.

On September 25, 1945, Bishop Robert Armstrong invested Father Kirby as Very Reverend Monsignor and Father Gerald O'Driscoll as Right Reverend Monsignor at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Sacramento.

#### **CHANCELLOR OF THE DIOCESE**

On October 31, 1951, Monsignor Kirby was appointed chancellor of the diocese, a position he held for the next seven years until October 28, 1958. After becoming chancellor, Monsignor Kirby found out that Bishop Armstrong was diagnosed with cancer. As a result of the bishop's declining health, Monsignor Kirby had to take on a major part of the responsibility of running the diocese for Bishop Armstrong until a successor was appointed

#### **A KEEN EYE WHERE TO PURCHASE PROPERTY FOR THE DIOCESE**

Monsignor Kirby had an innate ability to foresee where the future growth in the diocese would be and took the initiative to purchase land for future parishes. As we look back on that era, it is amazing to see how accurate he was in purchasing land for future parishes. Because of his foresight, he saved the diocese millions of dollars by purchasing land when it was cheap so when it was time to establish new parishes, the diocese already owned the land.

#### **APPOINTED TO BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF DeWITT HOSPITAL**

On February 27, 1953, Monsignor Kirby was appointed to the Board of Trustees of DeWitt State Hospital by California Governor Earl Warren and was reconfirmed to serve a second four years term on the Board by Governor Goodwin J Knight on March 21, 1957. He was also appointed to the State Cemetery Board by Governor Ronald Reagan.



**Regional Directors of Western Seaboard Dioceses of War Relief Services, NCWC**

L-R, Msgr Thomas Kirby, Sacramento; Rev Thomas Lambert, Tucson; Msgr Edward Swanstrom, Executive Director, Rev Bernard Cronin, San Francisco, Msgr George Eagleton, Reno - 1953

**ARRIVAL OF BISHOP MCGUCKEN AS CO-ADJUTOR**



**Bishop Joseph T McGucken  
Fifth Bishop of Sacramento**

With the declining health of Bishop Armstrong who was suffering from cancer, on October 26, 1955, Pope Pius XII appointed Bishop Joseph T McGucken, auxiliary bishop of Los Angeles, as co-adjutor bishop of Sacramento with the right of succession. Bishop Armstrong died on January 15, 1957 and bishop McGucken automatically became bishop of Sacramento.

Monsignor Kirby continued on as chancellor for a year and a half until he was appointed to his first pastorate at Immaculate Conception Church on Broadway in Sacramento.

### **PASTOR OF IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CHURCH, SACRAMENTO**

On August 8, 1958, Monsignor Kirby was named pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish in the Oak Park area of Sacramento, ending his 18 years of service in the Bishop's Office. The Oak Park area was thriving at that time and he served as pastor for five years.



Photo by John E Boll

### **Immaculate Conception Church, Sacramento**

### **NAMED PASTOR OF SAINT BASIL THE GREAT CHURCH, VALLEJO**

On September 17, 1963, Bishop Alden J Bell named Monsignor Kirby the third pastor of Saint Basil the Great Parish in Vallejo which was established in 1942. He succeeded Father Thomas P Garrigan who died suddenly on July 30, 1963 while on vacation in Ireland.

Saint Basil Parish became part of the Diocese of Sacramento in 1962 when Solano County was transferred from the Archdiocese of San Francisco to the Diocese of Sacramento when three new dioceses were created in Northern California. Monsignor Kirby served as pastor of this parish until he retired in 1971.

Monsignor Kirby was the third successive "Thomas" to be pastor of Saint Basil Church, succeeding Father Thomas Garrigan in 1963 who, in turn, succeeded Monsignor Thomas F Byrne who founded the parish in 1942 when Solano County was part of the Archdiocese of San Francisco.



Photo by John E Boll

### **Saint Basil the Great Church, Vallejo**

During his pastorate at Saint Basil Church, Monsignor Kirby commissioned John de Rosen, the famous artist from Warsaw, who painted the sanctuary mural at Saint Pius X Seminary in Galt in 1960, to paint a mural in the sanctuary of Saint Basil Church in memory of Monsignor Thomas Byrne, the founding pastor of the church. That mural is the central icon in the sanctuary of the church today.

#### **ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING MONSIGNOR KIRBY'S TIME IN VALLEJO**

During his eight years as pastor in Vallejo, Saint Patrick High School was built in 1968 at a cost of \$2.6 million dollars with the help of donation from all Catholic parishes in Solano County, with Saint Basil Parish raising more funds than all the other local parishes combined.

In 1964, Saint Catherine Parish was established and a new Catholic cemetery, All Souls, was opened in 1965 on land purchased since he arrived in Vallejo.



Photo by John E Boll

**Sanctuary Mural in Saint Basil Church**  
**Monsignor Kirby Commissioned Artist John de Rosen to paint this mural**

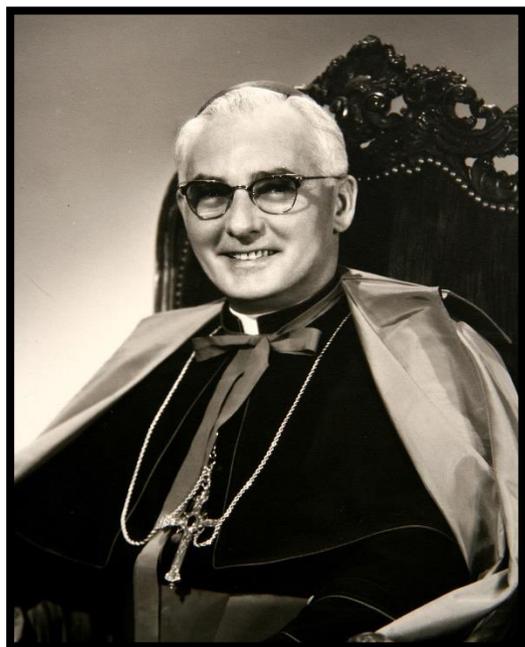
## **RETIREMENT**

On the advice of his medical doctor, Monsignor Kirby requested permission from Bishop Bell to step down from his pastorate of Saint Basil Parish and retire. Bishop Bell gave his permission and Monsignor Kirby retired from parish ministry on September 1, 1971.

Monsignor Kirby retired five days prior to his 66<sup>th</sup> birthday and moved to an apartment in Vallejo. In an interview with the *Vallejo Times-Herald* published on August 11, 1971, Monsignor Kirby stated that his retirement from administrative duties had been under consideration for a year. He said he had been offered an administrative post in Sacramento but declined, explaining, "I like Vallejo and its people. I have made too many friends here during my eight years at St. Basil's to leave now and I've decided to stay here."

He said his new leisure time would give him an opportunity to devote himself more fully to local civic and community affairs. "I have a large library and I hope to find more time for reading and perhaps learn to play golf all over again," he said.

## **REMARKS BY BISHOP BELL ON MONSIGNOR KIRBY'S RETIREMENT**



**Bishop Alden J Bell**  
**Sixth Bishop of Sacramento**

Bishop Bell said of Monsignor Kirby, "The Diocese of Sacramento, its former bishops and myself, as well as the priests, religious and laity, owe much to Monsignor Kirby for his years of administrative responsibility and his dedicated service as a priest of the diocese.

"We now, as a diocese, enjoy some of the real benefits of his wise planning for diocesan needs. His foresight makes my task easier as a result and the total diocese shares in many of these benefits."

## **MONSIGNOR KIRBY'S CONTINUED RESPONSIBILITIES**

At Bishop Bell's request, Monsignor Kirby agreed to continue as a member of the Diocesan Consultors, the executive board of the diocese, and as chairman of the Diocesan Building Committee. He also retained his post as legislative advocate for the Bishops of California in Sacramento, a position he held since 1940. Beginning in 1971, he served as chaplain to the Christian Brothers at Saint Patrick High School in Vallejo.

He retained his post on the State Cemetery Board to which he was appointed for a four-year term in 1968 by Governor Ronald Reagan and he continued to serve as treasurer of the Friends of the Vallejo Public Library of which he was a charter member.

He also continued his membership in the Vallejo Ministerial Association of which he was a former treasurer and as a member of the Executive Board of the Boy Scouts of America, USO, and as a member of the United Crusade Budget Committee.

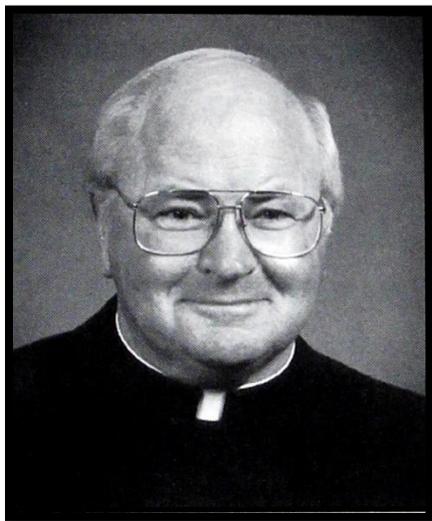
#### **DEATH OF MONSIGNOR KIRBY**

On Christmas Day, December 25, 1991, the Lord called Monsignor Kirby home to the Kingdom of Heaven. A Vigil was held for him on Sunday, December 29, at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacramento in Sacramento. Monsignor Higgins was the homilist at the Vigil.

The following day, Monday, December 30, Bishop Francis Quinn, bishop of the Diocese of Sacramento, was the main celebrant of the concelebrated Funeral Mass for Monsignor Kirby, held at Saint Basil Church in Vallejo where he was named pastor emeritus upon retirement.

#### **HOMILY AT MONSIGNOR KIRBY'S FUNERAL**

During the Funeral Mass, Father Colm O'Kelly, pastor of Saint Catherine Parish in Vallejo, and a friend of Monsignor Kirby, was the homilist. Father O'Kelly's homily follows:



**Father Colm O'Kelly**

#### **THE HOMILY BY FATHER COLM O'KELLY**

Your Excellency, Bishop Quinn, Sister Mary Vincent, my brother priests, brothers, sisters, friends of Monsignor Tom Kirby, my dear people of God.

Let me begin by attempting to make clear the reason for our coming together in this church of St Basil on this day and this time.

Because our traditions are ancient and our rituals centuries old, we are apt to carry them out without adequate reflection

We are faced with the reality of death, in this case Monsignor Thomas Kirby. Again, we are confronted by the mystery. Once more as we seek the answer to our unspoken questions.

The answer is given to us but not by me. As minister of the Word, I speak in the name of Jesus who said, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have

told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come and take you to myself so that where I am you also may be.”

We gather together so that we might honor the life of Thomas Kirby or Todd, as he was affectionately known by his family, a life created in the image of God and presented to the church so that his gifts and talents would be used to build up that community of faith in the Diocese of Sacramento and for the honor and glory of God.

I am in constant awe at the uniqueness of every human life and the more I experience the maturity of years, the more awestruck I become. To see into Tom’s life, not through human eyes but with the eyes of faith, is to be filled with wonder as to how God really works and how he uses us to make his presence known to the world.

As to why I should be the one to speak today may cause some of my brothers to wonder and it is only proper for me to afford them an explanation which, incidentally, will provide an insight into the character of Tom Kirby.

Only in recent years have I come to know Tom Kirby, in fact since coming to Vallejo; therefore, I may not be as well versed as some. Most of us know that Tom Kirby was gifted with a certain degree of directness, of strong opinions, strong likes and dislikes, and the ability to give expression to these from time to time.

Tom called me about four years ago and said “I have something very serious to talk to you about. I’m coming right over.” When he arrived he said, “I am appointing you my conservator. If anything happens to me, you take over. If I get sick, I don’t want to go to one of those rest homes. Call the Mercy Sisters in Sacramento and take me to Mercy Hospital. You are my conservator, not my executor. Pat Lanigan is my executor and Andy Coffey is to preach at my funeral. That’s all you need to know.” Since both are away at this time, it is my response to the powers that be... and with strains of the familiar hymn “Be not afraid” ringing in my ears, I have entered upon the task.

Tom Kirby was one of five children born to Thomas and Mary McQuinn Kirby on August 27, 1905. He was baptized on the next day at Saint John’s Church, Tralee, County Kerry. His primary and secondary education were received from the Christian Brothers and having completed his courses, entered into the world of business.

After several years, he answered the call to priesthood and at 24 years of age entered the seminary at Saint Patrick’s College, Thurles, Ireland and was ordained to the priesthood for the Diocese of Sacramento on June 23, 1935 at Saint Patrick’s College, Maynooth, the National Seminary of Ireland.

In the normal course of events, he would have been ordained on the second Sunday of June at the Cathedral of the Assumption in Thurles, but unfortunately, he was caught playing cards with some other seminarians which, as you might imagine, was strictly forbidden and for which he

received a "*caveat*," a severe form of punishment disqualified him from being ordained with his class since he received this "*caveat*" in his final year of studies.

But not to be dismayed by adversity, and this might give us an insight into his potential political astuteness, he wrote his parents that he was being afforded a singular honor by being ordained in the Chapel of the National Seminary in Maynooth.

He duly arrived in Sacramento and in January 1936 was appointed assistant at Redding. He developed tuberculosis, however, and spent over a year recuperating at the sanitarium at Colfax. He was cured of his illness but lost a lung during his period of recovery.

He was appointed assistant director of Saint Patrick's Home in Sacramento in 1938 and secretary to Bishop Robert Armstrong in 1940, vice chancellor of the Diocese of Sacramento in 1944 and chancellor in 1951.

For the next eight years, he virtually ran the Diocese of Sacramento and was responsible for much of what we have today by way of development. He was a particularly gifted administrator, a fact recognized not only by churchmen but by non-ecclesiastical administrators as well. To say that he was a politician is simply to understate a much deeper reality. He had the innate ability to meet people, introduce people to one another and represent the concerns of the Church at the highest levels of State Government. As was said by Monsignor Dwyer, "I was born and raised in Sacramento and come from no mean family but Tom Kirby knows more people in Sacramento than the entire Dwyer family."

He was in his time what the California Catholic Conference is today. He was the forerunner and standard bearer as the representative of the Catholic Church to the State of California. It would be fair to say that he used his gift of administration well for our church and since, in the Early Church, the work of administration was given over to deacons, he would, in the best of traditions, been designated Archdeacon.

He established the position of lobbyist for the Bishops of California, maintained a suite at the El Mirador Hotel in Sacramento, appointed Bill Burke to the position, but as a matter of fact, Tom Kirby called all the shots. I'm pretty sure he would have given Gorby a tip or two!!!

While chancellor, he was keenly aware of the future needs of the diocese and he spent his Saturdays, his day off, getting to know the developing areas of the diocese and purchasing properties for the establishment of new parishes.

He loved the company of priests and while in a position of authority, was instrumental in helping those who may have been experiencing some difficulties as attested to by those whom he cared for. He loved to chat and tell stories, smoke his cigar, and drink a little Scotch now and then.

Bishop Armstrong used to caution him, "Monsignor Kirby, don't forget to put out that cigar before the epistle." He was responsible for bringing many priests from Ireland to serve the needs of a growing diocese after the western migration of people from the east coast to the west coast following World War II.

He was a priest who took the long view, a visionary in some sense, not just of things material and political but also in the ways of the spirituality which he was taught. He was faithful to the recitation of the Divine Office, to the recitation of the rosary, and above all, his devotion to the Mass.

It is impossible to do justice to his gifts and his use of them during this celebration, but it is important to note that after his brief period as pastor and following his retirement in 1971, he remained very active in the church and in civic affairs for which he was much sought after because of his experience and expertise in these matters.

His life represents an era of which he must be the last. He was honored in life by bishops, governors and civic leaders, but his greatest honor was to be a priest of the Catholic Church, a church of the People of God, whom he served with distinction and fidelity.

May he enjoy the mansion which Jesus prepared for him in the company of parents Tom and Mary Kirby, his brother Gerard, his sisters, Sister Mary de Chantel, Sister Mary Columba, and all those who have come to know the Lord through the gifts of himself which he so generously offered to the church. May he rest in peace. Amen.

#### **SERVIVING FAMILY MEMBERS**

At the time of his death, Monsignor Kirby was survived by his sister, Sister Mary Vincent Kirby, RSM, of Auburn; his sister-in-law Eileen C Kirby of Mallow, County, Cork, Ireland; Nephews Todd and Raymond Kirby of Mallow, Ireland; and niece Dr Mary Kirby of England.

Preceding him in death were his parents, Thomas and Mary Kirby, his sisters, Sister Mary Columba Kirby of Dublin, Ireland; Sister Mary de Chantel of Tralee, County Kerry, Ireland; and his brother Gerard Kirby of Mallow, County Cork, Ireland.

#### **FINAL RESTING PLACE**

After the Funeral Mass, the body of Monsignor Kirby was taken to All Souls Cemetery in Vallejo where it was laid to rest until the day of the Lord's return and the resurrection of the dead.



**Mercy Sisters accompany Sister Mary Vincent Kirby, RSM, at the Burial of Monsignor Kirby**



**Bishop Quinn prepares to bless the grave of Monsignor Kirby**

## IN MEMORIAM

Monsignor Thomas Kirby dedicated his life to the growth of the Church of Sacramento. He was blessed by nature with administrative talents and Bishop Armstrong recognized those talents early on in the ministry of this young priest from Kerry. Father Tom had the ability to quickly grasp the central issues and knew how to take effective action.

When Bishop Armstrong was stricken with cancer, young Monsignor Kirby was able to step in to ensure the smooth running of the diocese with his administrative skills and ability to multi-task. The list of his responsibilities in the diocese over the years is amazingly long.

He had a clear vision of future growth and often spent his day off driving around the diocese to see where growth was taking place. He was in a position to purchase property for the diocese so when a new parish was needed in an area of growth, the diocese already owned the land. He was a skilled one-man act that paid off great dividends for the Church of Sacramento. That is why Bishop Bell was pleased with the planning Monsignor Kirby had done for the diocese in the 1950s.

The Diocese of Sacramento owes Monsignor Kirby a debt of great gratitude for his foresight and planning to meet the needs of a growing diocese.

Of the five Kirby children, four gave their lives in service to the church: one priest, three religious sisters and one brother who married. Tom and Mary Kirby must be very proud of all five of their children for the great contributions they made to the Catholic faith around the world.

We thank Monsignor Kirby for the great contribution he made to the Church of Sacramento in the mid twentieth-century. May he be fully alive in the joy and glory of the Lord!

*Lord,  
You called Thomas Kirby to the priesthood.  
For a half century he served the Church of Sacramento,  
sharing his many talents generously.  
Receive him into the joy of the Kingdom  
You have prepared for all who love you.  
May Monsignor Todd rest now in peace.  
Amen*

# PHOTOS ON THE JOURNEY

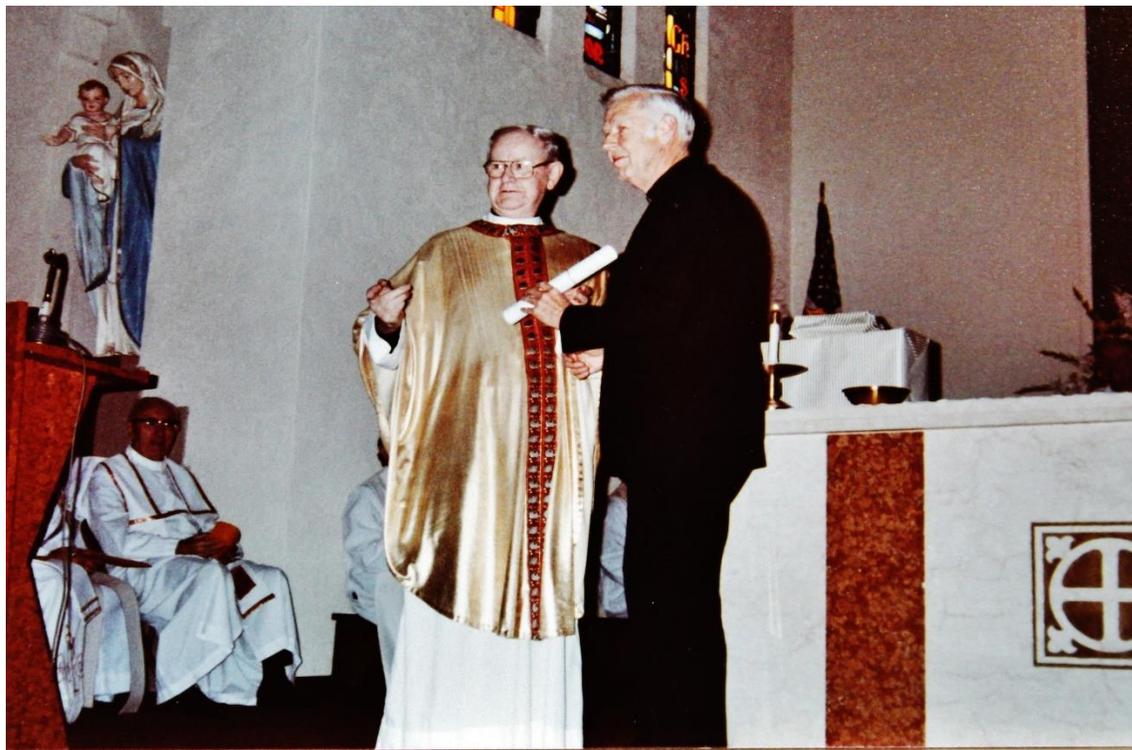


**Kirby**

The Kirby Family Coat of Arms



L-R, Sr Mary de Chantel of Tralee, Msgr Kirby, Sr Mary Columba of Dublin and Sr Mary Vincent of Auburn



Bishop Quinn congratulates Monsignor Kirby on his Golden Jubilee as a priest in 1985



Jubilee Mass



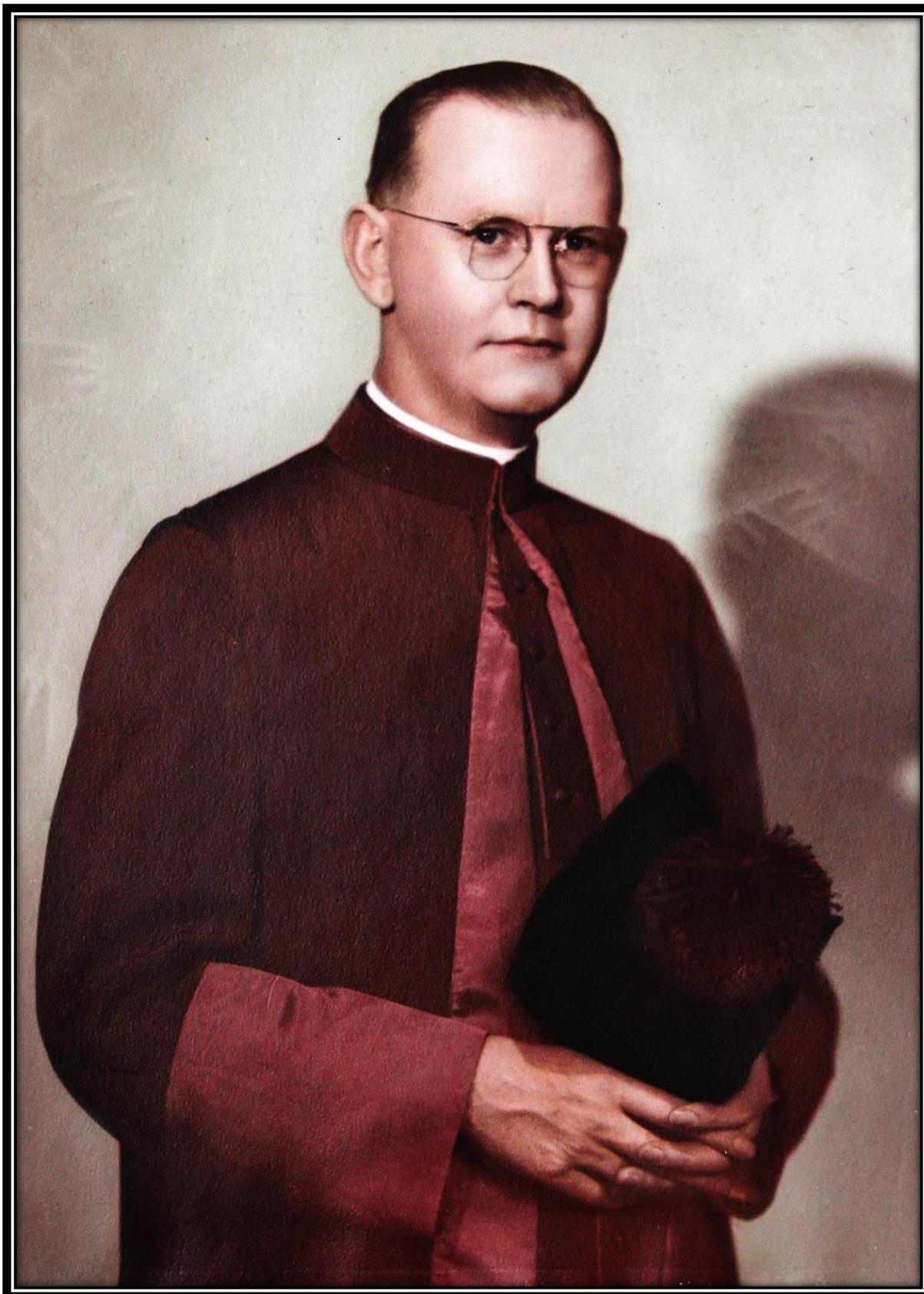
L-R, Jubilee Mass, Fr Thomas Bland and Fr Albert O'Connor



L-R, Msgr James Corcoran, Fr Nicholas Duggan and Fr Dan Looney



Members of the Chancery Staff during Monsignor Kirby's time in the Bishop's Office



*Monsignor Thomas Augustine Kirby*