

# SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 5

Father John E Boll

No 49

## *Father Lawrence Anthony Ryan*

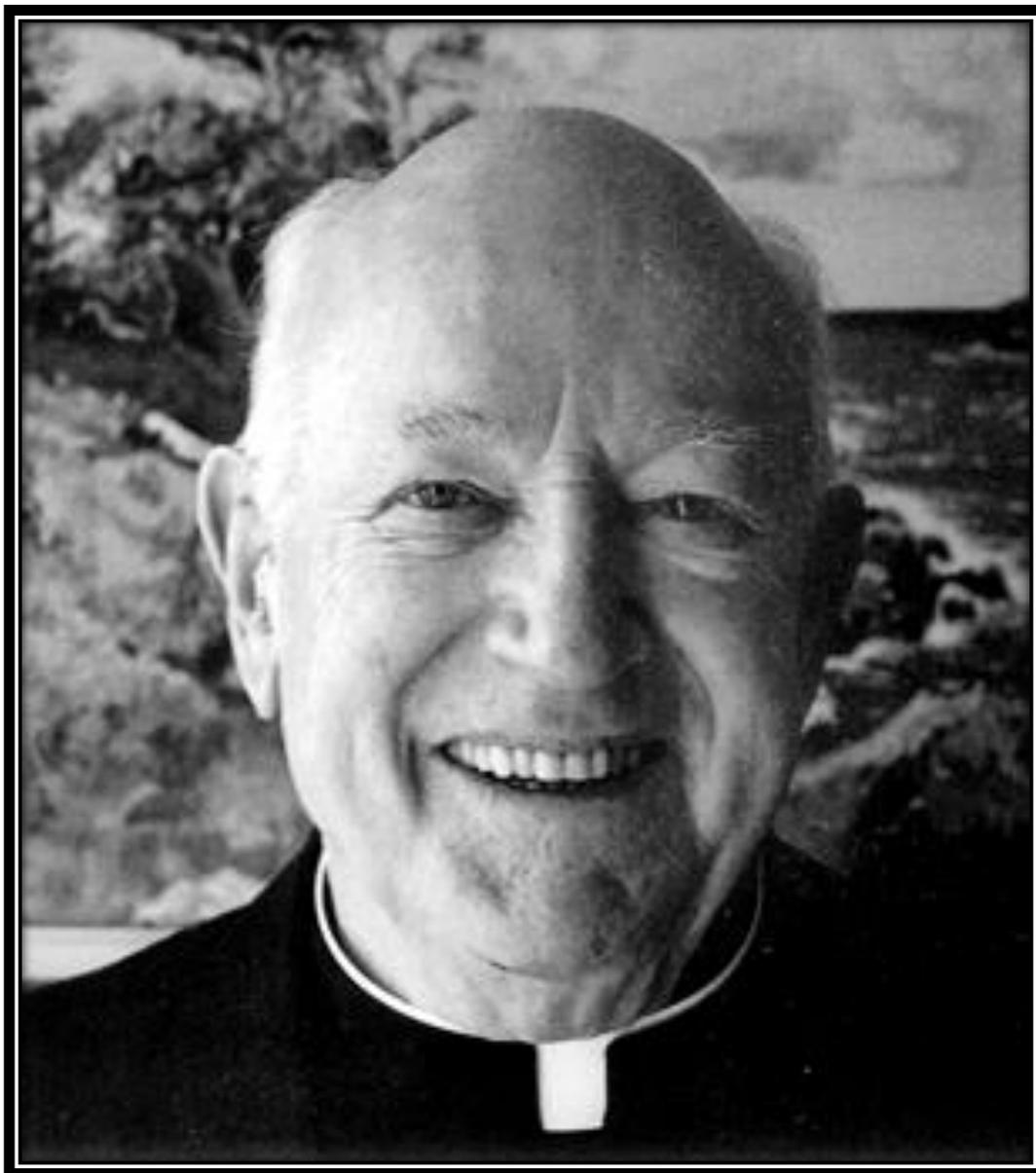
Native of Saint Paul, Minnesota

Priest of the Archdiocese of San Francisco

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor of Saint Mary Church, Vacaville, California

March 30, 1916 – January 18, 2012



**Lawrence Anthony Ryan** was born on March 30, 1916 in Saint Paul, Minnesota, the seventh of eight children born to James J Ryan and Mary Ellen Tracey. The Ryan children are Mary Catherine, Anna who died at birth, John Vincent, Maurice Francis who was ordained a priest for San Francisco in 1940, Rose who died in infancy, Robert, Larry Anthony and Alice Eleanor. Larry was baptized in Saint Joseph Hospital, Saint Paul, Minnesota, on April 3, 1916.

Larry's father James was a plumber and had to move the family as jobs changed for him. The Ryan family moved from Minnesota to the San Francisco Bay Area and settled in the Oakland area. They were parishioners of Saint Francis de Sales Parish in Oakland and Larry attended the parish grammar school from 1924 to 1930.



Photo from the web

**Saint Francis de Sales Church, Oakland, CA**

### **BEGINS HIGH SCHOOL AT SAINT JOSEPH COLLEGE**

After graduating from grammar school in 1930, Larry entered Saint Joseph College Seminary in Mountain View to begin his formation for the priesthood. After completing high school and his first two years of college in Mountain View, Larry's class moved to Saint Patrick Seminary in Menlo Park for his final two years of college which focused on studies in philosophy.

### **A GIFTED STUDENT**

Larry was a gifted student who graduated from college *summa cum laude* in 1938. The Sulpician Fathers who were the professors at Saint Patrick Seminary from its began in 1898 recommended

to Archbishop John J Mitty of San Francisco that Larry be sent to the Casa Santa Maria Pontifical North American College, via dell' Umilta, Rome for his theological training.



Photo by John E Boll

### **Saint Patrick Seminary, Menlo Park**

#### **INVITATION TO STUDY IN ROME**

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of June, 1938, Archbishop Mitty sent the following letter to Lawrence Ryan:

*Dear Mr. Ryan:*

*On the recommendation of the faculty of St. Patrick's Seminary, Menlo Park, I am offering you an opportunity to make your studies in Theology at the North American College in Rome, starting this coming fall.*

*I would be happy to learn from you if you are willing to accept this opportunity.*

*With every best wish and blessing, I am*

*Faithfully yours,*

*+ John J. Mitty  
Archbishop of San Francisco*

#### **LARRY ACCEPTS THE ARCHBISHOP'S INVITATION**

Larry was very happy to receive this letter from Archbishop Mitty offering him the opportunity to do his theological studies at the Jesuit Gregorian University in Rome. In the fall of 1938, Larry set sail for Rome and on December 4, 1938 wrote to Archbishop Mitty letting him know of his safe arrival in the Eternal City. Larry's letter to the archbishop follows:

*December 4, 1938*

*Your Excellency,*

*Now that I am finally settled at the North American College, I wish to offer you my sincere gratitude for giving me this great opportunity to study in this nerve center of Christianity. This is a privilege, I know, for which every seminarian hopes.*

*I sailed aboard the "Conte di Savoia" with two New York men on October twenty-second and arrived safely in Rome after an enjoyable voyage. The San Franciscans, John Connolly, Frank Reilly and James O'Neill, were on hand to welcome and aid me in preparing for the school year.*

*Needless to mention, there are difficulties to overcome; these, however, I shall not meet alone, for my future is in God's hands. Trusting in Him, as a child in a father, I pray that it may please Him to help me to succeed spiritually and scholastically this year. Then, on the natural side, there are the example and encouragement of those who have gone before me. Humbly, I ask your prayers for that intention. In return, you may be certain that I shall remember you in my daily Mass.*

*Praying that the Christ Child may grant you and your flock a holy and happy Christmas and a New Year abounding in graces and blessings, I am,*

*Your son in Christ,  
Lawrence Ryan*



Photo from the North American College website

**Dining Room, Casa Santa Maria, North American College, Rome**

## **LARRY DEVELOPS A SERIOUS HEARING AILMENT**

As Larry began his studies, he noticed that he was having difficulty hearing his professors and therefore could not understand the lectures. The Rector of the North American College, Bishop Ralph L Hayes, sent Larry to a doctor in Rome for an examination. After this medical consultation, Bishop Hayes wrote to Archbishop Mitty telling him he had reached the conclusion that it was advisable that Mr Ryan return home for further medical treatment since it was useless for him to attend classes in Rome without the ability to hear the lecturers. The doctor in Rome felt there was little hope for Larry to improve his hearing until the warmer weather arrived in Rome and that was only a hopeful guess that Larry's hearing would improve.

On February 8, 1939, Larry wrote to Archbishop Mitty about his hearing problem.

*Most Reverend John J Mitty,*

*Your Excellency,*

*I want to acknowledge your letter of December 22<sup>nd</sup> and thank you kindly for your good wishes and prayers.*

*This is not a pleasant letter for me to write. It is only after weeks of waiting and deliberating – and now on my confessor's advice – that I am writing you. For over two months I have been afflicted with ear trouble that hampers seriously my hearing. Although I have taken weekly treatments from several doctors, my hearing has not responded to these. How serious this defect is, you may judge for yourself from the fact that I have not been able to hear any of my lecturers since early in December.*

*I have waited patiently for some relief. Since it became evident that attendance of classes was for me, in my condition, a waste of time, aside from the training in obedience and patience. Our rector has granted me permission to absent myself from lectures and study in my room at the College. Hopeful as this remedy is, it does not compensate for the lectures I am missing. With your years of experience as a dogma professor you understand me and when I say that it is nigh impossible for me, a beginner in theology, to take my first steps in a new field without the supporting hand of a professor. Although my classmates and fellow diocesans have aided me wonderfully in this regard, they cannot adequately supplant the professors of the Gregorian University.*

*Frankly, I am bitterly disappointed because it is seemingly impossible to continue my theological studies with this handicap. Thus it is that I have betaken myself to your counsel and await your decision.*

*Your son in Christ,  
Lawrence Christ*



Archbishop Mitty responded to Larry’s letter on March 2, 1939 saying he was “very, very sorry” to hear that Larry was having serious ear trouble that hampered his ability to hear. He authorized Bishop Hayes to make the decision whether Larry should take treatment in Rome and continue there or return to San Francisco. The archbishop felt Bishop Hayes could judge more competently since Archbishop Mitty was many miles away.

**Archbishop John J Mitty**

The Archbishop went on to say “We were thrilled today to hear of the election of Cardinal Pacelli as our new Pope. San Francisco recalls his visit here with a great deal of pride.”

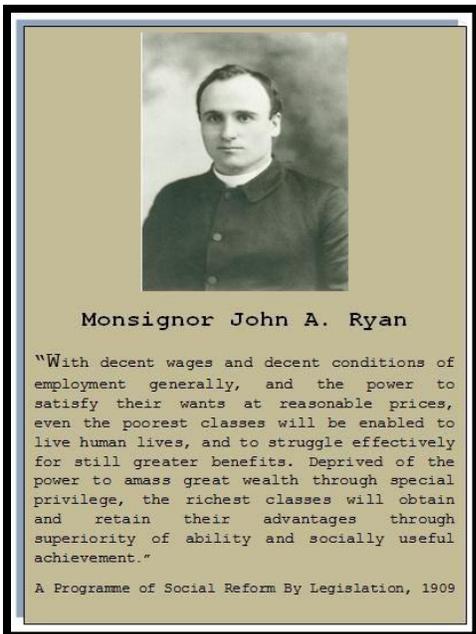
**RETURN TO SAN FRANCISCO**

Seminarian Larry Ryan began his return to San Francisco by setting sail from Cherbourg, France for New York on April 15, 1939. Once in New York, he traveled by train across the United States to San Francisco. He resumed his theological studies at Saint Patrick Seminary in Menlo Park from 1939 to 1942.

**FROM A LONG LINE OF PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS IN THE RYAN FAMILY**

Larry Ryan came from a family that had six priests and five nuns. Larry’s brother Frank was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of San Francisco in 1940 and was a pioneer in working with alcoholic priests at Via Coeli in Jémez Springs, New Mexico.

Two cousins were priests, Father David Ryan, OSA, in San Diego and Father Bill Fitzgerald, a Redemptorist and former Provincial of the Redemptorist Western Province.



Monsignor Lawrence F Ryan, Larry’s uncle, was a builder and rector of Saint Paul Cathedral in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Monsignor John A Ryan was an internationally known pioneer of U.S. Catholic Social and Economic teaching. He wrote 16 books and thousands of articles. He was a professor of economics at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC for 25 years.

**Monsignor John A Ryan  
International leader in Catholic Social Justice**

### **ORDAINED A PRIEST FOR THE ARCHDIOCESE OF SAN FRANCISCO**

Having completed his theological training at Saint Patrick Seminary in Menlo Park, Lawrence Anthony Ryan was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of San Francisco on June 13, 1942 by Archbishop John J Mitty at Saint Mary Cathedral in San Francisco.

### **FIRST PRIESTLY ASSIGNMENT**

After ordination, Father Ryan was assigned as assistant priest to Epiphany Parish in San Francisco from 1942 to 1944.



Photo from the web

### **Church of the Epiphany, San Francisco**

### **GRADUATE SCHOOL AT CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA**

After two years working in parish ministry, Father Larry was sent to Catholic University of America in the fall of 1944 for a year to work on his master's degree in English which he completed in 1945.

He returned to San Francisco in June 1945 and was assigned to the teaching faculty of Serra High School for Boys in San Mateo, a position he held until the summer of 1949. Father Ryan taught English and religion and coached the Serra varsity basketball team. His team won the Catholic League Basketball Championship in 1949.

While teaching at Serra High, he lived in residence at Mount Carmel Parish in Redwood City and commuted to the high school campus daily.



Photo from the web

**Catholic University of the United States, Washington, DC**

**STUDENT AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY**

Father Ryan continued his studies at Stanford University in Palo Alto to earn his doctorate in education which he completed in 1955.



Photo from Stanford Website

**Stanford University, Palo Alto, California**

### **PRINCIPAL OF MARIN CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL**

In 1949, Father Ryan served one year at Saint Joseph Military Academy in Belmont and then was assigned to Marin Catholic High School in Kentfield for the academic year 1950-51. He was then tapped to be assistant superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Archdiocese of San Francisco from 1951 to 1955 and then returned to Marin Catholic to serve as principal from 1955 to 1959.

While teaching English at Marin Catholic, Father Ryan had two students who would excel in their fields, the future laureate Robert Hass and David Del Tredici, Pulitzer Prize winning pianist and resident composer of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.



Photo from Marin Catholic Website

### **Marin Catholic High School, Kentwood, California**

### **NAMED PASTOR OF SAINT MARY PARISH, VACAVILLE**

After serving as principal of Marin Catholic High School for four years, Father Ryan was appointed pastor of Saint Mary Parish in Vacaville on June 27, 1959. At that time, Solano County was part of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Father Ryan would serve as pastor of Vacaville for the next 23 years.

During his two decade ministry in Vacaville, Father Ryan saw Vacaville grow from a town of 10,000 to a city of 55,000. He embarked on a building program to expand the rectory, built a catechetical-youth center and renovate the church to conform to the liturgical changes following the Second Vatican Council.

## BECOMES A PRIEST OF THE DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO

In April 1962, during the Pontificate of Pope John XXIII, the dioceses of Oakland, Stockton and Santa Rosa were created. It was at this time that Solano County was transferred from the Archdiocese of San Francisco to the Diocese of Sacramento and Father Ryan automatically became a priest of Sacramento.

Father Ryan had been an educator for twenty years and enjoyed being a teacher. But when he became pastor of Saint Mary Parish in Vacaville, he found parish work more fulfilling and rewarding. "People's appreciation was almost tangible," he said. "My parish ministry was very sustaining to me in the loneliness of the priesthood."



Photo by Cathy Joyce,

**Saint Mary Church, Vacaville during Father Ryan's Pastorate**

## RETIREMENT

After serving as pastor of Saint Mary Parish, Vacaville for twenty-three years, Father Ryan retired from parish ministry on July 1, 1982 and moved to Santa Cruz, California where he lived for the next eighteen years. He often helped local parishes with Sunday Masses when needed.

In 2002, Father Ryan moved back to Sacramento and for a short time lived at the Priests' Village in Citrus Heights. The then moved to Mercy McMahan Center in Sacramento and after that to Campus Commons Senior Retirement Village in East Sacramento.

## **CREATED A COURSE ON AGING GRACEFULLY**

Father Ryan had a sharp and creative mind well into his 90s. At the age of 90, he founded and moderated “Graceful Aging,” a five-part interactive discussion series designed to encourage fellow senior citizens to value themselves for the wisdom and knowledge they have accumulated and to share that wisdom with others. He led sessions of “Graceful Aging” at Campus Commons Senior Residence where he was a resident, and at several parishes in the diocese.

### **The topics of Father Ryan’s course:**

- 1 Winnowing the wisdom from your life experiences and leaving that wisdom as a legacy to the present and future generations.**
- 2 Maintenance of a living, growing relationship with God and the present world through the Eucharist, meditation and prayer.**
- 3 Remain active in helping out in parish Mass, programs, visiting the sick, shut-ins.**
- 4 Live in the present; be open to the modern advances in religion, scientific discoveries, and exercise, especially brain exercises; “Use it or lose it.”**
- 5 Continue to learn by attending courses and seminars, and keep reading.**
- 6 Cultivate new friendships by socializing with people in your environment.**
- 7 Avoid negativity. Counteract it with positivity.**
- 8 Enter the computer world and get out of the stone-age mentality. The computer is a library at your fingertips.**
- 9 Exercise! Exercise physically and mentally five times a week.**



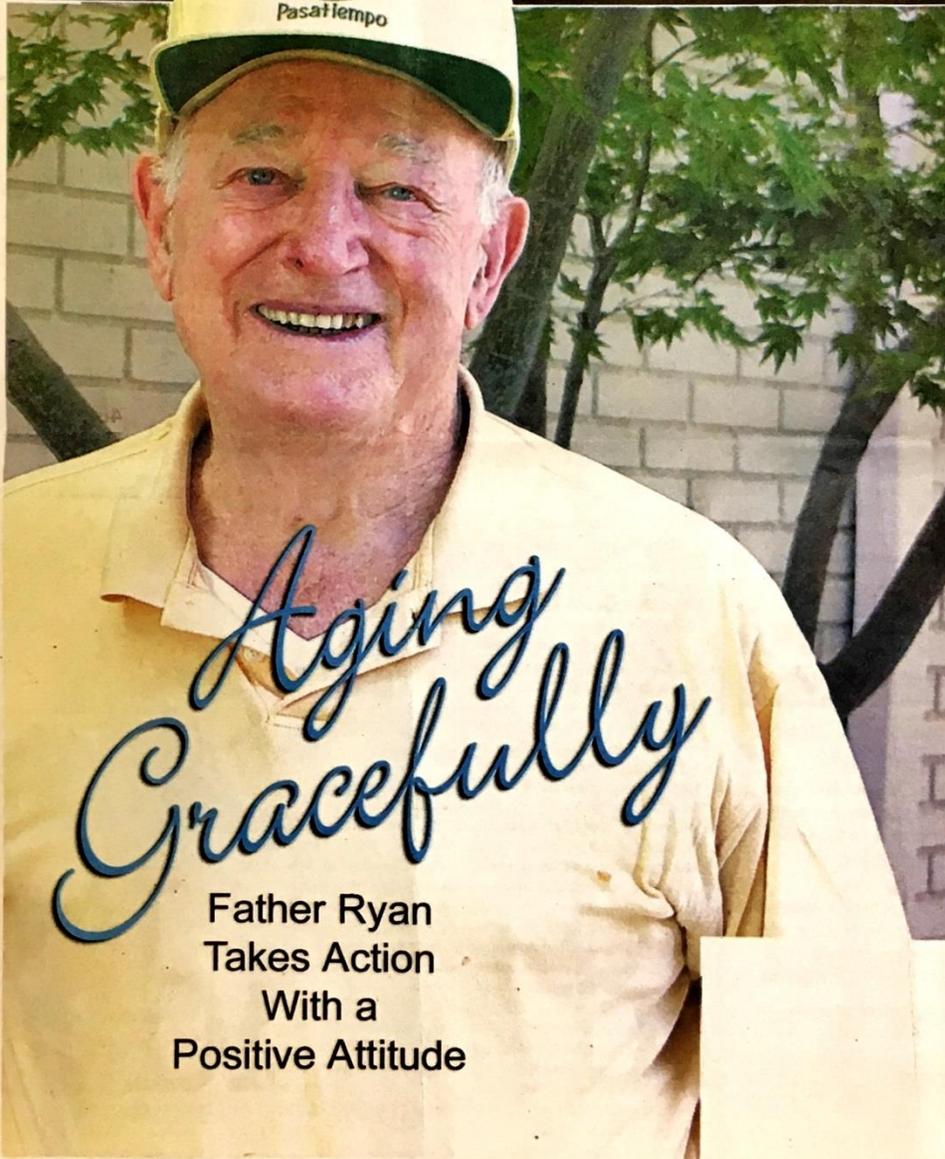
**Father Ryan visits former “Graceful Aging” students at Campus Commons Senior Residence  
2007**

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*Aging  
Gracefully*

**Father Ryan  
Takes Action  
With a  
Positive Attitude**

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An article about Father Ryan work with aging in the *SENIOR SPECTRUM* in 2006

## **IN HIS OWN WORDS**

In the 2003 fall edition of ***THE PATRICIAN***, a publication of Saint Patrick Seminary, Menlo Park, Father Ryan wrote a short article entitled, *A JUBILARIAN'S NOTE ON 60 YEARS OF SERVICE*. Father Larry wrote:

*An old pastor once said to us assistants, "Boys, the barque of Peter is indestructible. Not even we can sink it."*

*I am happy to report that none of the seven ordained for San Francisco in 1942 have tried to sink the barque of Peter.*

*Five of the seven are safe at home with God their Father – John Dwyer, Francis Scanlon, Dan Lynch, Ed Dingberg and John O'Shea. Two of us octogenarians are still in the land of the living: Tom Walsh and I, Larry Ryan.*

*I am pastor emeritus of St Mary's Church in Vacaville (oh, yeah, where the Nut Tree used to be).*

*When the Archdiocese was divided in 1962, I happened to sleep in the wrong town that night. I woke up the next day in the diocese of Sacramento!*

*When the famed Archbishop Fulton Sheen gave the priests' retreat here in 1941, he told this story about visiting a Trappist monastery and finding a sad looking monk. So sad that Sheen asked the monk why he was so sad. "Is it the long hours of prayer?" The monk shook his head. "Is it your strict diet?" The monk shook his head. "Well," Sheen continued, "what makes you so sad?" Finally, the monk spoke up, "It's the whole damned thing."*

*Like you, I have received several questionnaires – polls – about the priesthood. One constant question asked is if I am happy with my priesthood and to what degree. I answered: Yes, I am happy in the priesthood.*

*If someone – a la Sheen – were to ask why, I would say, "It's the whole wonderful, blessed thing!"*

*I am grateful for many things: the call to the priesthood; for graduating summa cum laude from St Joseph's College in 1936; for being recommended by the faculty of St Patrick's Seminary to make my studies in theology at the North American College in Rome in 1938; for the opportunity to take post-graduate studies at Catholic University and earned a Masters in English in 1945 and a PhD in education from Stanford in 1953; for 20 years in education as teacher, principal and assistant superintendent of high schools; for the opportunity to teach English at Marin Catholic High School to the future poet laureate Robert Hass, and David Del Tredici, Pulitzer Prize winner pianist and now resident composer of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra; and finally for 20 years in pastoral work, where the support of the laity was sacramental in helping me to carry on.*

*Why am I so happy? No one thing, It's the whole blessed thing. The first 60 years have been great. The next 60 years, I pray, will be heavenly.*



Photo by John E Boll

### **Saint Patrick Seminary Chapel, Menlo Park**

#### **DEATH COMES TO FATHER RYAN**

Father Lawrence Anthony Ryan died on January 18, 2012 at the age of 96. Bishop Jaime Soto was the main celebrant of Father Ryan's Funeral Mass on Thursday, January 26, at 10:30 AM in Saint Mary Church, Vacaville, where Father Ryan had been pastor for 23 years. His body was buried at Vacaville Elmira Cemetery.

#### **IN MEMORIAM**

Father Ryan came from a very Catholic family with some distinguished priest relatives who were strong voices for social justice in the world. Father Larry was a gifted student and very disappointed when he had to return to San Francisco after suffering from a hearing problem in Rome.

He had a distinguished teaching career in his early priesthood which he loved but later found great support from parishioners in his life as a parish priest. Little did he ever think he would become a priest of the Diocese of Sacramento in 1962 when Solano County became part of Sacramento when three new dioceses were created on February 21, 1962. As he said, "I slept in the wrong place that night."

Throughout his life, Father Ryan kept his keen mind ever engaged and expanding. He developed a program for seniors to stay physically and mentally fit and alive until their last day. Father Ryan lived to an amazing 96 years of age.

As we can see, he was forward thinker, hoping the church would continually reform itself so as to be a more effective instrument in the hands of the Lord to bring his healing peace to the world. Father Larry, priest, teacher, pastor, painter, gardener and lover of life now sees the Lord face to face in the joy and glory of the Kingdom of Heaven. May he be fully alive in the Lord!



*Father Lawrence Anthony Ryan*

*Priest, Educator, Pastor, Gardener, Artist and Painter*