

# SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 3

Father John E Boll

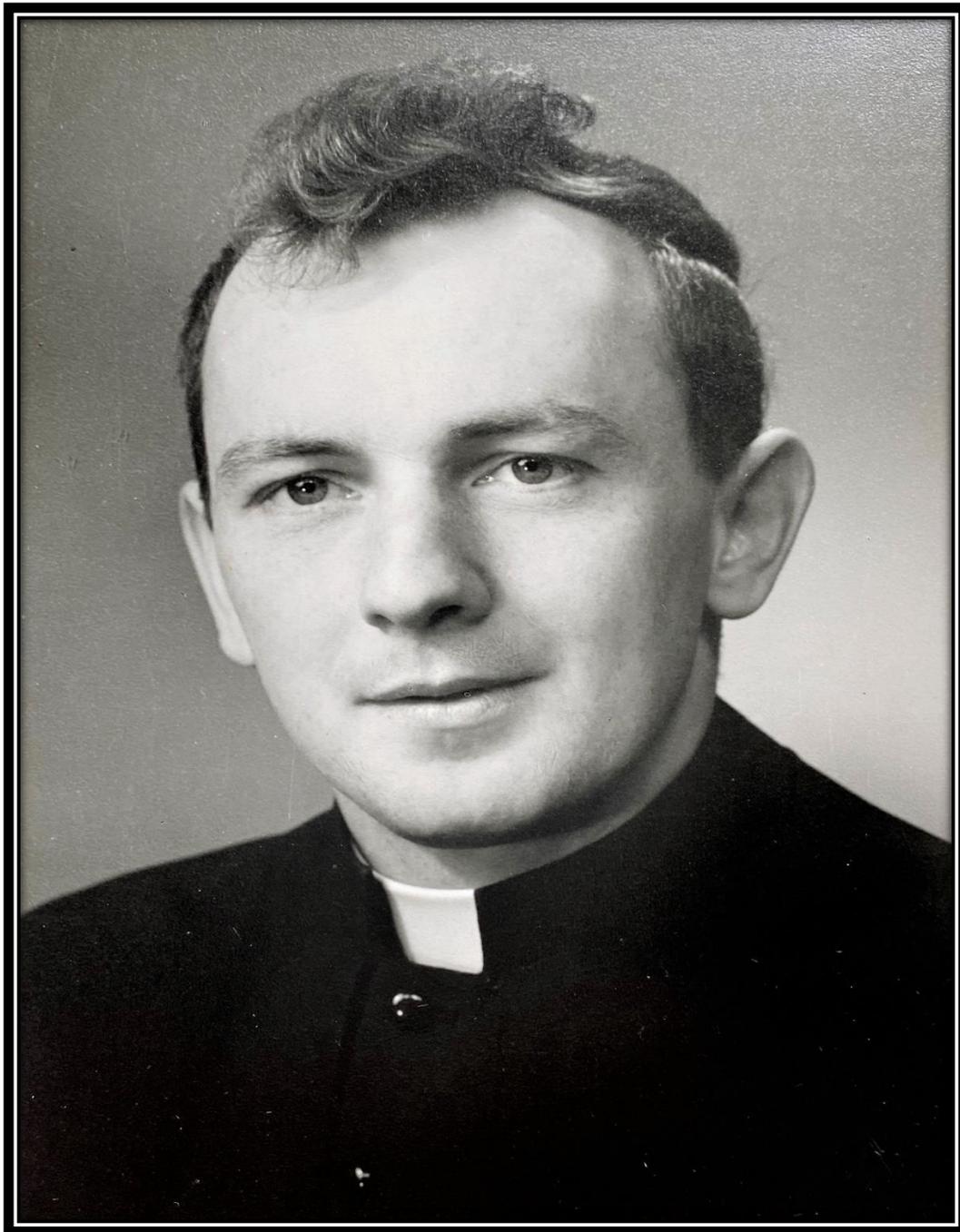
No 24

## *Father John Joseph Healy*

Native of Ardfert, County Kerry, Ireland

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Catholic Chaplain, Mercy General Hospital, Sacramento



**John Joseph Healy**, son of Philip Healy and Catherine Collins, is the fifth child of a family of seven children. The children are, in order of birth, Sheila, Phil, Dora, Jim, John, Thomas and Kathleen. Kathleen died a month after her birth.



Photo courtesy of Fr John Healy

### **Philip and Catherine Healy's Wedding Day, 1935**

#### **A WORD ABOUT JOHN'S FATHER PHILIP**

John's father Philip, known as Sonny, tragically died in 1944 of an apparent heart attack when John was two and a half years of age. Philip's death left his wife Catherine with the task of raising their six children on her own.

Philip had been a seminarian at All Hallows Seminary in Dublin for three years. He attended University College Dublin and graduated with a BA degree. John does not know why his father left the seminary.

On November 5, 1920, Philip was arrested by the British Forces, the infamous Black and Tans, and his brother Tom was shot by the Black and Tans and a third man in the group was shot and

killed that day. Philip was captured and sent to Dartmoor Prison for a year and a half. He was released from prison when a truce was signed by Britain and Ireland.

Once the war was over, Philip and other local farmers started a creamery in the Ardfert area and Phil was the secretary of the organization. It was a time when people tried to re-establish themselves in life and in a profession. Money was tight in Ireland so it was difficult time for families to survive.

### **JOHN SPEAKS ABOUT HIS MOTHER**

“My mother lived about a mile from my dad. There was a castle there hundreds of years old. Her house was right beside the ocean. When they had high tides, the ocean would come into the yard and they would have to let the cows out to bring them to higher ground.

“My mother was a very gentle woman; she never raised her hand to us or even her voice when we surely deserved it! She was a father and mother to us after my dad died. Whatever I learned about social justice, I learned from her.

“Every day, traveler families called Tinkers because they worked with tin, would come and she would seat them at table and give them dinner and then enough food to go. This went on for many years. She treated them with respect and dignity when others regarded them as dirty and dishonest.

This was a time when cash was very limited. I think she felt that ‘this is what your dad would do if he was alive.’ My brother told me that when our dad received a pension for his part in the Irish fight for freedom, he gave that money to the needy.”



Photo courtesy of Fr John Healy

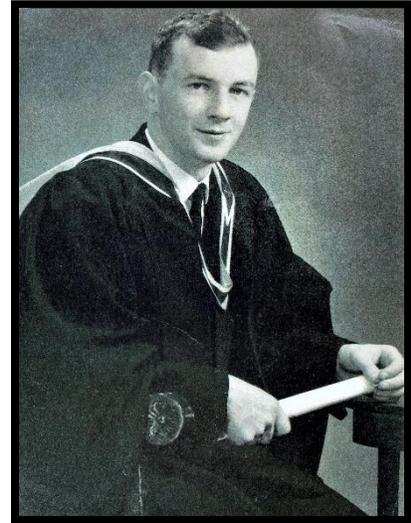
**L-R, Healy Children Jim, Phil, Sheila and John**

## JOHN BEGINS HIS EDUCATION

When John was five years of age, he began school at the Ardfert National School and remained there for seven years. He then transferred to the Causeway Saint Patrick Secondary School seven miles from Ardfert. John often rode his bike to school. After three years at Causeway School, he began classes at Mungret College which was a Jesuit school for boys. He attended this school for two years.

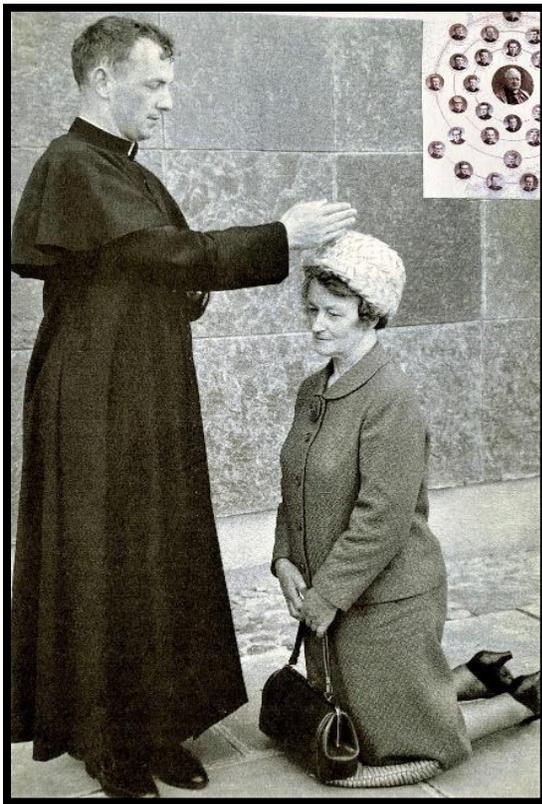
## ALL HALLOWS, DUBLIN

In 1959, John transferred to All Hallows College Seminary in Dublin. While at All Hallows, he attended University College Dublin which was about six miles from All Hallows. He attended UCD for three years and earned his BA degree in Philosophy and Logic with a minor in English. After receiving his degree, he began his theological training at the Senior House at All Hallows Seminary for the next four years.



**John Receives his BA Degree at UCD**

## ORDAINED A PRIEST FOR THE DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO



**Father John Blesses his Mother on his Ordination Day**

On June 19, 1966, John Healy was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Sacramento by Bishop Patrick Dunne, DD, Bishop of Nara and Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Dublin. It was a day with a wild rainstorm. There were thirty ordained to the priesthood that day for many dioceses around the world.

## FATHER JOHN HEADS FOR SACRAMENTO

After his ordination to the priesthood, Father John spent a couple months with his family and on Saturday, September 3, 1966, he said goodbye to his family and his native Ireland as he boarded a plane at Shannon Airport for New York. After his arrival in New York, he then boarded a flight for San Francisco and then on to Sacramento. He was met at the Sacramento Executive Airport by Monsignor Jerry O'Driscoll and spent his first few days at Sacred Heart Parish in Sacramento.

## FIRST ASSIGNMENT, SAINT JOHN PARISH, CARMICHAEL

Father John met Bishop Bell and the other new priests just arriving in Sacramento. His first assignment was as assistant to Saint John the Evangelist Parish in Carmichael with Father James Kenny, pastor. At the same time, he was also assigned part time teacher at Mercy High School in Carmichael and on February 1, 1967, as part time chaplain at Mercy San Juan Hospital.



Photo by John E Boll

### Saint John the Evangelist Church, Carmichael

Father John found teaching at the all-girls high school difficult because he was never trained to be a high school teacher. He says the students were great but he felt he had taught them very little. He did not know how to deal with a classroom of teenage female students. However, he became friends with his students and those friendships have lasted for the past fifty years.

While serving as a teacher at Mercy High School and part-time chaplain at Mercy San Juan Hospital, Father John attended college to earn a Master's Degree in Counseling, a *Pupil Personnel Services* degree. At the same time he also participated in the MAT program, a joint program sponsored by the Diocese of Sacramento and the University of San Francisco. After his first two years, he was relieved of his pastoral duties at Saint John Parish in Carmichael.



Photo by John E Boll

### **Mercy San Juan Hospital, Carmichael**

#### **ASSIGNED TO RED BLUFF**

One September morning in 1972, Father John received a letter in the mail from the Bishop's Office telling him that he was assigned to Sacred Heart Parish in Red Bluff beginning in early September. When he arrived in Red Bluff to take up his assignment, his new pastor Monsignor James Casey was away deer hunting with the other priests in the northern part of the diocese. During his first night in the parish, he received an emergency phone call from the family of a parishioner who need to be anointed. He knew nothing about the town and had no idea how to get to the sick person's house. He eventually found the house, anointed the lady who died in the early morning.

Besides being appointed assistant pastor of the parish, Father Healy was also assigned part-time to Mercy High School in Red Bluff. At the same time, he continued his college studies and completed his credential in counseling.



Photo by John E Boll

### **Sacred Heart Church, Red Bluff**

Father Healy loved the people of Sacred Heart Parish but found the work was consuming his energy because parishioners were scattered throughout the area. He found that the liturgies in the parish were excellent due in part to Monsignor Casey who liked good liturgy and sent parishioners to programs so they would be properly trained in liturgy.

Father John also spent a lot of time with the youth of the parish and the Sacred Heart Youth Group was one of the best youth groups in the diocese. Father John spent five years as assistant of Sacred Heart Parish.

#### **IN HIS OWN WORDS**

Father John says: "During my five years in Red Bluff, I began to experience stress leading to depression in my life. Part of it may have been caused by not taking my day off each week despite the fact that the priests of the area were very supportive of me.

“The priests and sisters of the surrounding area used to get together every Friday evening to visit, have a cup of tea and biscuits and discuss the Sunday Scripture readings in preparation for the Sunday homily. We also put on programs and lectures for the religious and lay people in the surrounding parishes. The priests of the area would meet monthly at the Vina Trappist Monastery for a couple hours.

“I decided I needed help to deal with my depression so I began attending a group at Saint Mary Hospital in San Francisco once a week. The group consisted of priests, brothers and sisters who were experiencing stress and depression in their lives. This weekly gathering was a life saver for me and helped me to grow as a human person and as a priest.”

### **NEXT APPOINTMENT, MERCY GENERAL HOSPITAL**

The chaplaincy at Mercy Hospital in Sacramento became vacant and since his five years at Sacred Heart Parish were up, he decided to apply for the position. He was selected to become the new chaplain of Mercy Hospital and began the position on October 1, 1977.



Photo by John E Boll

### **Mercy General Hospital, Sacramento**

The daily hospital Mass was scheduled for 5:55 AM each morning and after Mass, the priest went with the Sister Visitor to bring Holy Communion to the patients at that early hour because Catholics were bound by the fasting rule from midnight to the time of Communion. Father John says that about five years later, the chaplaincy in hospitals began to change with the advent of

CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) being introduced in all hospitals. Father John did not take his CPE training until 1985 when Mercy Hospital began a CPE program in the hospital.

Father Healy continued as Catholic chaplain at Mercy General Hospital for the next 40 years. At first, he was the only chaplain in the hospital. It was not until 1980 that the idea of a chaplaincy team began to develop. This demanded a change in attitude on the part of the priest who would no longer be the only chaplain but was now part of a larger chaplaincy group under a manager. Before this time, the priest chaplain served alone and was supervised by Mission Services which, at that point, was Sister Mary Saint Michael Myles.

Father John discerned that it would be a good idea for him to experience the same training that the other chaplains were receiving in the CPE program. He spent six months in training while working in the hospital five days a week.

### **CERTIFIED AS A CATHOLIC CHAPLAIN**

Father Healy was certified by the National Association of Catholic Chaplains on March 1, 1985. At the same time, Bishop Quinn appointed him to the AIDS Ministry. He had to fit this new ministry into his spare time. He began to visit people with HIV/AIDS, one on one, helping them deal with the dying process. It took a while for him to be accepted by the AIDS community but once that happened, it became easy for him to help those suffering with AIDS.

### **AIDS MINISTRY BEGINS**

Gradually, with the help of Sister Mary Redempta, Fathers John organized a committee to minister to people with HIV/AIDS. In 1986, Father John and Father Pat McGrath put on an AIDS workshop for the whole Diocese of Sacramento at Saint Rose Parish in Sacramento.



Photo courtesy of Fr John Healy

### **Fathers Pat McGrath and John Healy Plan an HIV/AIDS Workshop for the Diocese**

The needs of people with HIV/AIDS kept changing over time so the ministry had to continually evolve to meet the needs of the people. Father John began to make visits to the Vacaville Medical Facility which housed all the AIDS infected male inmates in the State of California. There were

about 400 inmates in this facility and Father John found it enriching for himself to minister to people with AIDS.

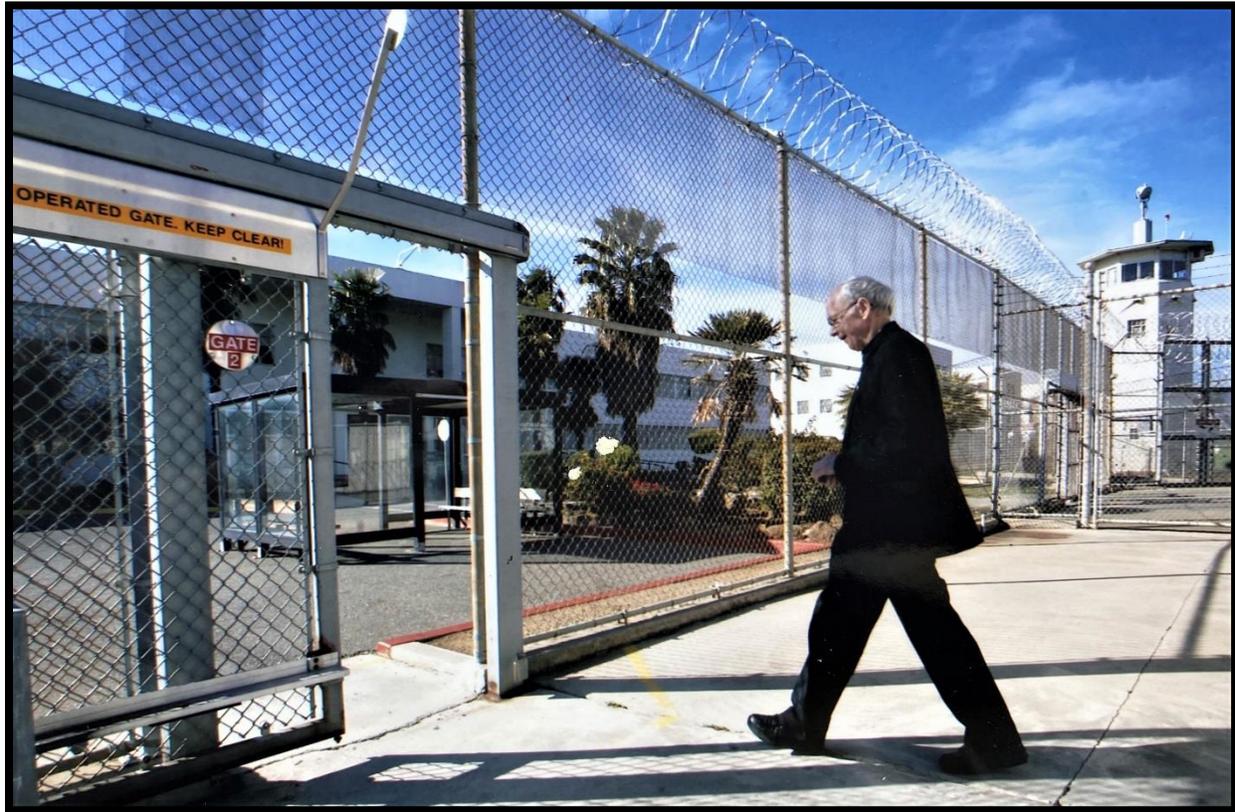


Photo courtesy of Fr John Healy

### **Father John Visits Vacaville Medical Facility**

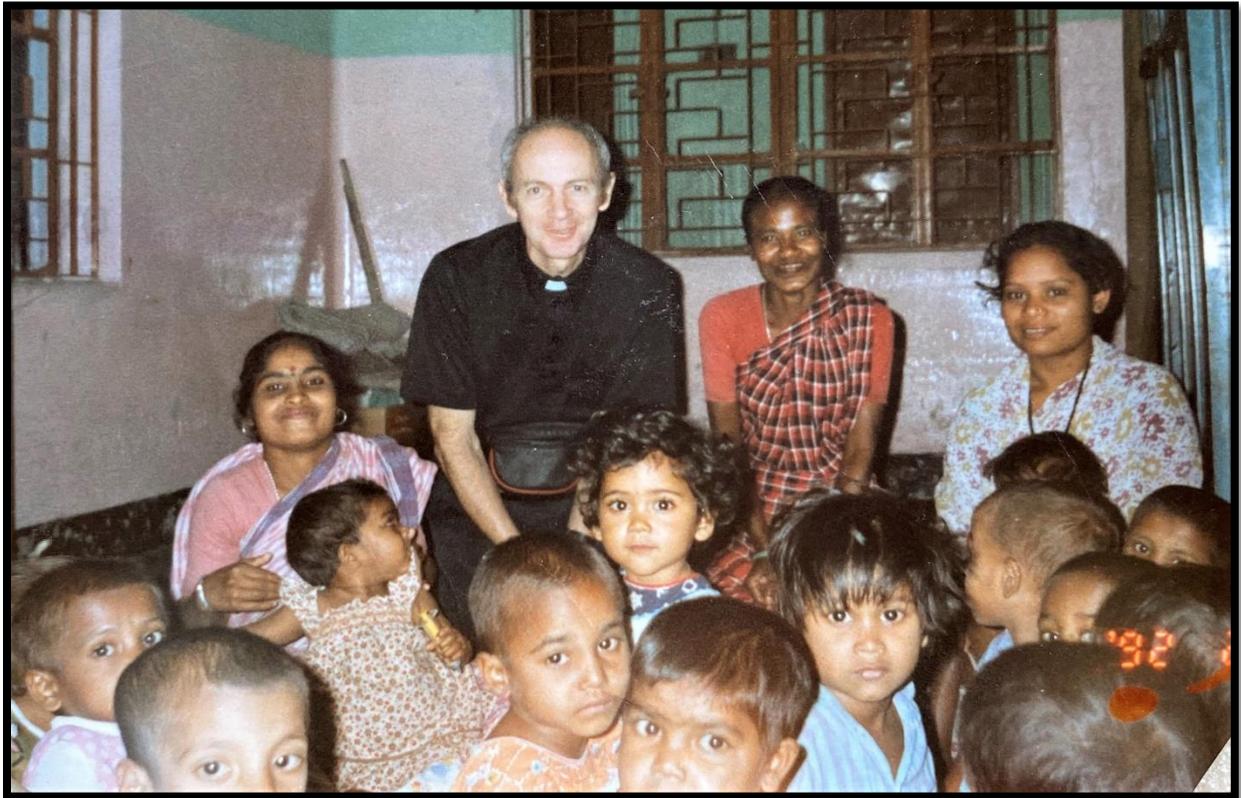
Father Pat Leslie, a priest of Sacramento working at the Sonoma State Hospital, played a major role in opening a hospice ministry for prisoners at the Vacaville Medical Facility who were in the last six months of life. This ministry continues to this day and any prisoner dying of HIV/AIDS will never be left to die alone but will be accompanied by a fellow prisoner trained in pastoral care.

### **ETHICAL ISSUES FATHER JOHN FACED**

As the medical complexities of human life increased, the moral issues affecting modern medicine and hospitals also increased. Father John served on the Ethics Committee of Mercy Hospital which had to deal with the complex issues of medicine and moral ethics.

### **SABBATICAL IN INDIA**

In the summer of 1991, Father John took a sabbatical in Kolkata, India to work as a volunteer at Mother Teresa's ministry to children, the poor and the dying. He spent a month working with the Missionaries of Charity in Kolkata. In the beginning, he felt a sense of anger after seeing the terrible poverty so many people were suffering from daily. But going out each day to feed the hungry and bathe the dying, he saw the great kindness of the people and decided to do what he could and leave the rest in God's hands.



Photos courtesy of Fr John Healy

**Father John Spends Time with the Children**



**A Street Scene of the Poverty in Kolkata**



Father John's Living Quarters in Kolkata



Father John Talks with Mother Teresa

He saw Mother Teresa often and talked with her about the dire situation in India. The place where he stayed was filled with mice and some rats. He had to sleep at night with a cover over his face to keep the mosquitoes away. It was a memorable experience and opened his mind and heart to the poor of India and the world.

### **A PRIEST FOR ALL PEOPLE**

Father John learned in India that he must be a minister of God's mercy to all people who were sick, not just Catholics. When he returned home, he developed guidelines on how to minister to the homeless when they came to the hospital. He had to give guidance to families when it was time to stop extra-ordinary means to keep a loved one alive when that person was nearing death.

### **FATHER JOHN RETIRES**

As he approached his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, Father John received notification from the diocese reminding him that he had not sent a letter to the bishop about retirement six months before reaching 75. Retirement was in the back of Father John's mind but he did not like the idea of retiring from ministry.



Photo courtesy of Fr John Healy

**Father John Healy Celebrates his 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ordination**



**Bishop Soto and Fellow Priests Join in Father John's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Mass**



**Sharing Eucharist with Fr Tom Delahunty (RIP), Fr Patrick O'Connor, & Msgr Brendan O'Sullivan, (RIP)**

He stepped down as chaplain of Mercy Hospital on July 1, 2017 and moved to the Priests' Retirement Village in Citrus Heights. At first, retirement was difficult for him because he saw it as an end to ministry but he found that retirement was totally different than what he expected. He has continued helping in parishes and has served 24 different parishes so far.

He enjoys the great variety of ministry he now experiences and takes time with the sacrament of reconciliation by giving people time to talk about their lives. He senses a great amount of pain in people's lives but also a great goodness in their lives. He even returned to Red Bluff to fill in twice after 42 years away but now those youth who were teenagers when he first came to Sacred Heart Church are now 60 years old!



Photo by John E Boll

### **Father John's Residence at the Priests' Retirement Village, Citrus Heights**

#### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Father John J Healy is a special man and priest. From the start of his ministry in the Diocese of Sacramento, without any help to adapt to the American culture, language, mentality and way of life, he was thrown into the middle of it without any preparation.

In his first appointment he was part-time assistant pastor at Saint John Church, Carmichael, part-time high school teacher at Mercy High School for girls, and part-time hospital chaplain at the new Mercy San Juan Hospital.

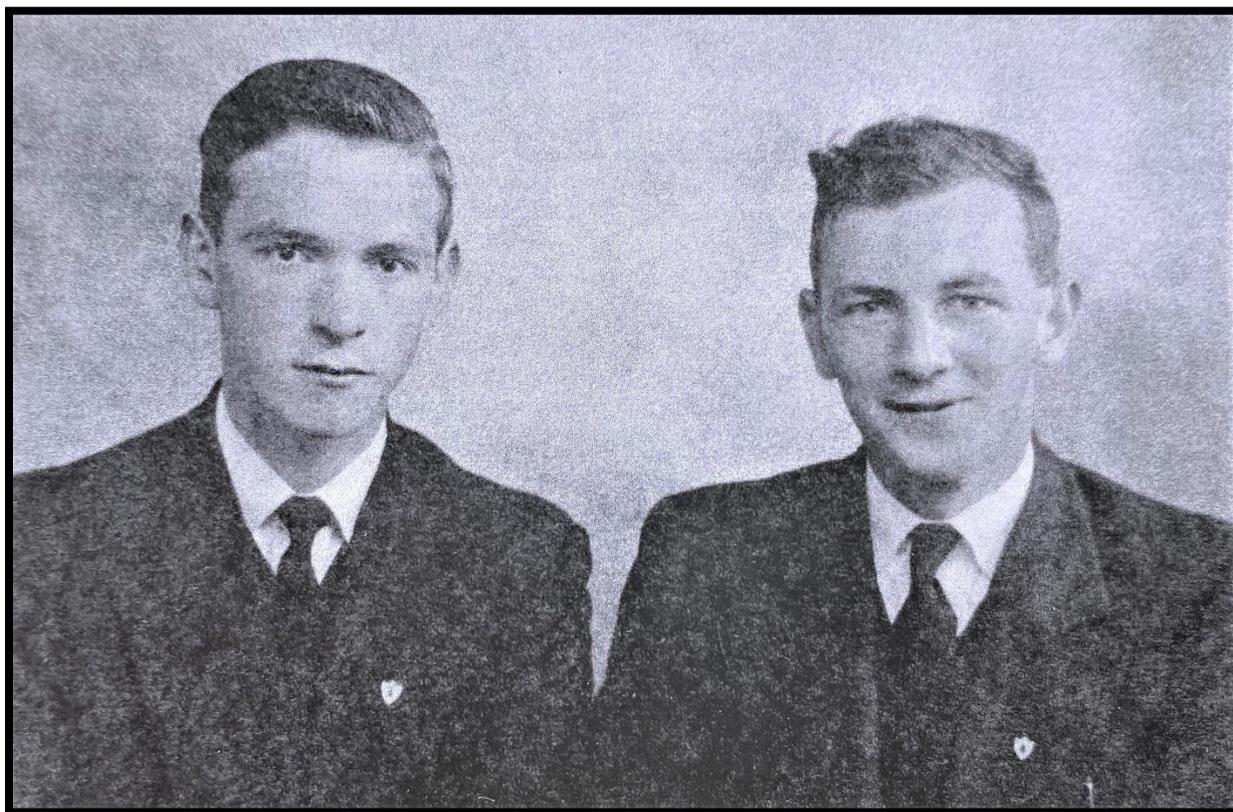
Father John never took his day off and eventually the grind of three different ministries began to wear him down. He had the wisdom to seek help which probably saved his life as a priest. He has been involved in so many ministries that it makes one's mind spin.

Over the past fifty years, he has touched thousands of people in moments of life and death in his hospital ministry. He has graciously and generously reached out to people with HIV/AIDS diseases to minister to them. He has accompanied many at the moment of their death and transition to the Lord of Mercy.

After hearing the story of Father John's life of ministry for over a half a century, I am deeply moved by all the good he has done for so many of God's people at critical moments of their lives. I am inspired by his life and ministry and I thank you, Father John Healy, for your willingness to leave all that was dear to you in Ireland and come on mission to the Church of Sacramento. You have been a faithful minister of the Gospel of Christ Jesus and have been a faithful priest after the pattern of the Good Shepherd. Thank you for being the person you are, wise, gentle, loving and compassionate. The Lord is well pleased with you.

## **PHOTOS OF FATHER JOHN HEALY'S JOURNEY OF LIFE**

Photos courtesy of Father John Healy



**Seminarians Brendan Lawlor and John Healy**



L-R, John O'Keefe, John Healy and Ted Molyneau  
Seminary Days 1962



**Seminarians John Healy and Dick O’Riordan**



**Father John’s All Hallows Ordination Class of 1966**

# All Hallows College

Young 1966 Priests



EUNTES · DOCETE · OMNES · GENTES

ALL HALLOWS SEMINARY ORDINATION CLASS OF 1966



**Medal given to Father John's Father Philip  
For Serving in the Irish Army for Independence**



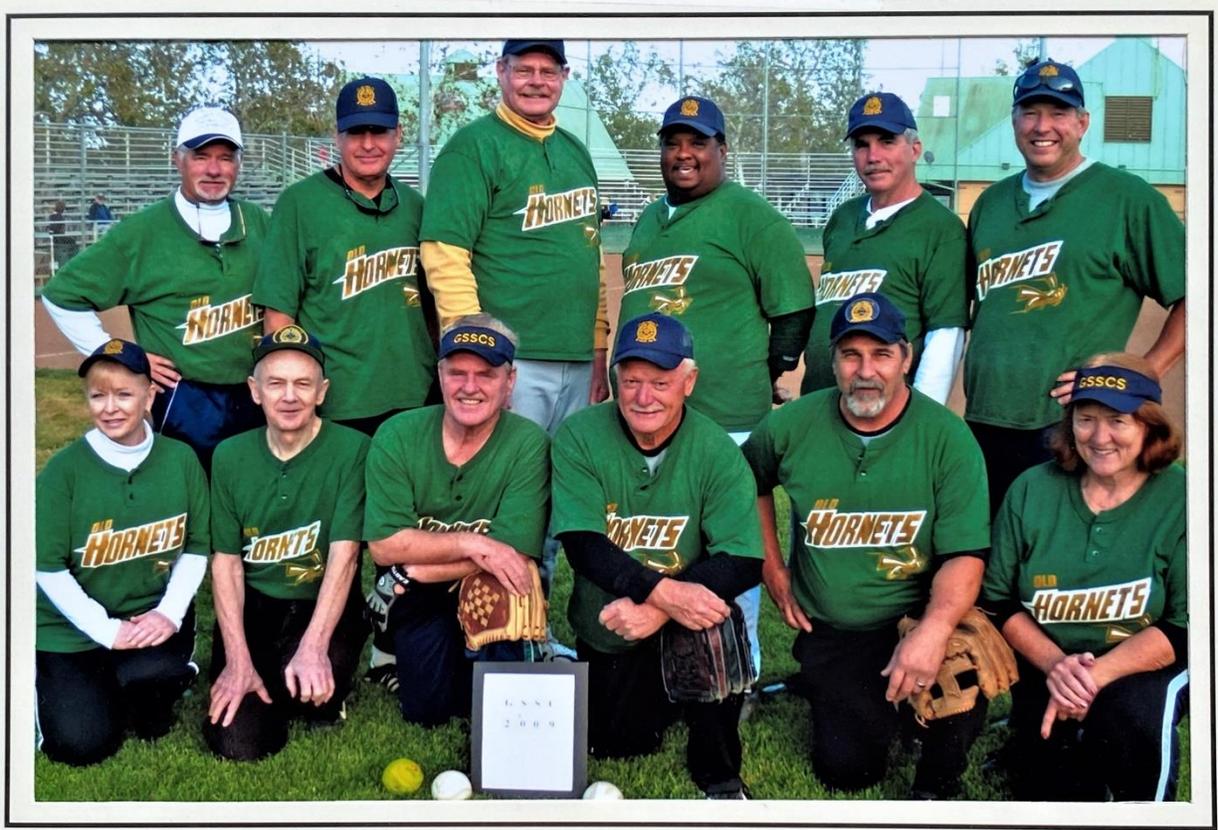
**John's Uncle Father James Healy and Aunt Sister Hannie Healy**



**Mungret College – John is Middle Row, first on the Left**



**All Hallows College, Dublin, Junior House vs Senior House, John is first row, 5<sup>th</sup> from Left**



**Golden West Senior Softball Team, Sacramento**



**Father John Ministers to the Dying**



Father John Celebrated a Monthly Mass at Mercy Hospital for those Suffering from HIV/AIDS



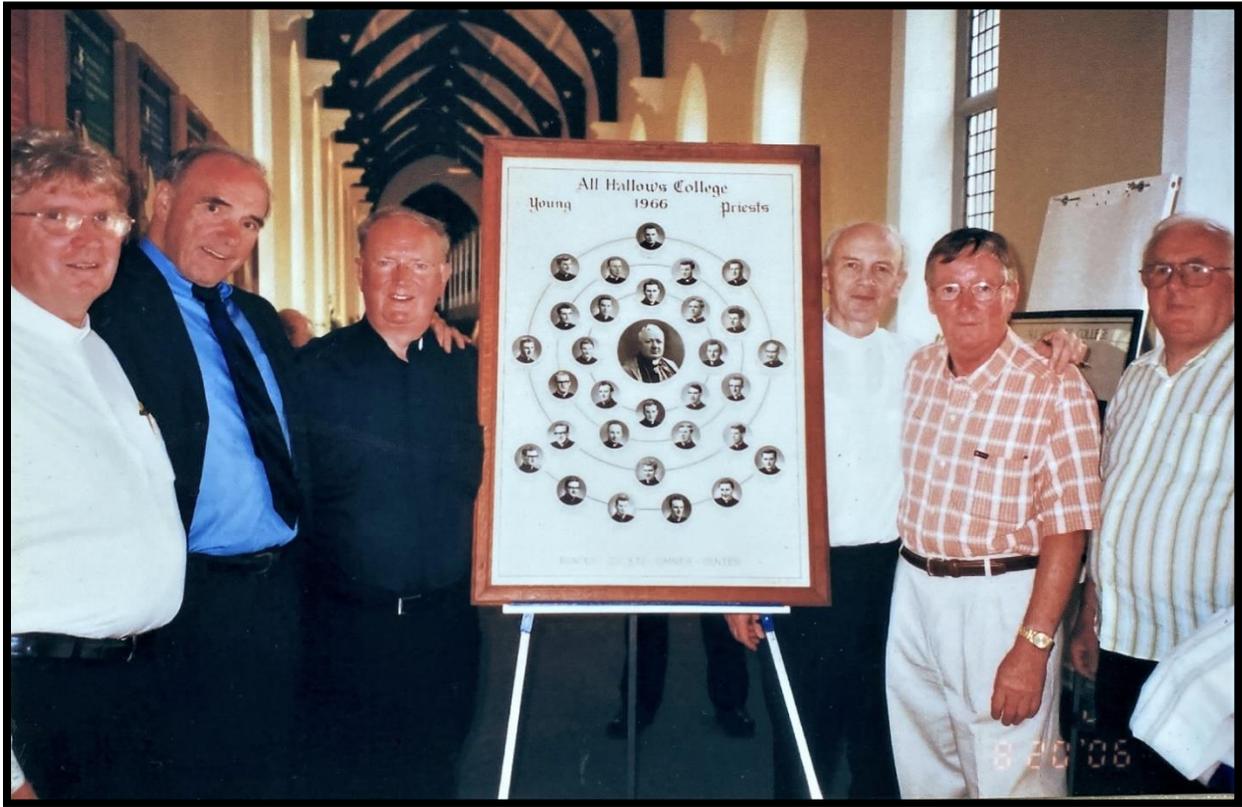
Ministering to an Inmate suffering from AIDS at the Vacaville Medical Facility



Father John is a Big Brother to Alfonso in the Big Brother Program



Father John Celebrates his 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ordination with Classmates at All Hallows



**Fortieth Class Reunion at All Hallows Seminary, Dublin in 2006**



**Father John and Sister Caritas at Mercy Hospital Chapel**



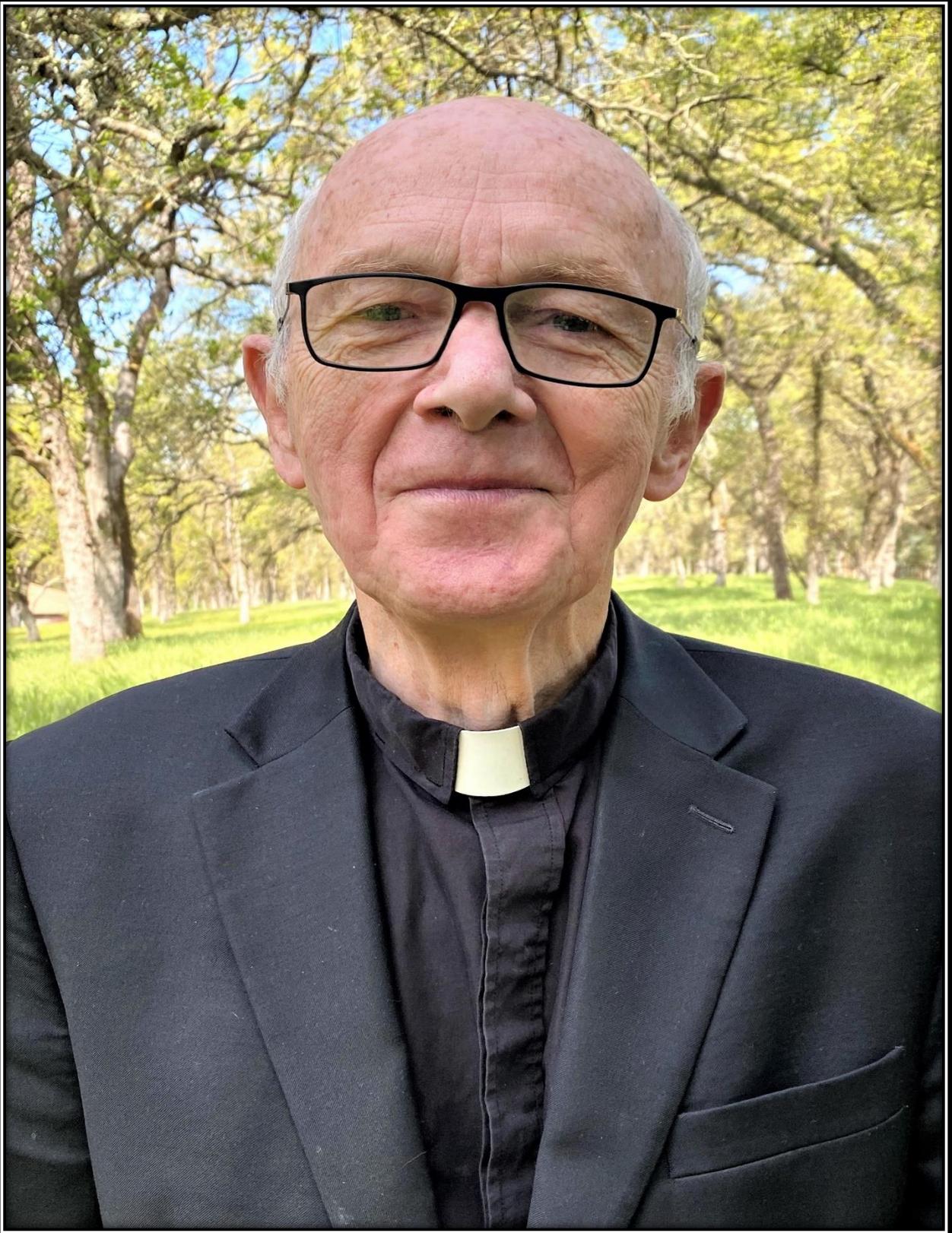
**Father John is honored as Mercy Hospital's *Hero of the Year* in 2015  
By Denny Powell, President of Mercy Hospital**



L-R, the Four Healy Brothers -- Phil, John, Jim and Thomas



Bishop Francis Quinn Joins Father John for his 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Mass at Mercy Chapel



*Father John Joseph Healy*