

Sacramento Diocesan Archives

Vol 3

Father John E Boll

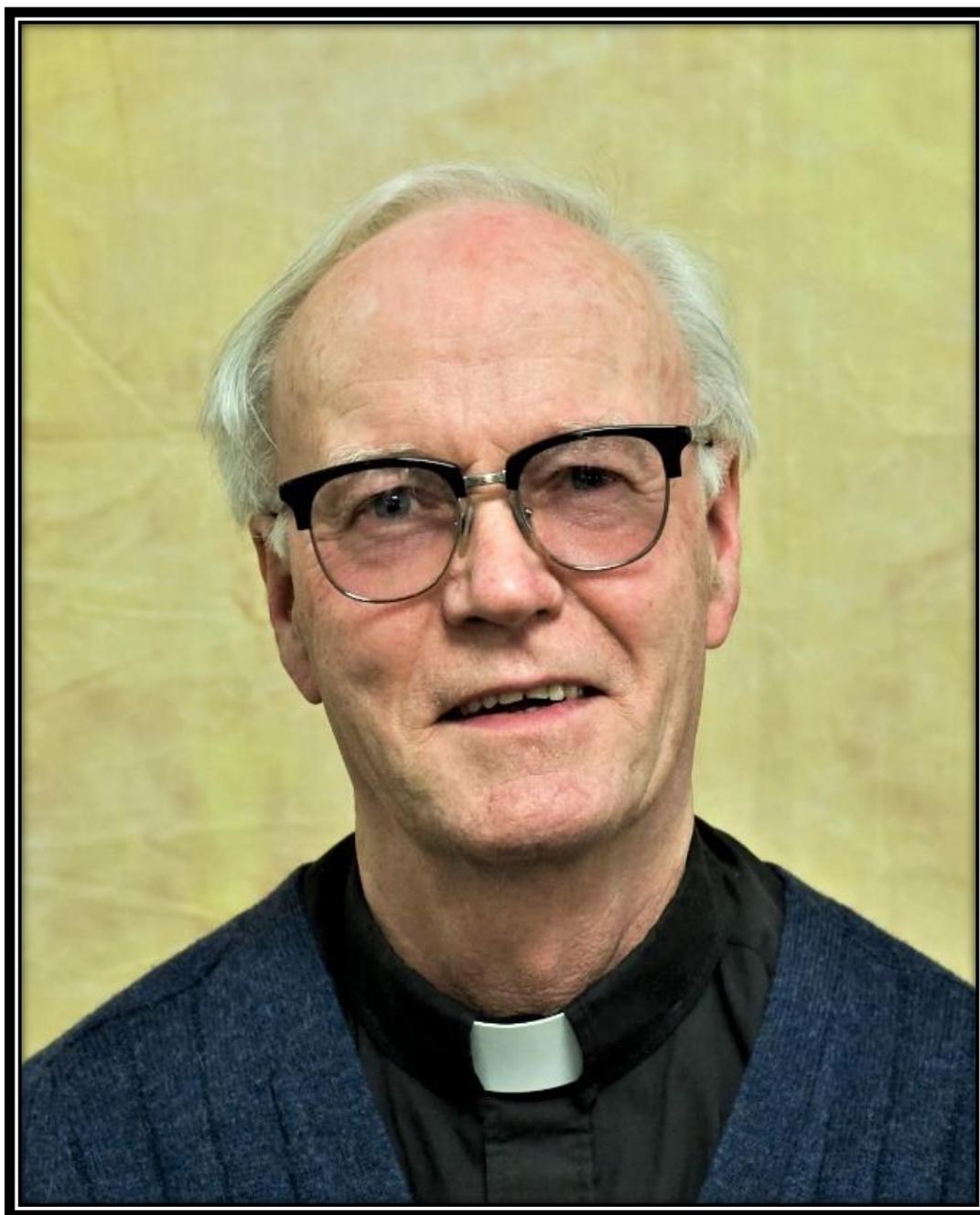
No 36

Father Maurice Joseph O'Brien

Native of Ballyporeen, County Tipperary, Ireland

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor Emeritus of Saint Monica Parish, Willows, CA



Maurice O'Brien, son of Maurice O'Brien and Mary Sweeney, was born on December 12, 1941 and is the second of six children born to the O'Brien family. The six children in order of birth are Michael, Maurice, Cornelius, John, Thomas and Mary. Mossie grew up on the family dairy farm in Ballyporeen where his father had a dairy farm and raised cattle.

BEGINS HIS EDUCATION

Mossie began his education at the primary school in Ballyporeen and went on to secondary school at Rockwell in Tipperary near the town of Cashel. Rockwell High School was staffed by the Holy Ghost Fathers, now known as the Holy Spirit Fathers. This group is a missionary order that was devoted to the African missions. Mossie was influenced by them and planned to join this religious order after he completed high school but was advised by his pastor in Ballyporeen to consider becoming a diocesan priest rather than a religious order priest.

SEMINARY STUDIES AT ST JOHN SEMINARY, WATERFORD

He began studies at Saint John Seminary in Waterford City and while there, the president of the seminary suggested that Mossie consider applying to the Sacramento diocese. The president told him there were a good number of priests from Ireland in Sacramento and he would feel at home in the diocese. Secondly, he suggested that Mossie might become a pastor earlier in Sacramento than he would in Ireland because at that time a priest served as an associate for about 40 years before coming a pastor.

After five years of seminary studies in Waterford, Mossie began to feel unsure if the priesthood was the right vocation for him. He left the seminary and went to London where he worked for two years. Toward the end of those two years in London, he began to reconsider his vocation to the priesthood and decided to return to Saint John Seminary where he studied for two more years and was then ready for ordination.



Photo courtesy of Fr O'Brien

Saint John Seminary, Waterford, Ordination Class of 1968

Second Row, Left, Father Maurice O'Brien and Father Liam macCarthy

ORDAINED A PRIEST FOR SACRAMENTO



Photo courtesy of Fr O'Brien

Father Mossie's Ordination Day with parents Maurice & Mary

Fathers Mossie and Liam remained at Saint John Rectory for a few days and then gathered with the other five priests ordained that year for Sacramento to meet Bishop Alden J Bell in his office in the Chancery located behind the Cathedral. At that meeting, Father Mossie was given his first assignment as assistant to Saint Vincent Parish in Vallejo to work with Father Patrick O'Regan who was pastor.

SAINT VINCENT PARISH, VALLEJO

Father Mossie discovered that Saint Vincent Parish was a very large parish with three priests for parish work and one priest in residence who worked at Catholic Social Services. In 1968, the world was in turbulent times for the church and society as a whole. Politically, 1968 was the year of the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr on April 4, 1968 and Robert F Kennedy on June 5, 1968. It was also the year of the Democratic Convention in Chicago that ended in protests and riots.

Maurice was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Sacramento in Most Holy Trinity Cathedral in Waterford City on June 9, 1968 by Bishop Michael Russell, bishop of the Diocese of Waterford. Included in his ordination class was Father Liam macCarthy who was also ordained for the Sacramento diocese that day.

After two months of vacation with his family, Father Mossie boarded a plane at Shannon Airport and after a brief stop-over in New York, he flew on to San Francisco and then to Sacramento. Father Brendan Broderick met Fathers Mossie and Liam at the Sacramento Executive Airport and drove them to Saint John the Evangelist Parish in Carmichael where they stayed. They met Father James Kenny who was pastor.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Vincent Parish, Vallejo

The Catholic Church was also struggling to implement the directives of the Second Vatican Council and many were resisting those changes. As far as the priests in the parish, they continued to celebrate the Eucharist and other sacraments, teach catechism, visit the parish grammar school and high school and tried to visit every home in the parish, Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Father Mossie never found anyone upset that he stopped by for a visit. He found this work to be a great ministry and his five years at Saint Vincent Parish were a happy and positive experience of ministry.

NEXT, SACRED HEART PARISH IN SACRAMENTO

Father Mossie was next assigned as associate to Sacred Heart Parish in Sacramento where Monsignor Thomas Markham was pastor. The other associate of the parish was Father Dan Madigan. Father Mossie found the parishioners of the parish to be warm, welcoming and friendly and he enjoyed celebrating Mass in the beautiful Sacred Heart Church.



Photo by John E Boll

Sacred Heart Church, Sacramento

JOINS THE SAINT JAMES SOCIETY

While he was an associate at Sacred Heart Parish, Father Mossie came in contact with the Saint James Society which is an association of diocesan priests from around the nation who worked in South America. He asked Bishop Bell for permission to join the Saint James Society to serve in South American for a five year term.



1974 Departure Mass with Boston Cardinal Medeiros for 5 St James Volunteer Priests Leaving for South America

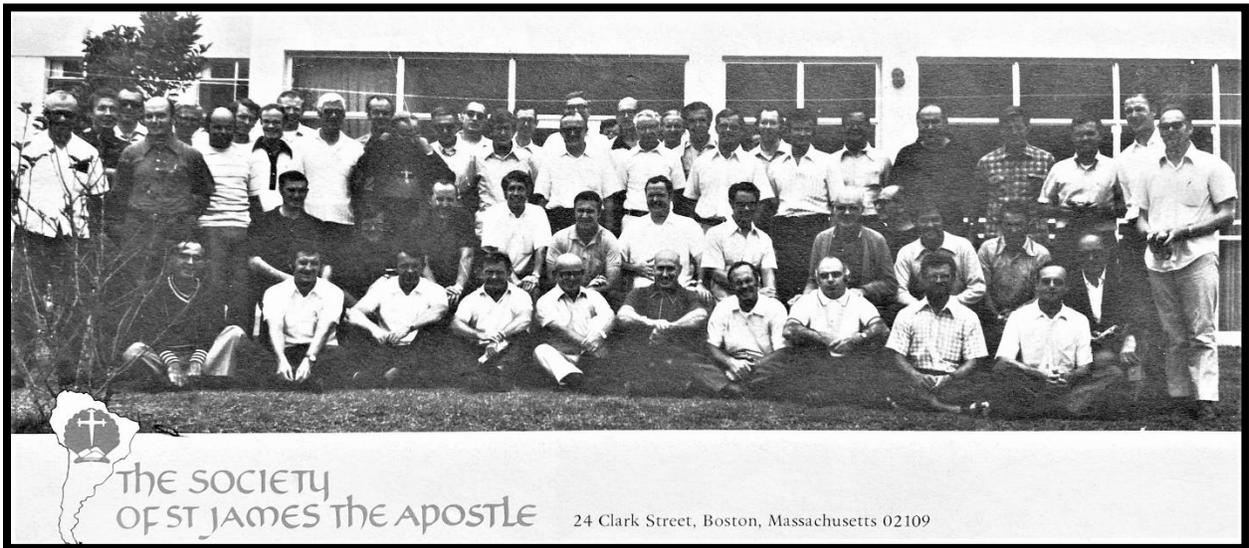


Photo courtesy of Fr O'Brien

Priests of the Society of Saint James the Apostle

The Saint James Society was established in Boston by Cardinal Richard Cushing at the request of Pope Pius XII to prepare and send priests to assist the Church in South America. This society has missions in three countries, Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador. Bishop Bell gave Father O'Brien permission to serve in the Saint James Society for five years.

Father Mossie left Boston in October 1973 for Lima, Peru, accompanied by four other American priests from different dioceses across the United States. After arriving in Lima, the five priests began studying Spanish in a language school operated by the Saint James Society from November 1973 until mid-February 1974. Father Mossie was then assigned by the Society to work in Bolivia.

LA PAROQUIA DE NUESTRA SEÑORA DE FATIMA, SANTA CRUZ DE LA SIERRA, BOLIVIA

The vision of the Saint James Society was to send American priests to poor parishes in Latin America that could not financially support their own clergy. The American priests received their salary from the Society in Boston. The goal was to build up these parishes financially and spiritually and then give them back to the diocese so Bolivian priests could continue the ministry.

Father Mossie was assigned to a poor parish in Santa Cruz de la Sierra named Nuestra Señora de Fátima and he worked there for five years. It was the policy of the Saint James Society to have at least two priests together in the parish. In this particular case, there were three priests.

Part of the work of the priests was to form comunidades de base, form catechists, especially in the outlying villages, and to build up the local Christian community. After five years of ministry in this parish, Father Mossie returned to Sacramento for reassignment.



Photo courtesy of Fr O'Brien

Father Mossie Prepares to Celebrate Mass in one of the Missions

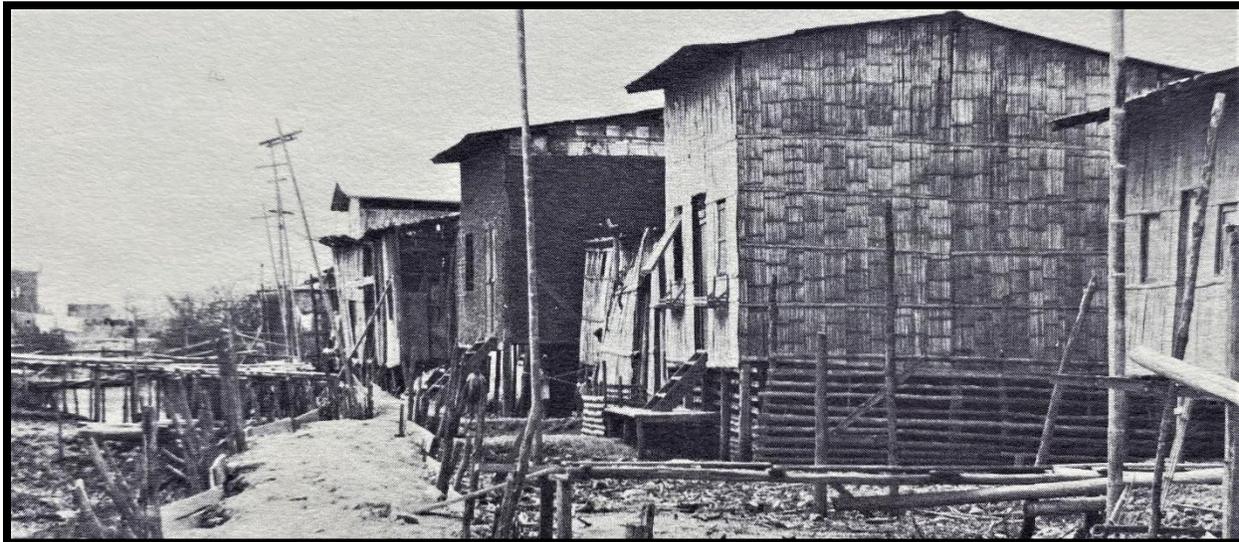
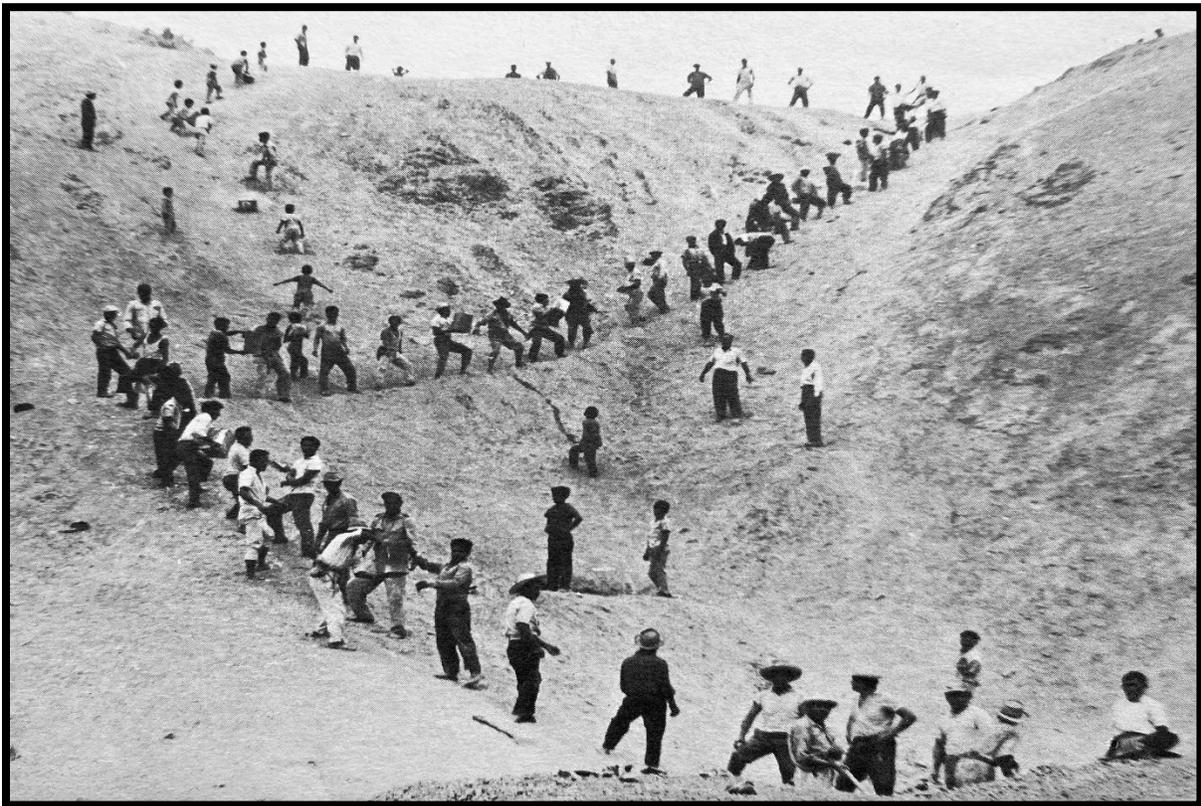


Photo courtesy of Fr O'Brien

Living Conditions in the Bolivian Missions



Preparing for Mass with Bishop Brown, an American Maryknoll Bishop



Passing the Pail of Rocks up the Hill in Bolivia

ASSIGNED TO SAINT THOMAS THE APOSTLE PARISH, OROVILLE

Returning to Sacramento, Bishop Francis Quinn, the new bishop of the diocese, assigned Father Mossie as associate pastor to Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish in Oroville to assist Sean Maloney who was pastor. Fathers Sean and Mossie worked well together and although this would be a short two-year assignment, Father Mossie enjoyed this parish experience very much.

In discussions with Bishop Quinn, Father Mossie mentioned that he would not mind returning to South America for another few years if it were possible. Bishop Quinn graciously gave him permission to return to Bolivia for three more years. Father Mossie left for South America in October 1981 for his second assignment in Bolivia. He was assigned to a different parish community in the Santa Cruz diocese and worked there for three years and then returned to Sacramento for assignment.

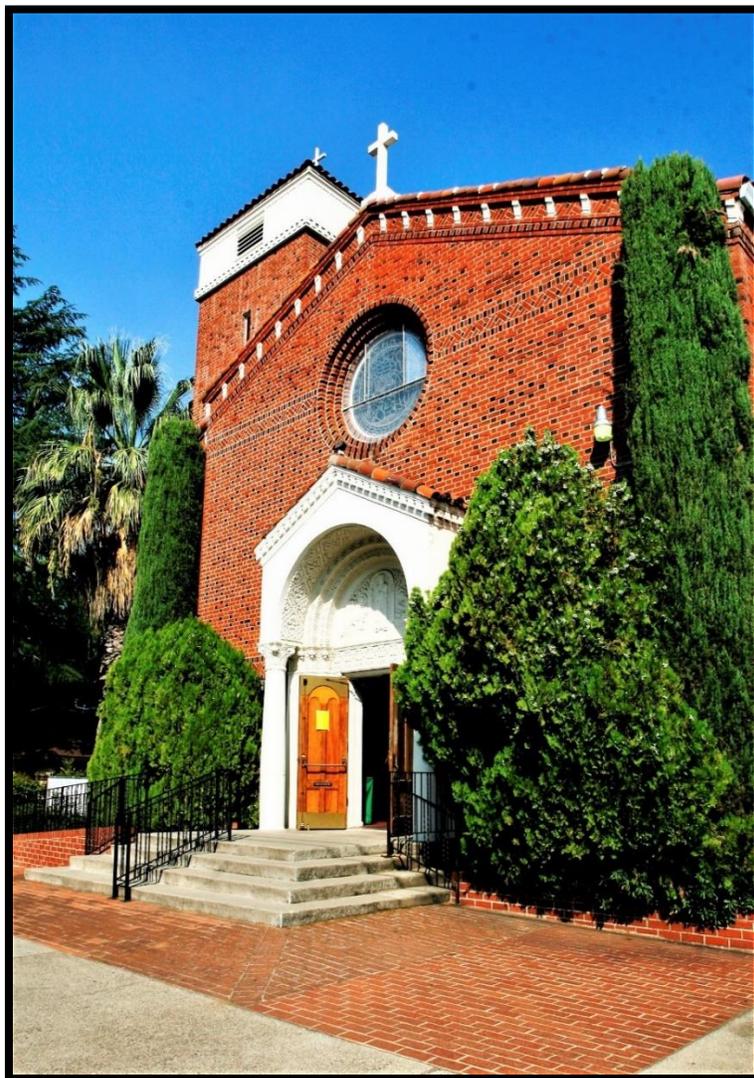


Photo by John E Boll

Saint Thomas the Apostle Church, Oroville

SAINT CHARLES BORROMEO PARISH, SOUTH SACRAMENTO

After returning to Sacramento, Father Mossie was assigned by Bishop Quinn to Saint Charles Parish in South Sacramento to assist Monsignor James Poole who was pastor. Father Mossie found that working with Monsignor Poole was a very positive experience and he thoroughly enjoyed working with the parish community of Saint Charles.

Since he was ordained 18 years at this point, Father Mossie knew his time at Saint Charles would be short because he expected to be appointed a pastor relatively soon. Indeed, a parish soon opened up for him which necessitated a move.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Charles Borromeo Parish, Sacramento



Photo courtesy of Fr O'Brien

Monsignor Poole and Father Mossie share Dinner with Friends

SAINT CHRISTOPHER PARISH, GALT

On January 1, 1986, Father Mossie left Saint Charles Parish to become pastor of Saint Christopher Parish in Galt. At this point, the Galt parish was relatively small with about 400 families in the parish. Since the church was small and old, a new church was badly needed.



Photo by John E Boll

The Old Saint Christopher Church

Soon after he arrived in Galt, the City of Galt began to experience considerable growth which changed the financial picture of the parish. A few years later, a fund drive was begun in the parish to raise money for the building of a new church. Father Mossie served as pastor of Galt for six years and during the last three years of his term he and the parish community were able to raise considerable funds for a new church. It would take a few additional years after he was transferred to a different parish for the Galt parish community to build the new church.

NEXT UP, ASSIGNED TO THE CATHEDRAL

In 1992, Bishop Quinn asked Father Mossie to serve as pastor of the Cathedral with Father John Folmer as the rector. If this arrangement sounds confusing, it was. One of his goals as pastor was to visit the parishioners of the Cathedral parish but because many who attended the Cathedral lived in the suburbs of Sacramento. It was almost impossible for him to visit the homes of his parishioners.

The Cathedral was a busy parish dealing with the poor and homeless of the area, celebrating the many Cathedral Masses and funerals, hearing confession and celebrating weddings. After two years at the Cathedral, Father Mossie applied for the parish of Dixon and newly installed Bishop William K Weigand appointed him pastor of Saint Peter Parish, Dixon where he served for ten years.



Photo by John E Boll

Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament

SAINT PETER PARISH, DIXON

Father Mossie was appointed pastor of Dixon in 1994. When he arrived, the construction of classrooms for religious education had just been completed and his task was to help pay off the debt of this new building.

During his pastorate in Dixon, the parish had three deacons, two for the English speaking and one for the Hispanic community. The parish was evenly divided between the English and Spanish speaking. There were five Masses every weekend, two in Spanish and three in English.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Christopher Church, Dixon

Father Mossie found this parish to be a wonderful experience of ministry and after ten years, he felt he had done all he could for the parish community and a change was in order.

SAINT JOSEPH PARISH, YREKA

Leaving the Sacramento Valley behind, Father Mossie headed north to the Siskiyou, to the parish of Saint Joseph in Yreka. Yreka is the County Seat of Siskiyou County and the Catholic Church is located across the street from the County Courthouse.

Father Mossie succeeded Sister Anne Chester, RSM, who served as the Parish Steward. Sister Anne, according to Father Mossie, had done a great job at the parish. Father John Lawrence had served as the priest for Yreka, Fort Jones and Etna and Sister Anne served as the administrator of the parish.

Father Mossie enjoyed serving the parish community in Yreka for three years and was beginning to think about retiring at age 65. However, Bishop Weigand called him and asked him to become the pastor of Saint Monica Parish in Willows.



Photo by John E Boll

Sanctuary of Saint Joseph Church, Yreka

LAST PARISH, SAINT MONICA IN WILLOWS

Willows is a prosperous farming community with a beautiful parish plant. It has a relatively new church, a large parish hall, classrooms and a former convent that has been converted into a parish community center. This agricultural community is focused primarily in dairy farming and the raising of walnuts, almonds and corn.

The community has a good sense of ownership of the parish and is a mix of English and Spanish speaking. Both communities work well together and Father O'Brien found this to be an easy community in which to work and minister. Even though he had considered retiring before he arrived in Willows, Father Mossie fulfilled his six year term and retired at age 71.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Monica Church, Willows

RETIREMENT

After 47 years of ministry as a priest of the Diocese of Sacramento, Father O'Brien retired from active parish ministry in February 2013 and moved to the Priests' Retirement Village in Citrus Heights. Active all his life, retirement has been very enjoyable for him although he is often called upon to help in parishes when there is a need. Because he can speak both English and Spanish, he has often been sought after by fellow priests to help in parishes where there is need for a bi-lingual priest.



Photo by John E Boll

Father Mossie's Apartment at the Priests' Village in Citrus Heights

FINAL THOUGHTS

Father Maurice O'Brien is a gentle man who is always thoughtful and kind. He has shared his talents with many people in the course of a half century of priestly ministry. As a young priest, he gave eight years of his life to ministry among the physically poor Catholic communities of Bolivia through the Saint James Society. Even when he was ready to retire from active ministry, he responded to the call of Bishop Weigand to serve six more years as pastor of Willows.

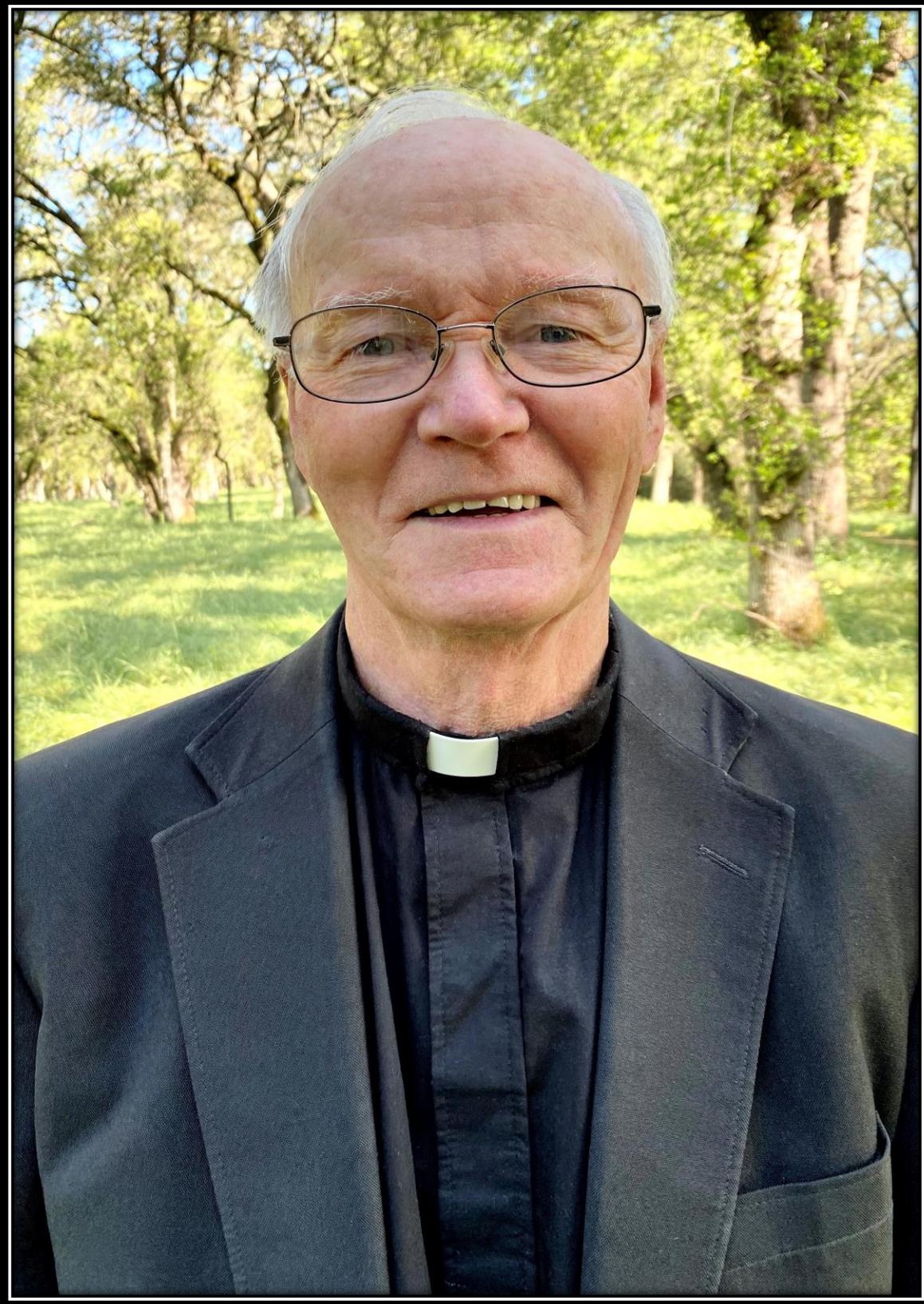
Finally, at age 71, he was able to step down into retirement. Father Mossie has been very generous in retirement to give his time to help brother priests when they need a helping hand in their parishes. The Diocese of Sacramento has been blessed by this priest of faith and generosity. Thank you, Father Mossie, for your lifetime of ministry to the People of God in the Diocese of Sacramento. We wish you good health and many happy years in retirement.

Ad Multos Annos!



Photo courtesy of Fr O'Brien

**Mary O'Brien Celebrates her 80th Birthday with her six Adult Children
L-R, Tom, Mary O'Brien, Con, Mary, John, Mossie and Mike**



Father Maurice Joseph O'Brien