

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

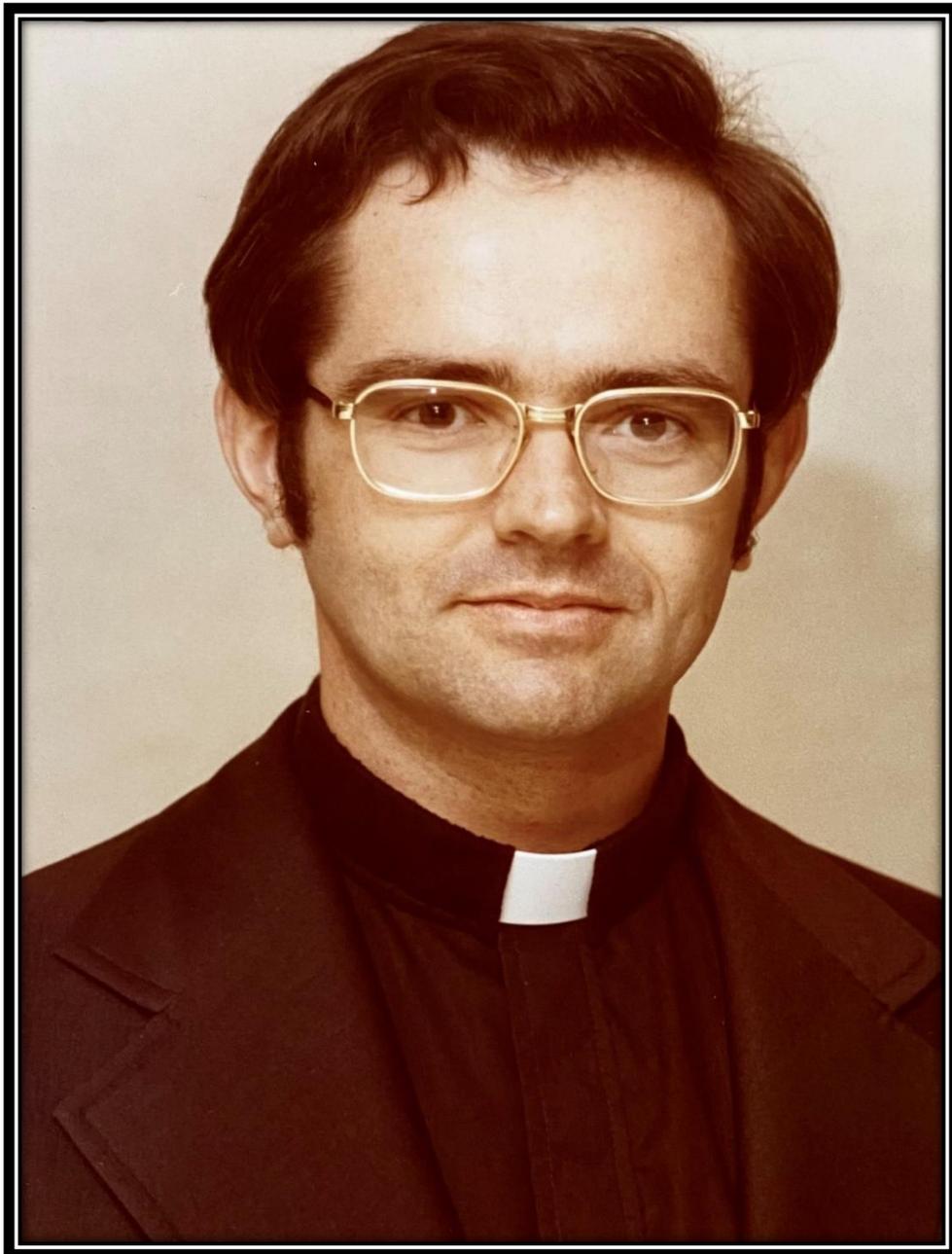
Vol 3

Father John E Boll

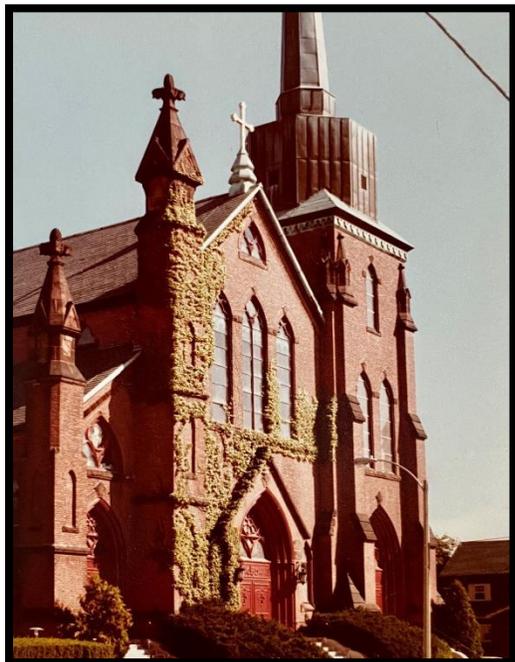
No 39

Father Edward Paul Pepka

Native of Natick, Massachusetts
Retired Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento



Edward Paul Pepka, born on August 26, 1946, is the firstborn child of Clement Pepka and Anna Greene. His father Clement was of Polish-American heritage from Webster, MA and his mother Anna was of Irish-American heritage with a possible mix of Asian Indian. Following Edward in order of birth are John, James (Jimi), Robert and Mary.



ST. PATRICK'S, NATICK MA

From the first time Ed attended Sunday Mass at the age of three and saw the priest at the altar, he says he knew from that moment he would be a priest. Ed's mother was a leader in the parish community of Saint Patrick in various areas. The social life of the Pepka family centered on the life of the parish and Ed's mother Anna kept the family focused on the Catholic Church.

The Pepka family participated in Saint Patrick Church in Natick which had a large congregation of ten thousand parishioners served by four priests, three Irish-American and one Italian-American which represented the make-up of the community.

BEGINS HIS EDUCATION

Ed began kindergarten in 1951 and for the next eight years, attended public school in Natick. He had a positive experience in the public school system. Beginning in the third grade, he became an altar server and continued serving Mass in Saint Patrick Church until he completed high school.



Ed in his Youth

HIGH SCHOOL IN FRAMINGHAM

In the fall of 1960, Ed went to Marian High School in Framingham, Massachusetts. Marian was a central Catholic high school of the Archdiocese of Boston. Academically, Ed was first in his class.

During high school, he began to work at a supermarket which still exists in Natick. Since his work scheduled averaged 26 to 32 hours a week, he had little time for much of a social life.

During high school, Ed made the decision to join the religious community of whatever college he attended. He now says that decision was the biggest mistake of his life.

ASSUMPTION COLLEGE

After graduating from Marian High School, Ed went to Assumption College in Worcester, MA, which was founded by the Augustinians of the Assumption. During his four years of college, he became editor of the college newspaper and a manager of the college hockey team. His major in college was philosophy and he received his A.B. degree in 1968.



Photo from the Assumption College Website

Assumption College, Worcester, MA

JOINS THE AUGUSTINIANS OF THE ASSUMPTION

Right after graduating from college, Ed joined the Assumptionists and entered the novitiate in Dedham, MA, for one year. He felt the novitiate was highly psychologized because the novice master was trained in that field.

After completing his year of novitiate, Ed attended Weston College School of Theology in Cambridge, MA, for three years. The Jesuits had moved their School of Theology to the campus of the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge and Ed says he had some excellent professors there. He received his Master of Divinity degree from Weston College in 1972.

As a member of the Assumptionist community, Ed lived in Brookline with his community. At the conclusion of his theological training, his superiors wanted him to have some experience of ministry before being ordained. He was hired by Pope John XXIII Central Catholic High School in Everett, MA, as director of religious education. During his two years at the high school, Ed established a department of full-time religion teachers.



Photo from Pope John XXIII School Website

Pope John XXIII Central Catholic High School, Everett, Massachusetts

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, NEW YORK

After teaching two years at Pope John XXIII Central Catholic High School, Ed moved to New York to attend Union Theological Seminary for one year of New Testament studies when he received his S.T.M. degree in 1976. It was at Union Theological Seminary that he had world-renowned Scripture scholar Father Raymond Brown, SS, as one of his professors.

At the same time, Monsignor Myles Bourke taught at Fordham University as an adjunct professor and Ed wanted to attend his course on Mark. Monsignor Bourke was pastor of Corpus Christi Parish, across the street from UTS. Ed was able to catch a ride with Monsignor Bourke and attended his class at the university campus in the Bronx. He says Monsignor Bourke was a great clerical gossip, so he picked up lots of ecclesiastical information on his rides with Monsignor Bourke to the Bronx.

RETURN TO ASSUMPTION COLLEGE

After his year of studies at Union Theological Seminary, Ed returned to Assumption College where he did some teaching and was assistant coach of the hockey team. In the summer of 1976, he went on a grand tour through Western Europe, with two months in Jerusalem. This was like his retreat before making final vows.



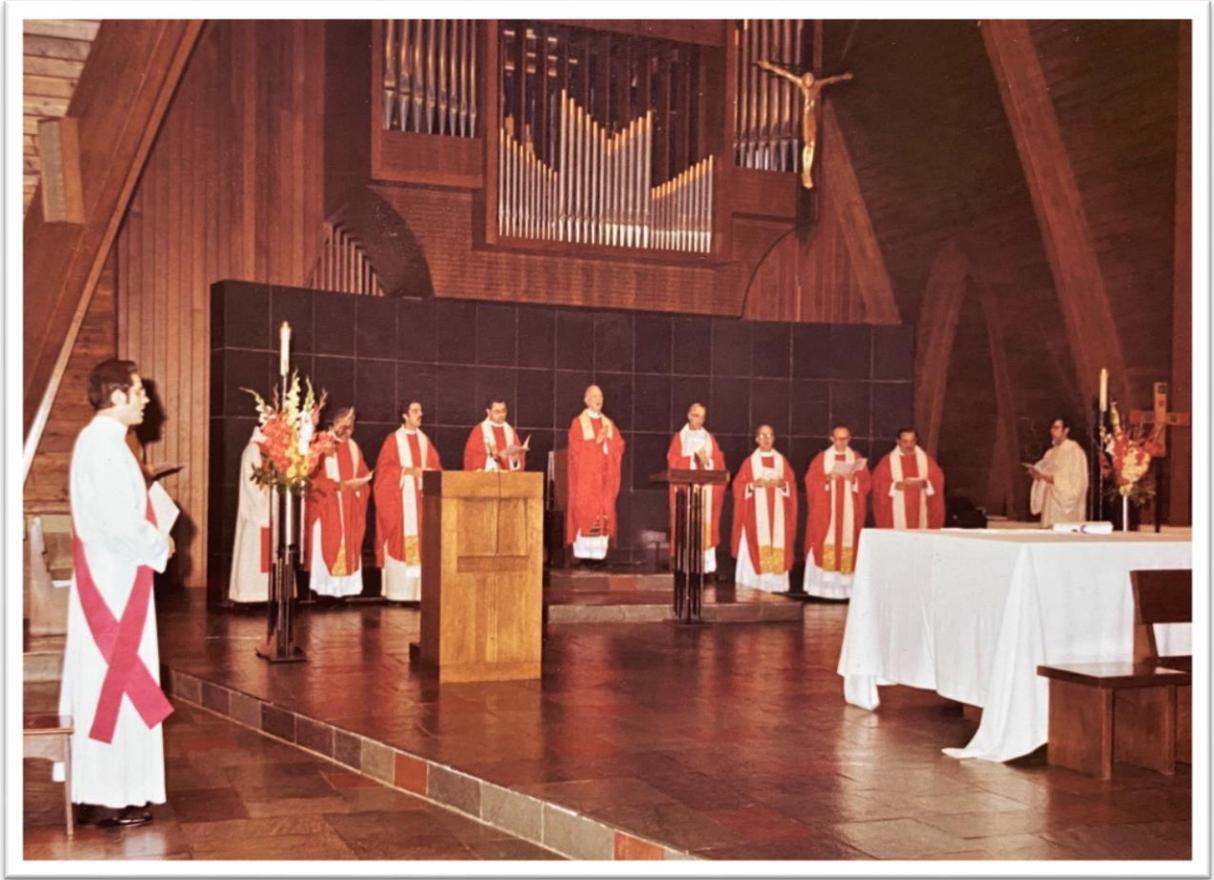
Photo by John E Boll

The Old City of Jerusalem

ORDINATION TO THE MINISTERIAL PRIESTHOOD

In the fall of 1977, Brother Edward began his PhD residency at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. Some of his best professors were Monsignor John Tracy Ellis, Jesuit Fathers Walter Burghardt and Avery Dulles, Father David Power, OMI, Father Robert Eno, PSS, and his best teacher ever, Father Louis Bouyer, CO.

On October 22, 1977 Ed was ordained a priest at Assumption College Chapel in Worcester, MA by Bishop Bernard J Flannigan, Bishop of Worcester. At the ordination liturgy, Ed was the only one ordained a priest that day.



Photos courtesy of Fr Ed Pepka

Father Edward Pepka Ordained a Priest

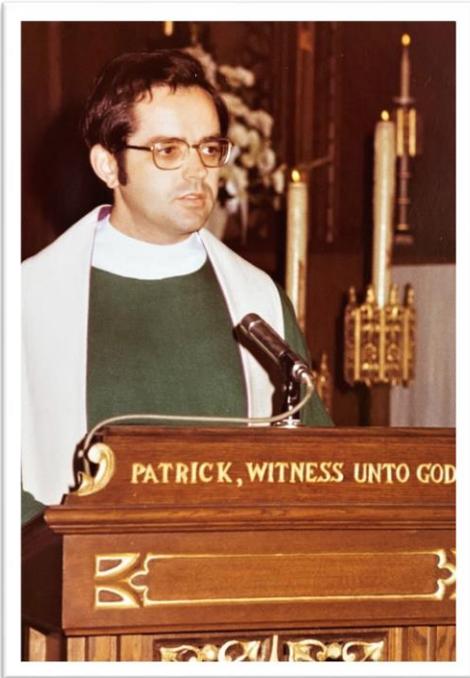




Prayer of Ordination Prayed by Bishop Bernard J Flannigan of Worcester



Father Ed Celebrates his First Mass in Saint Patrick Church, Natick, MA



Father Ed Preaches at his First Mass



Celebrates the Eucharist



Gives Communion to his mother Anna



Clement and Anna Pepka have a few words to say about their son Father Ed



The Pepka Family

L-R Clement, Jimi, Mary, Bob, Fr Ed, John, and Anna

CALLED BACK TO ASSUMPTION COLLEGE

After Father Ed finished his PhD work except for his dissertation, he was called back to the house of studies in Brookline to assist at the novitiate and to teach part time at Assumption College. In his adult life, he moved 27 times, so he was constantly coming and going.

Father Ed was allowed to return to Catholic University for two years to work on his dissertation. He lived with the English Benedictines at their monastery in Washington, D.C. Once again, he was called back to Assumption College to teach and then he finally returned to Washington to complete his doctoral degree in 1986.

SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT THE ASSUMPTIONISTS

By this time, Father Ed was having second thoughts about staying with the Assumptionists. He kept in touch with St. Anselm's in Manchester, NH. But then an opportunity opened for him in Nairobi, Kenya, in East Africa, and he volunteered to go to Africa.

A CALL TO AFRICA

Father Ed's time in Africa (1987-1991) was the most exciting time in his life. He loved everything about Africa, the people, the animals, the climate, and the founding of a new mission. The Assumptionists had a sister community, the Religious of the Assumption, who had gone to East Africa in the late 1950s. Now, young men were interested in joining the Assumptionists as well, so Father Ed's task was to found a new Assumptionist mission in East Africa. During the first year he developed contacts and prepared for the arrival of the rest of the founding members the next year. Since the initial founding of the group, the Assumptionists have moved from Nairobi, Kenya, to Arusha, Tanzania.



Photo from Images Shutterstock from the Web

Nairobi, Kenya, East Africa

Before Father Ed went to Africa, he began studying the Swahili language and East African culture so he would be able to adjust to East African life more easily when he got there. He felt he did well in acculturating himself before and after his arrival. He arrived in October, 1987 and began preaching in Swahili the following Easter Sunday.

ASSUMPTIONIST SUPERIORS CALL FATHER ED BACK TO MASSACHUSETTS

Father Ed found that he was beginning to disagree with his superiors in Massachusetts about the character of the mission; and after four years in Africa, his superiors pulled him out of East Africa. He made contact with the pastor in Natick, MA, to see if he could help out in the parish and live in the rectory while he sorted out his prospects. The pastor, Fr. Joseph Greer, told Father Ed he was welcome to come to Saint Patrick Parish to work until he decided what he would do. He worked at the parish for two and a half years.

LEAVES THE ASSUMPTIONIST COMMUNITY

Father Ed thought about where he might serve the Church if he left the Assumptionist community. Since his sister Mary Thomas and family were living in Weed, Sacramento had the edge for him. He applied to the Diocese of Sacramento and made a visit to Sacramento in advance. Bishop Francis Quinn was in the process of retiring and was away, so he met with Monsignor Robert Walton, the Vicar General. Monsignor Walton told Father Ed he would not be made a pastor for 10 years. As it turned out, Father Ed was made an administrator after one year and a pastor after seven. During this initial visit, Father Ed celebrated his first Sunday Mass in the diocese in Fort Jones, at the gracious invitation of Father Roy Doner.

FIRST ASSIGNMENT, PLACERVILLE

On May 10, 1994, Father Tony Gurnell picked up Father Ed at the Sacramento Airport and drove him to Placerville. The next day, Father Tony told Father Ed that he was being tested for cancer and his doctor soon confirmed Father Tony had cancer. He went to Sacramento to begin cancer treatment, so Father Ed had to take over the administration of the parish.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Patrick Church, Placerville

Because Father Tony's treatment and recuperation took place in Sacramento, Father Ed had to oversee the running of the parish in Placerville. After Father Tony's retirement was announced, parishioners began to write to Bishop William Weigand asking that he appoint Father Ed pastor. At the Confirmation liturgy that spring, Bishop Weigand jokingly told parishioners to stop sending letters.

ASSIGNED TO COLUSA

On June 1, 1995, Bishop Weigand appointed Father Pepka administrator of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Colusa. Father Ed decided to write to Bishop Weigand from time to time to let him know how things were going in the parish. Bishop Weigand graciously responded to Father Ed's letters and invited him to his diocesan office for a luncheon meeting to talk about how he was doing in the parish. Father Ed greatly appreciated these meetings with the bishop.



Photo by John E Boll

Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Colusa

Father Pepka remained in Colusa for six years as administrator. At the end of his fifth year of service in the diocese with the bishop not stating otherwise, according to Canon Law, he was automatically incardinated in 1999 in the Diocese of Sacramento.

ASSIGNED PASTOR OF DIVINE SAVIOR PARISH, CHICO

On August 1, 2001, Father Ed was transferred laterally with Father Roy Doner and appointed pastor of Divine Savior Parish in Chico. Before he made the move to Chico, pain in his right knee began to cause him great distress. He went to an orthopedic doctor in Chico who told him he should have a hip replacement. The doctor left the decision with Father Ed saying, "Come back when you can't stand the pain anymore."

On the Wednesday of Holy Week, Father Ed had hip replacement surgery. Recuperation was rather slow. Father Tom Bland filled in at the parish for him on weekends. For some years without recognizing it, Father Ed had been suffering from major depression. Bishop Weigand asked him to resign the Chico parish and to seek treatment at the St. John Vianney Center in Downingtown, PA. It was a success and gave Father Ed inner peace and a happier attitude.



Photo by John E Boll

Divine Savior Church, Chico

A NEW ASSIGNMENT

In early 2004, when Father Ed returned to Sacramento, he was assigned to Holy Spirit Parish as his residence. He had three part-time appointments: part-time parochial vicar at Holy Spirit Parish; part-time teacher and full-time chaplain at Saint Francis Catholic High School; and adjunct professor of theology at the late, lamented University of Sacramento, run by the Legionaries of Christ. He was a very busy priest.

After Father Ed left Chico, he resumed his parish adult study program called "*Coffee and Catholicism*", in which he offers for study and discussion various topics from the Catholic Tradition except for the Bible. He did this ministry first in Natick, MA, and then in Placerville, Colusa, and Holy Spirit and Presentation Parishes in Sacramento.

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION PARISH

After three and a half years living in residence at Holy Spirit Parish and working at Saint Francis High School and the University of Sacramento, Father Ed was sent to Immaculate Conception Parish in Sacramento on October 20, 2008, where he lived in residence for nine months.

This parish had no pastor; Deacon Jerry Pauley was assigned as the Parish Steward and Father Pepka and Father Bill Feezer, who was suffering from cancer, lived in the rectory. For nine months, Father Ed continued working at Saint Francis High School and the University of Sacramento, while helping with Masses at Immaculate Conception Parish.



Photo by John E Boll

Immaculate Conception Church, Sacramento

SAINT CHARLES BORROMEIO PARISH

On July 1, 2009, Bishop Jaime Soto appointed Father Pepka as parochial vicar of Saint Charles Borromeo Parish to assist Father Desmond O'Reilly who was administrator of the parish. Father Ed served at Saint Charles Parish for a year and a half until December 31, 2010.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Charles Borromeo Church, Sacramento

FINAL ASSIGNMENT, PRESENTATION PARISH

For his final assignment, Bishop Soto appointed Father Pepka as parochial vicar of Presentation Parish in Sacramento, where he served for a year and a half. Then on September 1, 2012, Bishop Soto asked Father Ed to retire, a year and a half short of 20 years serving in the Diocese of Sacramento.

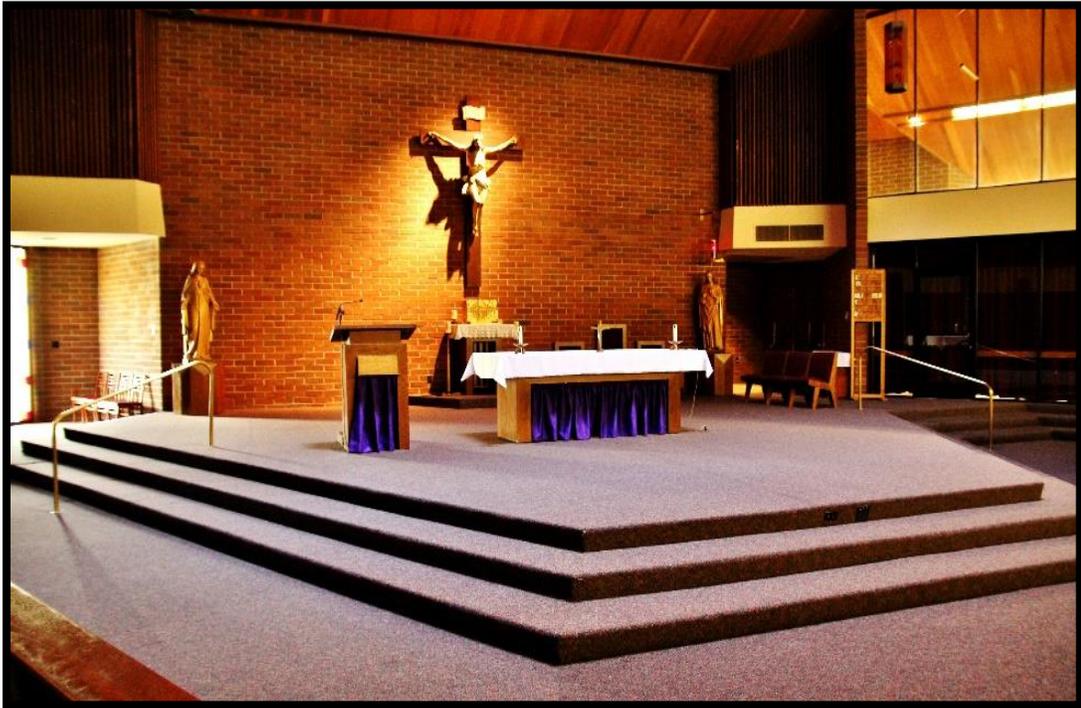


Photo by John E Boll

Presentation Church, Sacramento

RETIREMENT

When Father Ed retired, a parishioner of Presentation Parish invited him to live in his house. He had a vacant apartment in the house and Father Ed lived there for two years. When the parishioner decided to sell the house, Father Ed moved to the Saint John Vianney Village in Citrus Heights and has been living there for the past five years. He enjoys living at the Village.

Since his retirement, Father Ed has kept *Coffee and Catholicism* going in Presentation Parish and recently started it in Saint Joseph Parish in Auburn and, for a while, in Holy Spirit Parish. He has celebrated a Sunday Mass at Our Lady of Grace Parish in West Sacramento since Father Nicholas Ho was pastor and recently began to celebrate a weekday Mass at Saint Joseph Parish in Auburn. He teaches one Saturday a month at Easter's Faith Formation Program in Citrus Heights.

All this came to a sudden halt in mid-December 2019 when he developed a blood clot in his right leg. He is still recovering from the clot as the whole world struggles with the Corona virus plague.



Photo by John E Boll

Father Ed's Apartment at the Priests' Retirement Village, Citrus Heights

FINAL THOUGHTS

As we now know the story of Father Pepka's life journey, he has had both good times and difficult ones. Throughout his years as a priest, he has always been convinced from age three that God has called him to be a priest.

Intellectually bright, he earned his doctorate degree in Historical Theology at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. He has always had a great interest in the Catholic Tradition, especially the Patristic Period. He enjoys classical music, the history and theology of the Mass of the Roman Rite, the Vikings, the Crusades, Islam, the Roman and Spanish Inquisitions, cacti, glass paperweights and eggs, and of course, East Africa.

His time in East Africa was the highlight of his life and the happiest time in his life. Although he has suffered bouts of depression in his life, he now feels much happier and centered.

Leaving the Assumptionists was not an easy decision for him, but when he made the decision, he decided to come to California to be closer to his sister Mary and his two nieces who were growing up in Weed.

Through the grace of God, Father Ed became a priest of the Diocese of Sacramento and we are grateful for the knowledge and wisdom he has shared with the Church of Sacramento these past twenty years. So, Father Ed, we wish you both good health and much happiness as you move forward toward the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

Ad Multos Annos!

PHOTOS OF FATHER PEPKA'S JOURNEY OF LIFE

Photos courtesy of Father Ed Pepka



Photos courtesy of Fr Ed Pepka

Main Street of Natick, MA, where Father Ed grew up

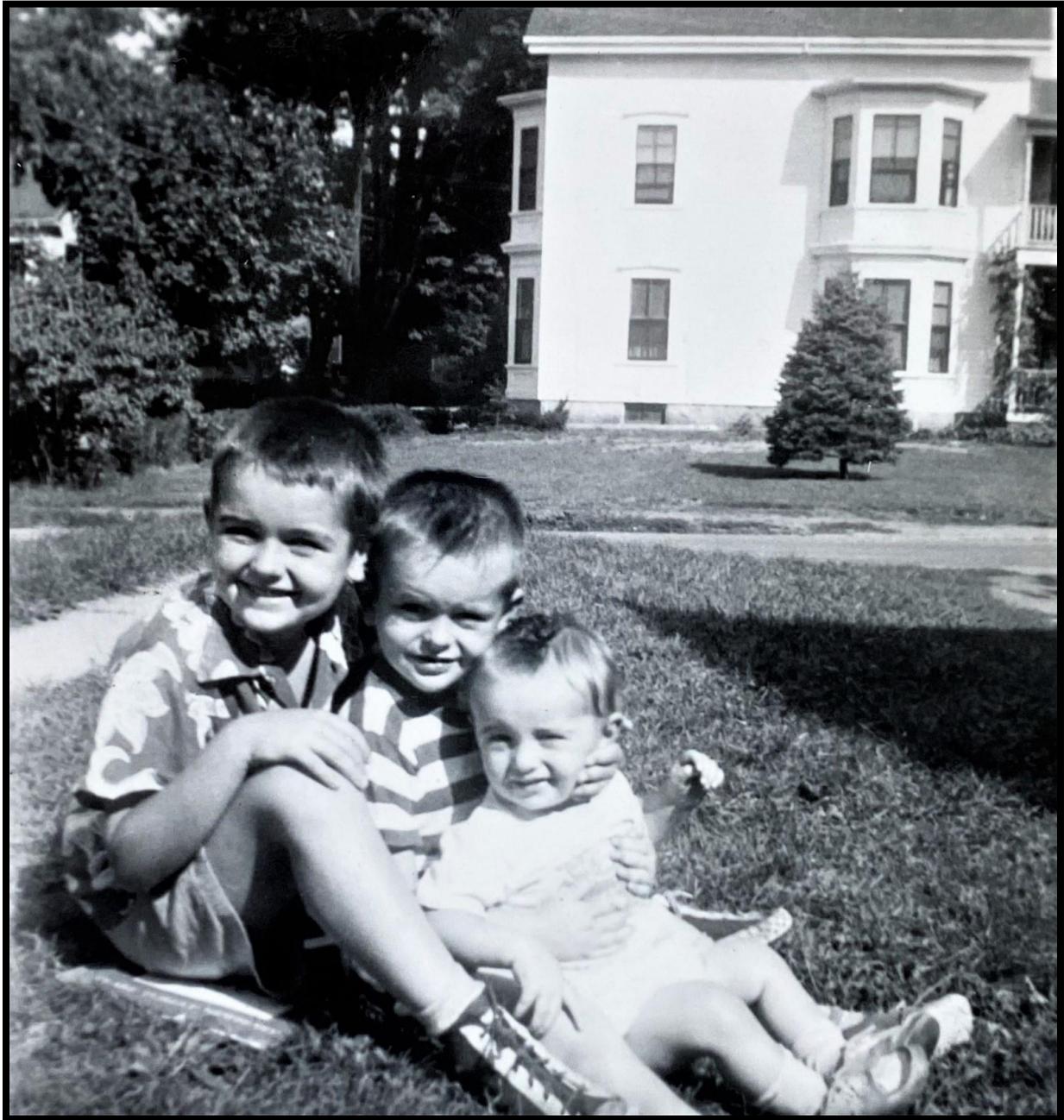


Photo courtesy of Fr Ed Pepka

Ed with his two Younger Brothers John and Jimi



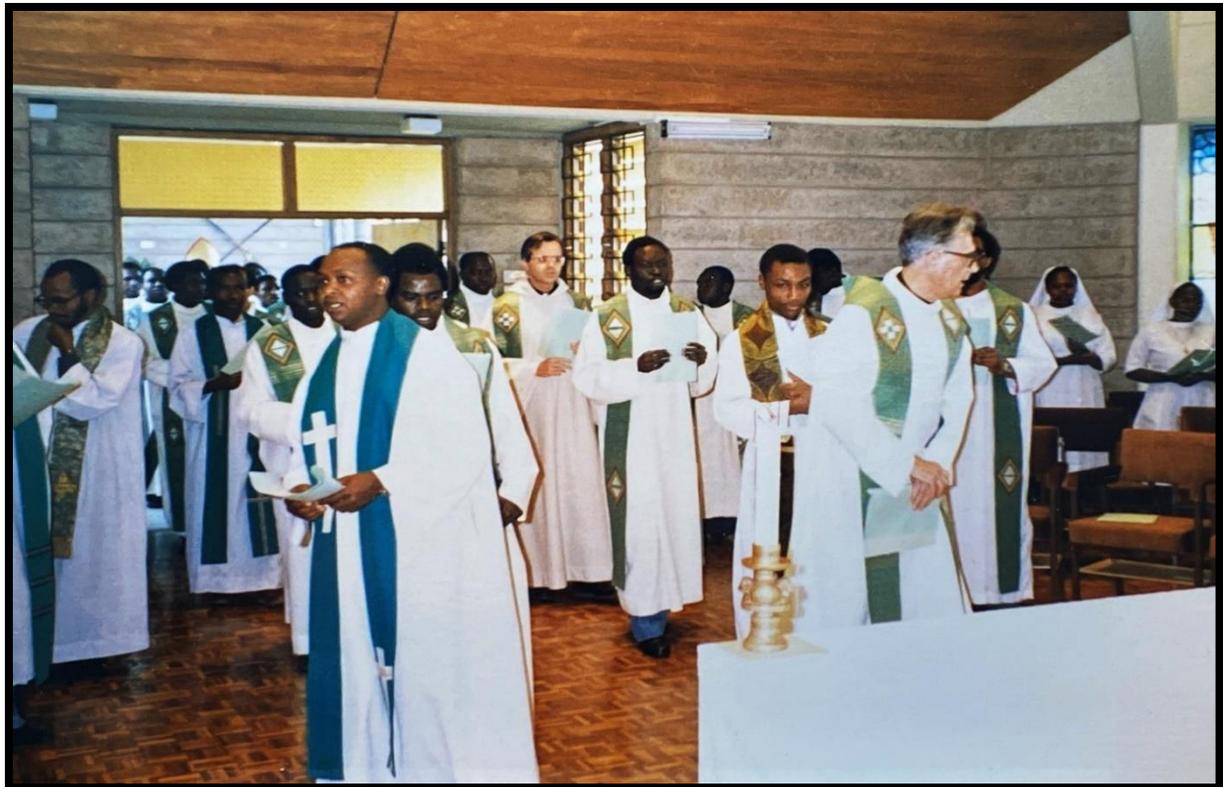
Clement and Anna Pepka, Father Ed's Parents



Father Ed with his Parents



Dinner after Father Ed's Ordination to the Diaconate, 1976



Mass at the Catholic Higher Institute of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, 1987



Holy Family Sunday Mass in the highest church on the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro, 1987



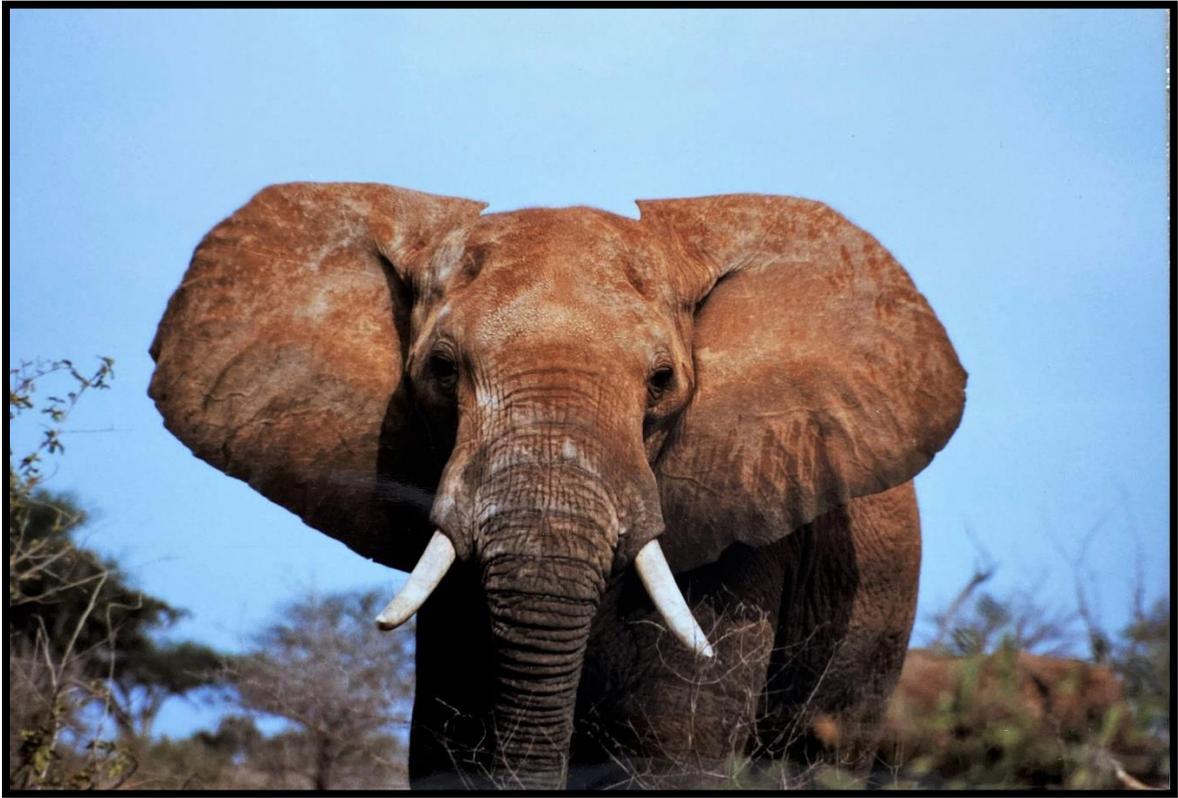
Just arrived at the Catholic Higher Institute of Eastern Africa, 1987



Commencement at the Catholic Higher Institute of Eastern Africa 1988



On the road to Mugango, Tanzania 1989



Elephant, Lake Gipe, Kenya 1991



Maasai Friends south of Kajiado, Kenya, 1991



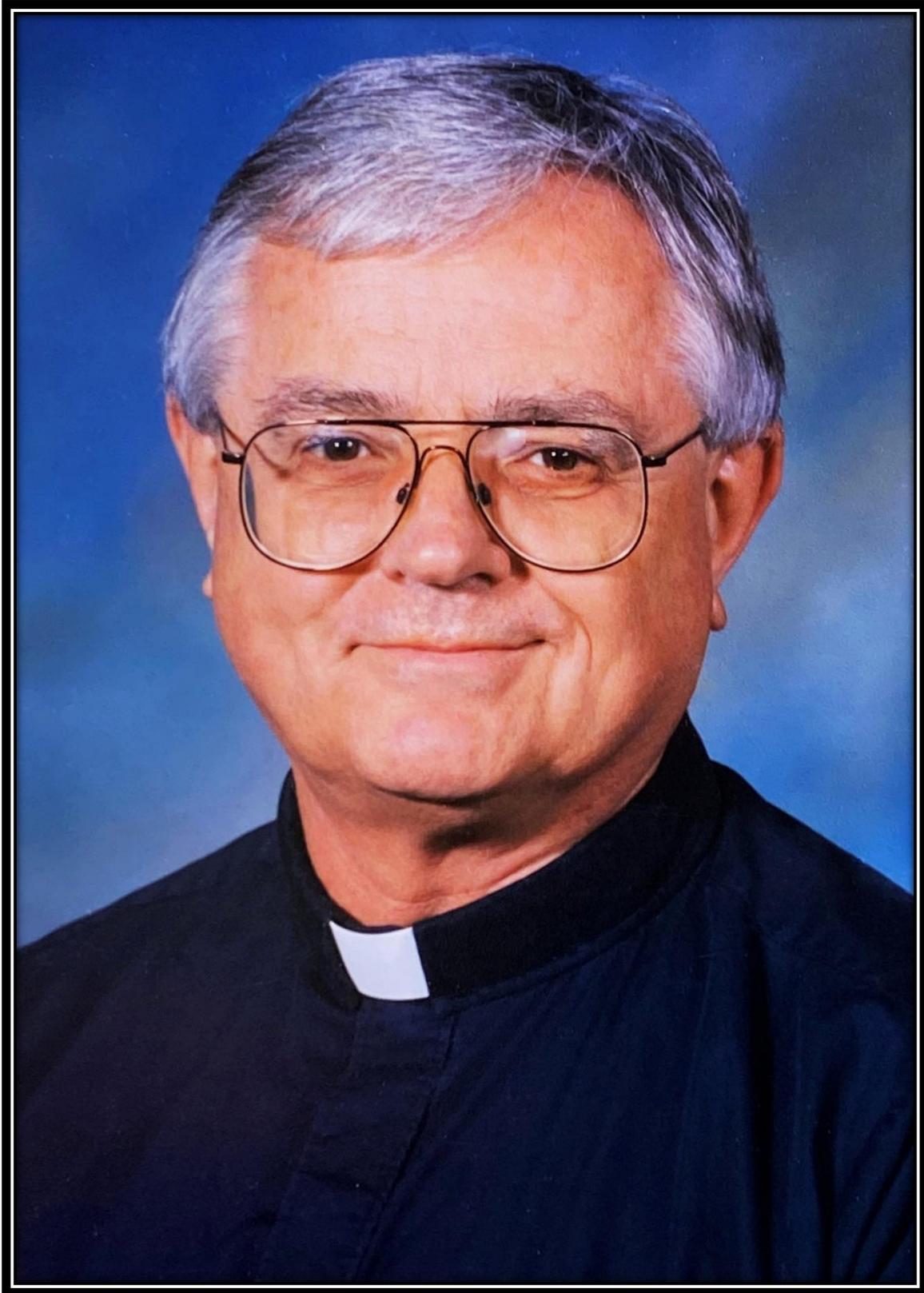
Mount Kilimanjaro, Christmas 1989



Kairos Retreat for Saint Francis High School Students



Father Ed Celebrates Mass in the gym at Saint Francis High School, Sacramento



Father Edward Paul Pepka