

# SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

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Father John E Boll & Jane deLeon, PhD

No 69

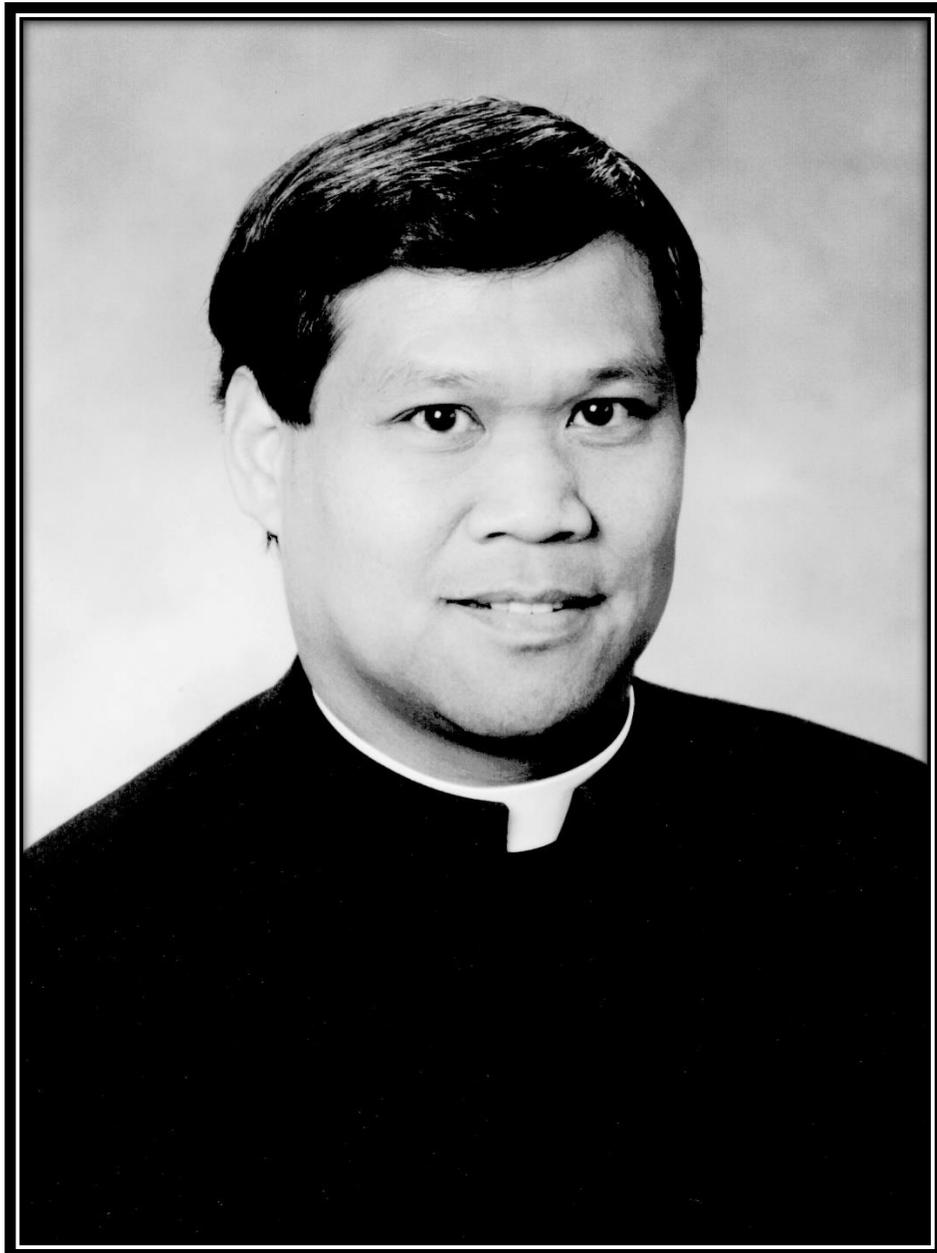
## *Father Benedict Santos DeLeon, Jr.*

Native of Sacramento, California

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor Emeritus of Corpus Christi Parish, Tahoe City, California

January 21, 1954 – August 15, 2019



### *In Principio*

**Benedict Santos DeLeon, Jr.**, son of Benedict Santos DeLeon, Sr. and Praxedes Robles de Guzman, was born in Sacramento on January 21, 1954, the fourth child of five born in the DeLeon family. Father Edward Kavanagh baptized Ben in Saint Rose Church, Sacramento.

Ben's father, Benedict, Sr., was born in the Philippines and immigrated to Piedmont, CA, as a high school student. Graduating from Piedmont High School, he served in the Pacific theater during World War II in a US Army reconnaissance unit. While visiting his family in the Philippines, he met his future wife Praxedes, and they were married in what is now the minor basilica of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary of Manaoag. Benedict then returned to the United States, and two years later, Praxedes immigrated as a war bride. In the first 12 years following their decision to settle in Sacramento, five children would be born to the DeLeon family: Jane, Marlene, Daniel, Benedict Jr., and Philip.



Photo courtesy of the DeLeon Family

**Benedict and Praxedes DeLeon**

The four elder DeLeon siblings recall growing up in a traditional 1950s household. Their father was a civil service employee trained in electronics and employed at the Sacramento Signal Depot, and their mother a full-time homemaker. The parents had built their first home on a lot bounded by a vineyard on both sides and an orchard in the back, the last vestiges of the semi-rural truck-farming areas of South Sacramento. The children learned early to appreciate the bounty harvested from their parents' gardens, enjoying homegrown vegetables at mealtimes and their mother's flower arrangements around their home.

As preschoolers, the children learned to pray by following their parents' example, and the family worshipped at Saint Rose Church in South Sacramento where the children were also enrolled in Saturday morning catechism classes.

The children walked to the local public school and were encouraged to work diligently in their studies. Their parents would remind them that the reason for their parents' decision to settle in the United States, far away from their extended DeLeon and de Guzman kin, was to provide the opportunities afforded by the American public educational system, thus assuring the best development of their children's talents and skills. The children were taught to respect their teachers and authority.



Photo by Praxedes DeLeon

### **Ben on his third birthday in 1957**

**Back row l-r, Mr. & Mrs. Emilio Daclan & son Robert of Sacramento, Ben's godparents; Fred Fernandez of Vallejo, godfather, and Ben DeLeon, Sr; children in front row are Daniel, Ben, Marlene and Jane with Penelope the cat**

For their own sense of satisfaction and achievement, all of the children were expected to excel in the classroom and to become leaders, both academically and in extra-curricular activities. In addition to their studies, the children were encouraged to develop musicianship and

performance skills, including public speaking. As early as fifth and sixth grade, the children volunteered for public speaking opportunities and competitions, activities which their parents supported by reviewing the speech drafts and serving as rehearsal coaches. Benedict and Praxedes required their children to think logically and to write and speak clearly, and the parents were their children's toughest as well as most supportive audience. Looking back at the editing and speech rehearsal sessions with their parents, the five DeLeon siblings appreciated being held to their parents' rigorous standards. Their parents' high expectations and support helped the children not only to hone their skills, but also to build their poise and confidence.

As the offspring of parents who were the first in their families to emigrate from the Philippines to the United States, the DeLeon children knew very few relatives in this country. Their parents' closest friends became the children's godparents, and early in their childhoods, the daughters and sons of Benedict and Praxedes understood the value of friendships made and nurtured over a lifetime. Although the word *community* was not so prevalently used then as now, the young DeLeon children came to see that they were part of the neighborhood which was their local community; they also recognized that they were part of the larger community of Filipino families from the Sacramento region and the Bay Area where their godparents lived.

Benedict and Praxedes taught their children to appreciate their Filipino roots as well as their good fortune to be living in America. Growing up in that era before Filipino nationals would come to the United States in the large immigration patterns that emerged in the late 1960s, the children observed that Filipino Americans were a small group. The DeLeon children were encouraged to remember that their actions and achievements reflected not only on their parents and siblings but also on their Filipino ethnic roots.

In sum, Benedict and Praxedes nurtured in their children the development of three fundamental values:

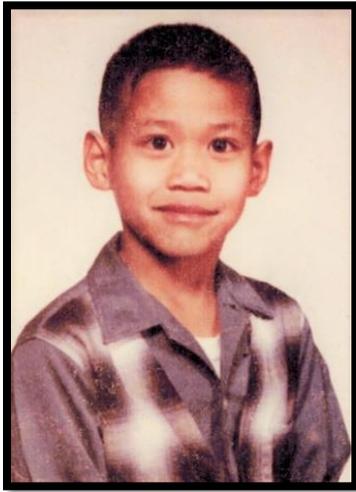
- Love of family and faith
- Appreciation of education and the opportunities to develop their talents
- Respect for and willingness to share the responsibility of building up the larger communities of which they are a part.

These three values contributed to young Ben's sense of himself, his place in the world, and his growing awareness of his calling to the priesthood.

## **BEN'S CHILDHOOD**

In 1959, Benedict and Praxedes built their second home in rural Florin, California, and moved their growing family there just before Christmas in 1959. Three months before the move, the fifth DeLeon sibling had arrived, and Ben became a big brother to Philip.

All of Ben's siblings recall that he was the most patient of the five children and always very gracious to his siblings and parents. As a youngster, he was also the least voluble. Based on the family stories he would share at family gatherings decades after the siblings had all grown up, it

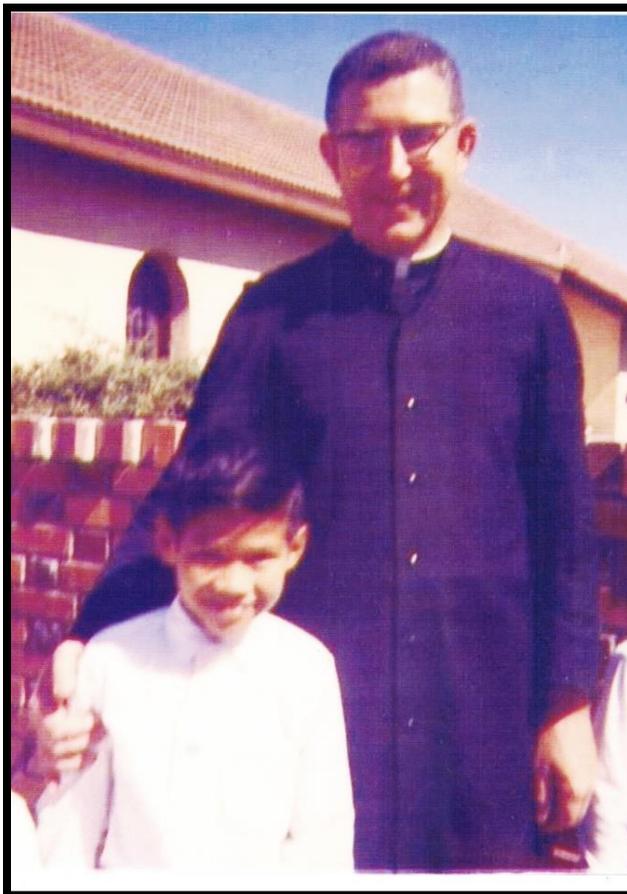


became clear that the quiet little boy Ben had keenly observed the many details of the family members' daily interactions, accumulating these details in his remarkable memory. His ability to observe and listen, along with his patience, courtesy, and kindness would serve him well in his life's work as a priest.

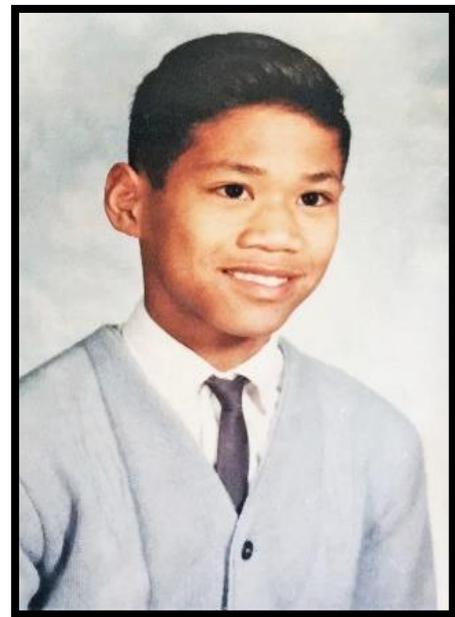
When the family moved to Florin, they left Saint Rose Parish and began attending Mass at Saint Paul Church, established in the 1940s as a mission of All Hallows Parish. In 1959, Father Michael Hogan was the parochial administrator. After Father Hogan's sudden death on Easter Sunday in April 1960, Father Richard Doheny was assigned to Saint Paul, which would be designated as

### **Ben Begins his Education**

a parish later that year. Ben received his First Communion from Father Doheny and learned from him how to serve Mass. During his seminary years, after his ordination, and throughout his priesthood, Ben would occasionally remark, always with respectful appreciation, that Father Doheny was his mentor and the model of the kind of priest Ben would aspire to be.



**Ben with Father Doheny after receiving First Communion**



**Ben as a Grammar School Student**

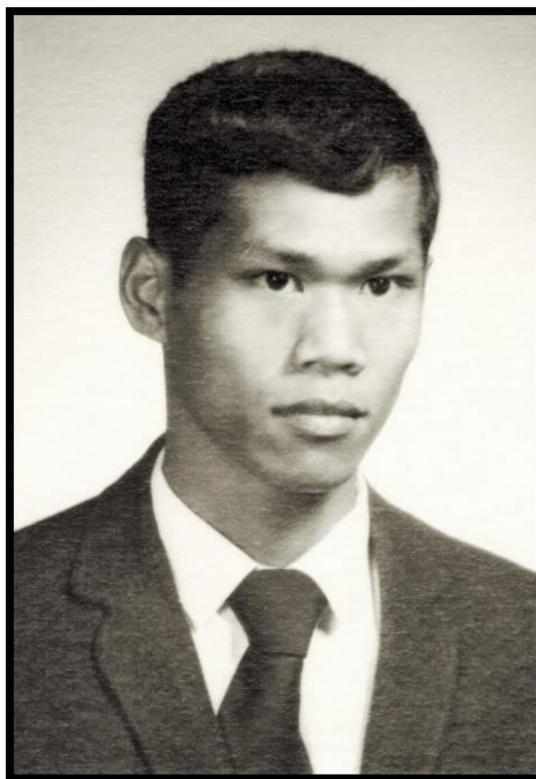
## **BEN'S TEENAGE YEARS**

As early as his grade school years, Ben had expressed to his family his desire to become a priest. His parents encouraged his sense of vocation, at the same time advising him to enter the local public high school, to perform well in academic and extracurricular activities, and to experience a typical teen-age social life before applying for admission to the college seminary.

Ben complied with his parents' instruction and availed himself of the full spectrum of high school experiences. He enrolled and excelled in his college preparatory courses. He played clarinet and saxophone and participated in pep rallies and entertainment for Friday night football games as well as in community parades with the Elk Grove High School Marching Band. He enjoyed a full social life. He signed up for local and regional speech competitions, winning first place in several and honing the skills that would support his future preparation of homilies for daily and Sunday Mass. Ben also served in student government and was elected a class officer.

During high school, Ben also became a Columbian Squire, thus beginning what would be his more-than-four decades of association with the Knights of Columbus. As a Squire, he enjoyed fellowship with other Catholic teenagers as well as the opportunity to travel throughout California to various Columbian Squire gatherings. He distinguished himself in the Squires' governance structure, serving at state-level positions, including election as the state Chief Squire for the term 1968-1969.

Besides his studies and extracurricular activities, Ben also gained work experience. During the hot Sacramento summers, Ben and his younger brother Philip worked with their mother to grow vegetables on the family's two-acre field. Ben drove a tractor and helped to plant, cultivate, and harvest the crops. The harvests were plentiful enough that twice weekly, Ben and Philip helped their mother to sell their vegetables at the Farmer's Market in



**Ben as a High School Student**

Sacramento. Their proceeds were more than enough to purchase Ben's first vehicle, the International pick-up truck in which — as Father Ben — he would a few years later chauffeur members of Saint Catherine's Teen Club.

All in all, the teenage years that his parents advised him to spend at home and in public high school before leaving for college seminary served to affirm Ben's sense of his vocation and enabled him to develop the talents he would bring to his future work as a priest. During these years, Ben learned to appreciate, communicate and work well with individuals of diverse backgrounds: ambitious and competitive college prep classmates, musicians and bandmates, Columbian Squires, Farmers' Market customers. Interests first initiated and followed during his

teenage years supported development of Ben's well-rounded character and, as the decades progressed, would also provide the basis for the effectiveness of his work as a priest.

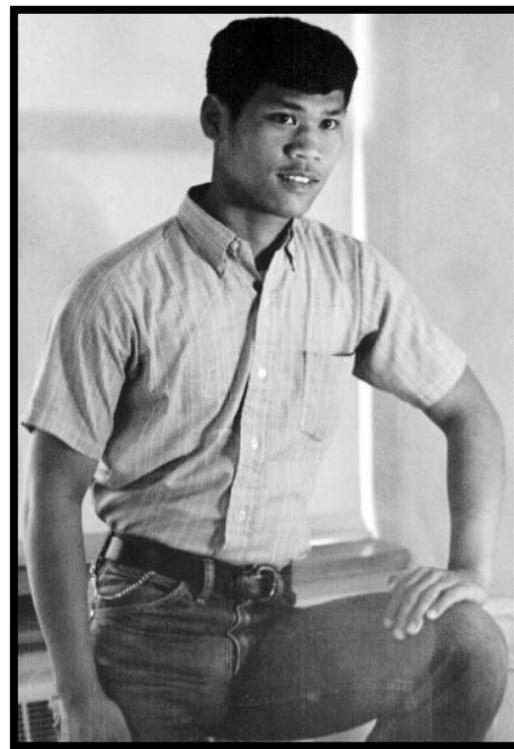


Photo from the Elk Grove Senior High School Website

**Elk Grove Senior High School**



**Saint Joseph College Seminary, Mountain View**



**Ben as a college seminarian**



Photo by John E Boll

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

#### **TRAINING FOR THE PRIESTHOOD**

In fall 1972, Ben entered Saint Joseph College Seminary in Mountain View, California, majoring in liberal arts. During these college seminary years, Ben strengthened his prayer life, including praying the rosary in the evenings with his classmates. As he neared the finish of his undergraduate years, Ben shared with his family an evaluation received from one of his advisors: his advisor had told Ben that his studies and progress toward ordination and life in the priesthood were best characterized by Ben's tempering his seriousness and commitment with his sense of playfulness and ability to laugh heartily. His advisor urged Ben to maintain always this healthy balance.

After his 1976 graduation from Saint Joseph College Seminary, Ben entered Saint Patrick Seminary in Menlo Park, California, for advanced studies preparing for the priesthood. In addition to his studies in Scripture, theology, liturgy and homiletics, Ben was assigned to work in parishes on the San Francisco Peninsula. Significant milestones during these years included his elevation to the minor orders of lector and acolyte, after which in March 1979, Ben was ordained to the order of the diaconate at his home parish of Saint Paul in Florin, California.

#### **DIACONATE AT SAINT CATHERINE PARISH**

From June 4, 1979, to April 3, 1980, as part of his final year of training, Ben was a transitional deacon completing his pastoral year of service at Saint Catherine Parish in Vallejo. Father Colm O'Kelly, who had become pastor there earlier in 1979, was Deacon Ben's mentor.

Father O'Kelly remembers Ben as a friendly, focused and dedicated deacon who truly wanted to be a priest. During his year at Saint Catherine Parish, Deacon Ben helped to develop a parish youth group and worked well with the members. He made enduring friendships with many in the parish youth group, and, as the years and decades progressed, officiated at their weddings, baptized their children, and said Mass for their deceased parents.

Father O’Kelly also recalls the musical evenings that he and Deacon Ben would enjoy together. With Father O’Kelly on the baby grand piano and Deacon Ben on the tenor saxophone, the two would perform duets in the music room of Saint Catherine’s rectory.

### **ORDAINED A PRIEST FOR THE DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO**

Benedict Santos DeLeon, Jr was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Sacramento on March 22, 1980, by Bishop Francis Anthony Quinn in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Sacramento.



Photo courtesy of Phil DeLeon

### **Father Ben concelebrates his Ordination Mass with Bishop Quinn and Fathers Hannan and Doheny**

Of that long-anticipated ordination at the Cathedral, the siblings of the newly-ordained Father Ben recall four special images from a day filled with precious memories:

- Their brother during the chanting of the litany of the saints, garbed in his white alb, lying prone on the sanctuary floor, his future life of priestly service captured in that image of complete and faithful submission
- The long line of vested Diocesan priests, each taking his turn to lay hands on the head of their brother in blessing and support
- Father Doheny, the pastor under whom they grew up and their brother's mentor, helping the newly-ordained Father Ben to vest in the stole and chasuble, symbolizing the priestly office
- Their newly-ordained brother giving their parents his first blessing.

Almost four decades later, Father Ben would share with his siblings his own treasured memory of that most precious day: before the start of the Cathedral ceremonies, Bishop Quinn and Ben were standing for a quiet moment, and then, at Bishop Quinn's suggestion, together prayed to Blessed Mother Mary, asking for her grace for Ben's life of priestly service.



Photo courtesy of Phil DeLeon

**Bishop Francis Quinn and newly ordained Father Benedict DeLeon, Jr.  
Immediately after the Ordination Mass in the Cathedral**

On the day after his ordination, Father Ben celebrated two First Masses: in the morning at his home parish of Saint Paul and in the afternoon at Saint Catherine Parish in Vallejo.



Photo courtesy of Phil DeLeon

**Father Ben celebrates his First Mass at Saint Paul Church in Sacramento**

Later that spring, Father Ben accompanied his parents to Pangasinan province on the island of Luzon in the Philippines, there to celebrate First Masses in his father's home town of Binmaley and in his mother's home town of Manaoag at the church where 34 years earlier, Benedict and Praxedes had exchanged their marriage vows.



Photo courtesy of Philip DeLeon

**Church of the Purification in Binmaley, Pangasinan Province, the Philippines  
where, in spring 1980, Father Ben celebrated "First Mass" in his father's home town**

Bishop Quinn appointed Father Ben associate pastor of Saint Catherine Parish in Vallejo, at which he served for two years, April 3, 1980 to March 22, 1982.



Photo by John E Boll

### **Saint Catherine of Siena Church, Vallejo**

#### **SERVING AS VOCATION DIRECTOR AND CHRISTIAN BROTHER'S CHAPLAIN**

After serving Saint Catherine Parish for two years as parochial vicar, Bishop Quinn asked Father Ben to become Vocation Director of the Diocese of Sacramento. At the same time, he was appointed part-time chaplain of Christian Brothers High School in Sacramento with residence at Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish (March 1982-September 1983) and then at Christian Brothers (September 1983-July 1985) as resident chaplain.

During his chaplaincy at Christian Brothers, Father Ben was pleased to celebrate Mass for the students and Christian Brothers and to return the rite of Benediction and Veneration of the Eucharist to the school's schedule of liturgical observances. He also taught religion and served as an academic advisor.



When Father Ben moved into the rectory at Presentation parish, Monsignor Eymard Gallagher was the pastor and Father John Boll the parochial vicar. Father John remembers that Father Ben owned the newest high-tech devices on the market and knew how to use them. He was a technology expert in the early 1980s when many others were just beginning to learn computer technology.

**Monsignor Eymard J Gallagher**

## PASTORATES IN THE DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO

### **SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST PARISH, Dunsmuir**

On July 1, 1985, Father Ben was appointed to his first pastorate at Saint John the Evangelist Parish in Dunsmuir and, as well, named parochial administrator of Saint Joseph Parish in McCloud, a mill town 16 miles east of Dunsmuir. In his roles as pastor of Saint John's and parochial administrator of Saint Joseph's, Father Ben served two communities with diverse and contrasting though interdependent cultures, Dunsmuir being a railroad town and McCloud a mill town.



Photo by John E Boll

### **Saint John the Evangelist Church, Dunsmuir**

The years as pastor of Saint John's and administrator of Saint Joseph's initiated what would become Father Ben's life-long affection for living and working in the mountains. He enjoyed serving his mountain parish communities and treasured long friendships with the families of his parish. Parishioner Ron Manfredi recalls that Father Ben would often have Saturday dinner with the Manfredi family after the Vigil Mass. The two good friends enjoyed fishing and hunting together. They also shared their distinctive interests: Ron taught Father Ben how to play golf, and Father Ben helped Ron to learn computer skills [Appendix A].

As would be true for all of his assignments as pastor, Father Ben took seriously his responsibility for the fiscal health of St. John's. The spacious rectory, for example, provided one way for Father Ben to practice good management of resources. To decrease the large rectory's energy costs during winters, Father Ben closed up the second story and installed a new wood-burning stove on the first floor. The smaller, efficiently-heated space provided comfortable quarters for Father

Ben and his dog Cyrus. Father Ben also took pleasure in cooking his own dinners in the rectory's kitchen.



Photo by John E Boll

### **Saint Joseph Church, McCloud**

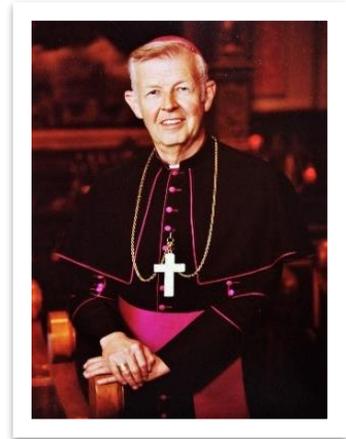
His dual appointments as pastor and administrator required Father Ben to drive many miles to celebrate Mass both at Saint John and Saint Joseph Churches. In winter, the snowy conditions made the drives to and from both churches treacherous, as well as stressful and tiring. Months later, Father Ben told his family how on the first Christmas of his pastorate, he returned to the Dunsmuir rectory after celebrating all of the Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Masses at both parishes. Suddenly overcome with fatigue, he thought to sit a few minutes on the stairs just inside the rectory door but fell instantly and deeply asleep, only to be gently awakened several hours later by his dog Cyrus.

During his first pastorate, Father Ben also trained for and served as a medical chaplain at local hospitals in Siskiyou County.

### **SAINT CLARE PARISH, Antelope**

In spring 1992, Father Ben completed his seven-year first pastorate and began his next assignment: Bishop Francis Quinn appointed Father Ben as founding pastor of Saint Clare Parish in Antelope.

Father Ben purchased a house in Antelope to serve as the parish rectory and rented Saint Andrew Episcopal Church on Watt Avenue for the small Saint Clare community's weekend celebration of Mass.



**Bishop Francis A Quinn**

At one of the Saturday Vigil Masses at Saint Andrew Church in early spring 1993, extended members of the DeLeon and Horton families gathered to celebrate when Father Ben's young nephews Colin and Kieran de Leon-Horton received First Eucharist.

As Saint Clare's founding pastor, Father Ben began raising funds to build the parish's first buildings and worked with architects to begin a master plan for the new parish site. Having set these processes in motion for the new Saint Clare's parish community, he then applied for his next assignment when the closure of nearby McClellan Air Force Base was announced. Father John Boll who was Vicar for Clergy and living in residence at Saint Lawrence Parish, was asked by Bishop Quinn if he would also be administrator of Saint Clare Parish temporarily. Subsequently, the Diocese moved Saint Clare Parish from Antelope to a new site in West Roseville.

Before leaving Saint Clare's, Father Ben and Father Troy Powers represented the Diocese of Sacramento at the 1993 convocation of the National Federation of Priests' Councils in Chicago. The theme of the gathering marked the 25th anniversary of the NFPC's founding after Vatican II: "At the Crossroads: reflections on priesthood and ministry for the 21st century" [Source: <http://www.nfpc.org/about-us-2/nfpc-history/>].

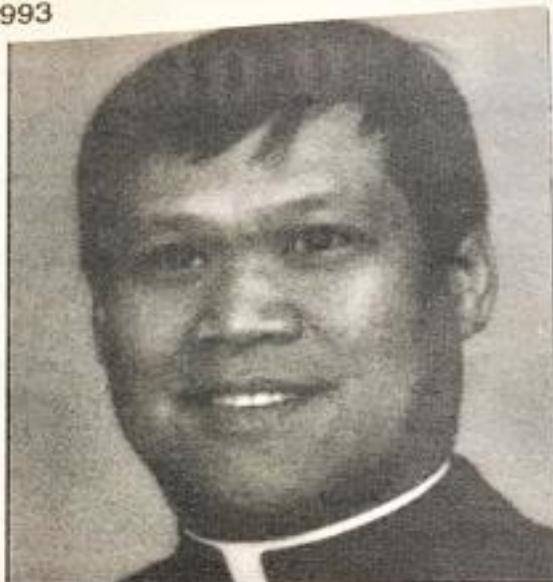
Elected to serve on the Executive Board representing the dioceses of Northern California in the San Francisco province, Father Ben returned from the convocation as part of the NFPC's governing structure.

## Fr. DeLeon is elected to board of NFPC

Father Benedict DeLeon, pastor of St. Clare's Parish, Antelope, has been elected to the executive board of the National Federation of Priests' Councils.

Father DeLeon and Father Troy Powers, pastor of St. Joseph Church, Yreka, represented the Diocese of Sacramento, at the NFPC convention in Chicago May 3 to 7. The NFPC represents, through its diocesan affiliates, about half the priests in the United States.

Father DeLeon praised a talk given by Father Canice Connors at the convention. "Father Connors gave a very mov-



**Fr. Benedict DeLeon**

ing presentation," Father DeLeon said, "on how — in spite of liability and legal fears — we as priests should never abandon a hurting brother priest, especially at a time when that hurting priest might need our fraternal support most."

On the executive board, Father DeLeon will represent the northern California dioceses in the San Francisco Province.

Photographed by Philip DeLeon

From the *Catholic Herald* issues in the Diocesan Archives

Twenty-five years later, Father Ben would return to Saint Clare Parish to mark another milestone: On September 17, 2017, the past and previous pastors and parishioners of Saint Clare Parish celebrated Mass on the observed 25th anniversary of the parish's founding. At this Mass, founding pastor, Father Ben DeLeon, was the homilist.



Photo by Junie Baldonado and posted on the Saint Clare website

### **Homilist Father Ben at Saint Clare's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Mass**

#### **OUR DIVINE SAVIOR PARISH, Chico**

Father Ben arrived in Chico on July 6, 1993, to serve as pastor of Our Divine Savior Parish. A significant memory for his siblings attending Father Ben's installation Mass was seeing for the first time the image of the resurrected Christ in the church sanctuary, a complementary image to that of the crucified Christ with which they grew up at Saint Rose and Saint Paul Parishes. They also recall with appreciation the kind welcome extended to the family at the reception following Father Ben's installation Mass.



Photo by John E Boll

### **Interior of Our Divine Savior Church, Chico**

#### **SAINT MARY PARISH, Vacaville**

After the three-year pastorate in Chico, Bishop William K Weigand appointed Father Ben pastor of Saint Mary Parish in Vacaville, starting on April 12, 1996. Consistent with his previous experience, Father Ben's interaction with parishioners would result in life-long friendships.

His work at Saint Mary's began with his gentle but firm instruction to the parish's liturgy committee: The church environment should support the beauty of the liturgy. For example, the banners and the cloths on the altar and ambo should reflect the liturgical color of the day, and flowers in the church should always be real. In keeping with Father Ben's preference for fresh flowers, a new rose garden was planted during this period. Saint Mary's parishioner Nelly Verba recalls that Father Ben's directive required more work but was duly followed [Appendix B].

Mrs. Verba also remembers Father Ben's strong involvement with the parish community's food assistance project and one particularly memorable experience: Covering his face, he stood in line at the parish's food locker. Arriving at the front of the line, he told the volunteers that he needed food right away and, when given a hot dog, complained about the cold food, saying he needed, "A *hot* hot dog." Only when the food had been microwaved and returned to him did Father Ben reveal himself by his hearty laughter.

During his time at Saint Mary's, Father Ben also served as spiritual advisor for the Santo Niño de Cebu Society of Vacaville, Fairfield, Suisun and vicinity, a religious, social and fraternal organization. This work strengthened Father Ben's ties with and appreciation for his Filipino

heritage. As former Saint Mary's parishioner Merlina Tan writes, "He celebrated Mass during novena days and we would take delight when he attended the dinner dances and fiesta days for Baby Jesus, Santo Niño. Needless to say, I not only respected him during the Mass (La Misa) but admired his jovial and friendly fellowship during the feast (La Mesa). He could be easily spotted with his hearty and jolly chuckle anywhere and especially so when he was pulled on the dance floor for Electric Slide Line Dancing" [Appendix C].

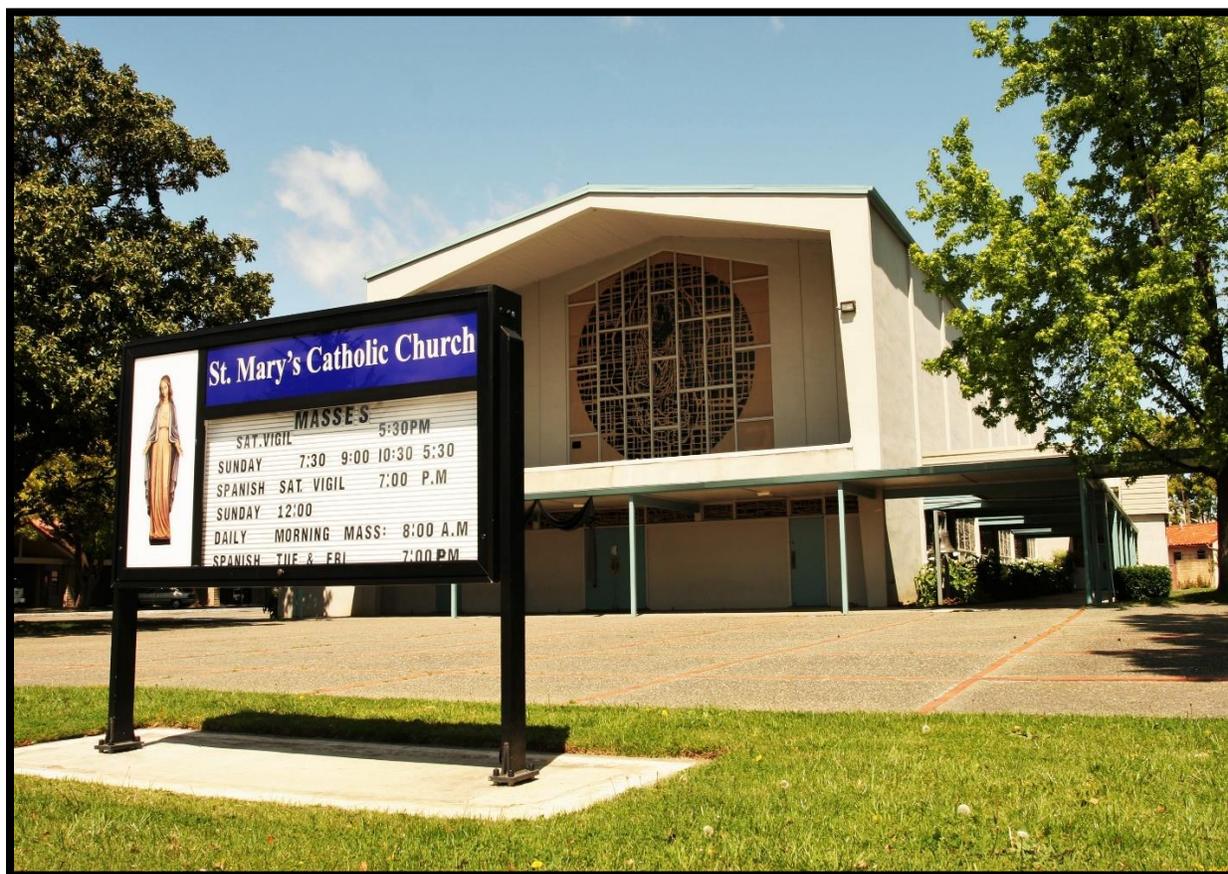


Photo by Cathy Joyce

### **Saint Mary Church, Vacaville**

When Father Ben began his five-year pastorate at Saint Mary's, he was in the sixteenth year of his priesthood. During this period, he was able to take a sabbatical, returning to his studies in theology.

In the summer and fall of 1997, he participated in a four-month program for priests in Jerusalem sponsored by the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. Father Ben would later share with his family that he would always be grateful for the faith-filled experience as a pilgrim walking the roads where Saint Paul had walked and living in the places where Christ himself had lived on earth.



Photo by John E Boll

### **Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Mount Calvary, Jerusalem**

While serving Saint Mary Parish, Father Ben also availed himself of the opportunity to undertake graduate theology studies at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in Saint Meinrad, Indiana. The Saint Meinrad's alumni newsletter for winter 2020 names Father Ben in its "Alumni Eternal" page and notes his enrollment in 1999 in the program for Master of Theology Studies.



Photo from St Meinrad Seminary Website

### **Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology**

## **SAINT THOMAS THE APOSTLE PARISH, Oroville**

After five years as pastor in Vacaville, Bishop William Weigand appointed Father Ben pastor of Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish in Oroville on June 1, 2001.

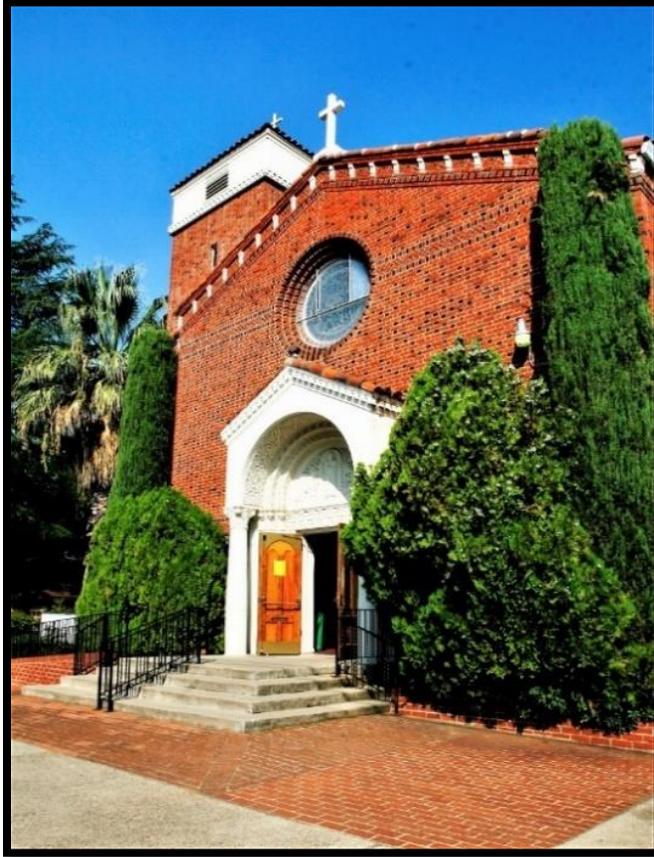
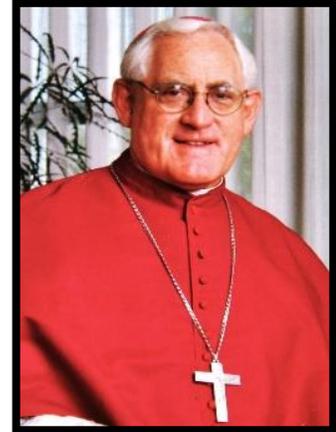


Photo by John E Boll

### **Saint Thomas the Apostle Church, Oroville**



**Bishop William K. Weigand**

The parishioners of Saint Thomas remember Father Ben for his kindness and sense of compassion. Parishioner Ray Crosthwaite recalls, “[Father Ben] always said, ‘If you make a mistake, make it on the side of compassion.’”

From the very beginning of his ordained ministry when he was a transitional deacon at Saint Catherine Parish, Father Ben consistently invested resources for nurturing the Roman Catholic faith in youth. As youth minister for Saint Thomas, Mr. Crosthwaite notes that, “Father was a great proponent of youth. He positively influenced all youth with whom he came into contact and had a great influence on the lives of the youth of Oroville”[Appendix D].

Activities that Father Ben led for the parish's young people included bringing the youth group to the Youth Day portion of the Religious Education Conference sponsored by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, after which the Saint Thomas youth group enjoyed time in Disneyland. He also oversaw the planning for sending Saint Thomas' youth delegation to the largest world youth event: in July 2008, Father Ben led eight Saint Thomas young people to the World Youth Day in Sidney, Australia.

The Australia WYD was the first of three international youth trips led by Father Ben. In August 2011 and again in July 2016, Father Ben led parish youth delegations to World Youth days in, respectively, Spain and Poland.

Five years into his service at Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish, Father Ben celebrated his 25th year of priesthood. In June 2005, Father Ben's parishioners, former parishioners, brother priests and family prayed their thanksgiving in the Mass at which Auxiliary Bishop Richard J. Garcia was the principle celebrant. Guests traveling to the celebration included Father Richard Doheny, pastor of Saint Paul Parish when Father Ben was a boy.

### **SAINT JOSEPH PARISH, Redding**

After seven years as pastor of Saint Thomas in Oroville, Father Ben was asked by Bishop Weigand to accept the pastorate in Saint Joseph Parish in Redding. Father Ben served at Saint Joseph's for two years, March 23, 2008 through July 20, 2010.



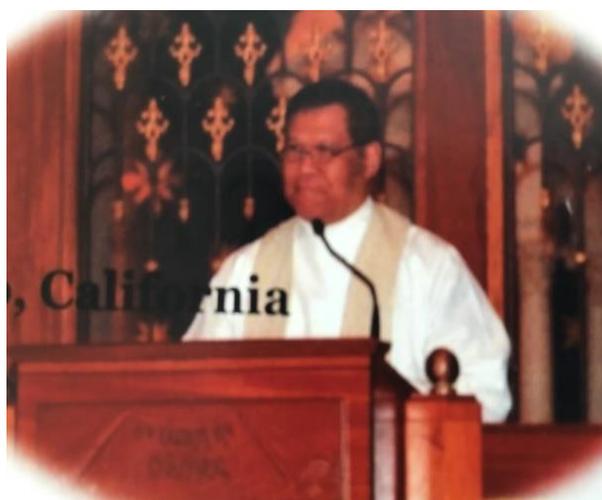
Photo by John E Boll

### **Saint Joseph Church, Redding**

As had been true for his previous pastorates, Father Ben's work included mentoring seminarians and transitional deacons serving their pastoral years. Among those with whom Father Ben worked are Father Joseph Huyen Van Nguyen and Father Guillermo Hernandez. While at Saint

Joseph, Father Ben worked with seminarian Michael Ritter, who remembers Father Ben as a deeply fraternal person and loving of his priesthood and his fellow priests, very human and easily approachable. Father Michael describes Father Ben as a priests' priest, always ready to support his brother priests. He recalls, for example, Father Ben's phone calls suggesting that Father Michael write a note of support to the bishop whenever the bishop was being criticized and, for more encouragement and guidance, receiving a copy of Father Ben's own note to the Bishop [Appendix E].

While at Saint Joseph's, Father Ben received an invitation from the Religious of the Virgin Mary Sisters to participate in their celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the RVM's missionary presence in Sacramento. On July 18, 2008, at the Eucharistic Celebration in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, Father Ben was the homilist.



**Homilist Father Ben at RVM's 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Eucharistic Celebration**

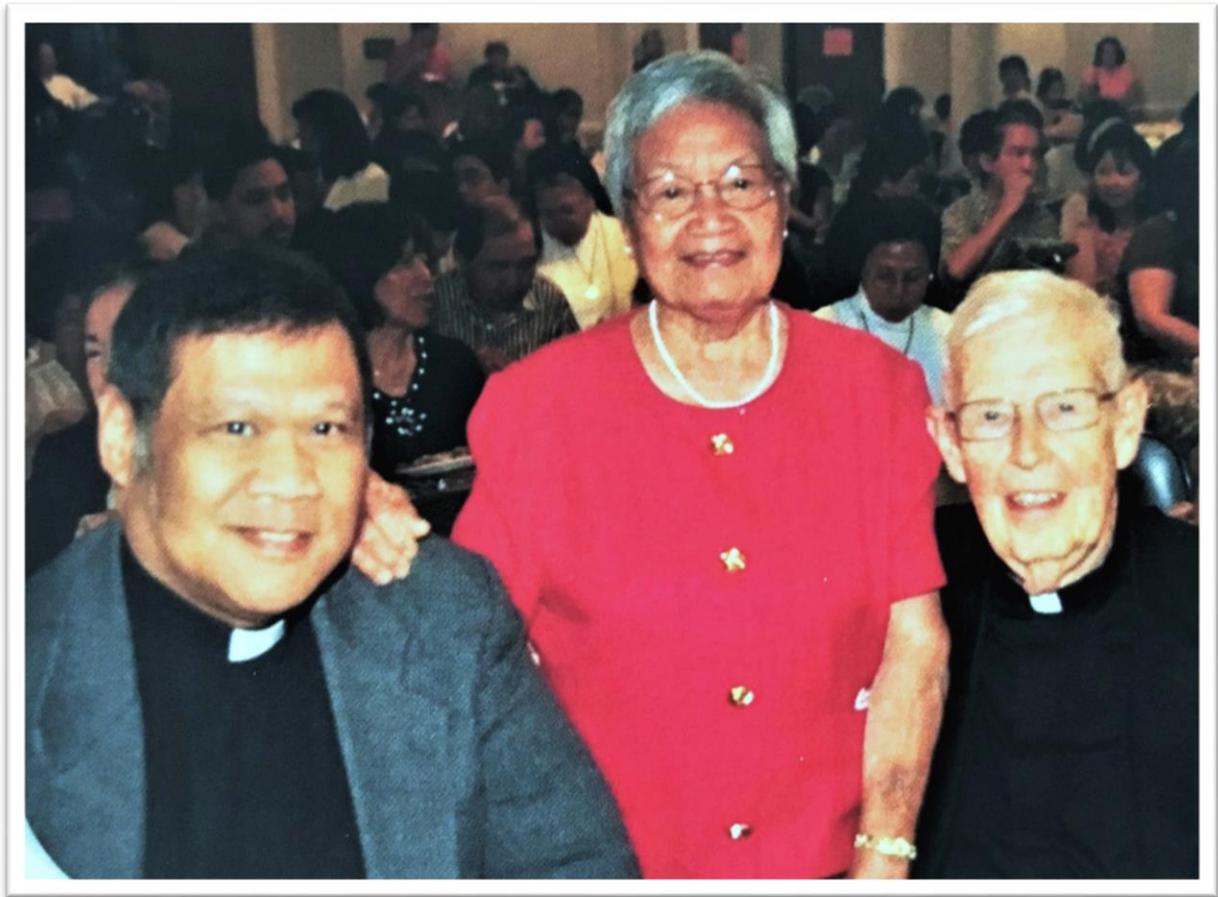
Having been a child of five years when the first RVM sisters accepted Bishop Joseph McGucken's invitation to establish a Sacramento apostolate, Father Ben could draw on his own boyhood memories of the pioneering RVM sisters' work, giving detailed witness to their "50 years of unselfish and valuable and immeasurable service to the Catholic people of Northern California."

[The Sisters] have touched the lives of so many souls in our diocese, regardless of ethnic background, through their apostolates in parish Religious Education programs, teaching in Catholic Schools, comforting the sick and the dying and their families, acting as liturgy coordinators. I remember as a little boy when they first arrived in our diocese at the invitation of Bishop Joseph McGucken, and they came to visit my family in our home.

Even as a little boy I came to look-up to them with respect and admiration, knowing that they were dedicating their lives to the Lord and helping people come to know God in the unselfish work they did.

To my dear friends, my co-workers in the Lord's vineyard, the Religious of the Virgin Mary – on behalf of all of us present with you today in this beautiful celebration of the Eucharist, giving honor for 50 years, working with us, being with us, praying for us, we thank you for your devotion, your commitment, and your unselfishness, in bringing God's comfort and love and hope to all of us, and to all the Catholic faithful throughout the diocese. We pray that our good and merciful Lord will continue to bless you, to give you his strength and wisdom and guidance as you continue your ministry and apostolate in our diocese.

[Source for the published homily and the three 50<sup>th</sup> year celebration photos: "Footprints of Gold," the commemorative book prepared in 2009 for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the RVM's missionary presence in Sacramento. See Appendix I for the full text of the homily.]



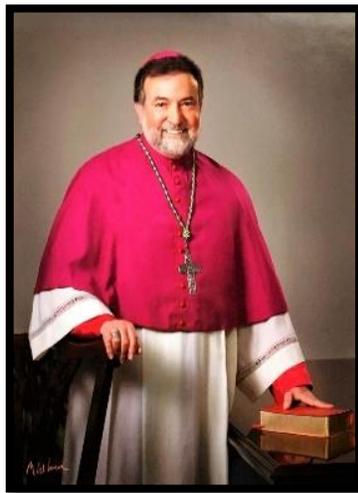
**At the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, Father Ben DeLeon, his mother Praxedes, and Bishop Francis Quinn following the Eucharistic Celebration on July 18, 2009, Honoring the RVM's 50th year in Sacramento**



**Religious of the Virgin Mary with Bishop Quinn and Father Ben at the 50th Jubilee Celebration**

**SAINT THERESA PARISH, South Lake Tahoe**

Father Ben had first experienced working in a mountain community parish while a seminarian serving one summer at Saint Theresa Parish in South Lake Tahoe. More than three decades later, he would come full circle: appointed by Bishop Jaime Soto, Father Ben became pastor of Saint Theresa Parish on August 1, 2010.



**Bishop Jaime Soto**



Photo by John E Boll

### **Saint Theresa Church, South Lake Tahoe**

For his family and friends, as well as for Father Ben, the years at Saint Theresa Parish were very special. Now and again, his family joined him to celebrate several occasions. One such family gathering was especially poignant, occurring when Father Ben and (transitional) Deacon Memo Hernandez hosted the DeLeon siblings and their families on the first Thanksgiving after the death of their mother Praxedes seven months earlier.

A second more jovial occasion happened two winters later. After the siblings and their families had enjoyed a quiet dinner, Father Ben was presiding over the family's after-dinner pleasantries when the lights were suddenly turned off, the better to enjoy the presentation of a candle-lit birthday cake to the table. All voices – Father Ben's baritone included – were heartily joined in singing "Happy Birthday," until the lights went back on and the birthday cake was presented to a thoroughly surprised Father Ben. Because they were all in Tahoe, his siblings had decided to surprise him with a celebration two weeks ahead of his 60th birthday.

Another special occasion hosted by Father Ben during his Saint Theresa's pastorate was a gathering for his Filipino priest brothers. Always appreciative of good eating and himself a skilled cook, Father Ben had planned and prepared the menu's recipes. Later, Father Ben happily shared with his siblings that at the end of the meal, a brother priest from the Philippines enthusiastically commended the California-born-and-bred Father Ben for keeping alive his roots, as demonstrated by his excellent preparation of their delicious and beloved Filipino cuisine.

In the last six months of Father Ben's pastorate, a potentially catastrophic event in Saint Theresa Parish's history occurred. As reported in the local media, high winds swept through the region on Thursday, December 11, 2014, toppling a large pine tree planted in front of the church. Fortunately, no persons were hurt although the toppled pine narrowly missed falling on the statue of Saint Theresa. However, damage to the roof of Globin Social Hall was extensive enough to require closure of both the hall and church and potentially to impact the full schedule of liturgical celebrations for the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Advent Season. Describing the situation to his siblings, Father Ben expressed his intent to organize efficiently the resources necessary for achieving a safe and timely repair of the damage.



Photo by Philip DeLeon on December 11, 2014

### **Toppled pine tree on the roof of Saint Theresa's Globin Hall**

As recalled by Saint Theresa's parishioner Paul Camacho: "The tree fell on Globin Hall in the early afternoon on December 11, 2014. The impact crushed a portion of the roof, and broke the fire sprinkler system which flooded the hall. This caused the whole Church to be red tagged ahead of the Our Lady of Guadalupe Celebration. This means all utilities are shut off and no one allowed entry. After the damage occurred, we were able to coordinate with the local building official, tree removal service, vacuum truck service, local contractor and structural engineer to get the hall secured that evening.

“Due to those actions, we managed to get the red tag to apply only to Globin Hall and the Church was able to resume activities with the scheduled Our Lady of Guadalupe celebration the next evening. This was no small feat! Father Ben was critical in making the necessary decisions to make this happen” [Appendix F].

### **CORPUS CHRISTI PARISH IN TAHOE CITY**

On July 1, 2015, Father Ben finished his work at Saint Theresa Parish and began his assignment at Corpus Christi Parish. Auxiliary Bishop Myron Cotta installed Father Ben for what would be Father Ben’s four-year assignment before retirement. Father Ben’s younger brother Philip, elder sister Jane and brother-in-law Peter were present at this Mass. At the reception afterwards, they enjoyed conversations with the parishioners and learned that choir members from Saint Theresa’s in South Tahoe had driven to Corpus Christi in Tahoe City so that both parish choirs could join their voices in simultaneous farewell and welcome at Father Ben’s installation Mass.

The warmth with which Father Ben’s parishioners past and current regarded him was expressed by Corpus Christi parishioner Paula Hendricks: “Our lives were touched by Father Ben's homilies at Corpus Christi in Tahoe City. He was inspirational and we always left Mass with a smile on our faces, our hearts and minds ready for the week ahead . . . .”

[Source: <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/sacbee/obituary.aspx?pid=193704716>]



Photo by John E Boll

**Corpus Christi Church, Tahoe City, CA**

Father Ben's last 15 months at Corpus Christi were marked by the passing of two priests whose lives had significantly influenced his own life and priestly formation: Monsignor Edward Kavanagh, pastor emeritus of Saint Rose Parish, who had baptized the infant Ben, and Bishop Francis Quinn, who had ordained Father Ben in 1980 and at whose funeral on April 1, 2019, Father Ben served as a pall bearer.



[Photo extracted from [scd.org/news/watch-livestream-bishop-francis](http://scd.org/news/watch-livestream-bishop-francis)]

**Father Ben served as a pall bearer at the Funeral Mass of Bishop Francis Quinn  
At the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament on April 1, 2019**

## RETIREMENT AND FINAL PILGRIMAGE

Although his official retirement had begun in January 2019, Father Ben served Corpus Christi as parochial administrator until June 2019, when he began the move to his new home base at the Priests' Retirement Village in Citrus Heights. During that busy last week of June, he made numerous car trips between Tahoe City and Citrus Heights to transport his personal belongings. On the last week-end of June, he co-officiated at the family wedding of his nephew Kieran de Leon-Horton to Kati Wu at Saint Paul Church.

He then spent the month of July substituting for the vacationing pastor at Saint Thomas Parish in Oroville. In addition to the pastoral duties, Father Ben enjoyed the time with his former parishioners and friends at Saint Thomas. He could also be seen hiking on the roads around Oroville Dam, walking sticks in hands, with his faithful dog Klondike at his side. Father Ben was continuing his training and preparation for the pilgrimage that had been several years in the planning: his September pilgrimage walk on El Camino de Santiago in Spain.

When his siblings asked whether he would have access to Internet connectivity during his trek through the Pyrenees, Father Ben gently replied that he was not planning to make use of the Internet, seeking instead to enjoy the quiet and dedicating his time to prayer.

In a summer already memorable for family gatherings and milestones, two more liturgical gatherings occurred before Father Ben's planned departure for Europe and his pilgrimage.



**Father Ben celebrating his Mass of Thanksgiving on August 11, 2019, at Saint Paul Church, Father Joyle Martinez, pastor, concelebrating** [Photo courtesy of Dale Yamamoto, as posted on Saint Paul's website]

On August 11<sup>th</sup>, Father Ben celebrated his Mass of Thanksgiving for Priesthood at Saint Paul Church where 39 years earlier he had celebrated his First Mass. Among the worshippers at this Mass of Thanksgiving were parishioners who had watched him serve Mass as a young altar boy. They listened now to the words of what would be his last homily: an encouragement to pray every day and to make time to listen for the quiet voice of God.



Photo from the photo albums on the Saint Paul's parish website

**Father Ben in the Saint Paul's sanctuary with his family and Father Joyle Martinez  
After celebrating his Mass of Thanksgiving**

Three days later on August 14, 2019, at Mater Ecclesiae Church in Thornton, Diocese of Stockton, Father Ben celebrated the last of his public liturgies. With permission of the local diocese, Father Ben was the principle celebrant at the Funeral Mass of a family friend, the last surviving member of his late mother's circle of town mates from the Philippines.

The funeral was scheduled on a San Joaquin Valley summer day registering a hot temperature of over 100 degrees. Father Ben presided with his characteristic compassion, gently explaining the rites and theology while faithfully leading the worship and prayers of the Funeral Mass and the interment. After the rites, he spent time with the bereaved family before driving back to Citrus Heights and his new residence in the Curé d'Ars Retirement Village. His brother priest Father Patrick Henry visited Father Ben that evening in his apartment.

Looking back at his life, Father Ben had remarked to his family that his parish assignments had taken him to the Diocese of Sacramento's distant points west, north and east. During his 39 years as priest of the diocese, Father Ben enlarged the generous scope of his love of family and faith to include both the parishioners entrusted to his care and, equally important, his brother priests. He watched over the spiritual lives of his parishioners and thoughtfully stewarded the resources of his parishes' facilities. He cared deeply about the well-being of his brother priests and made provision for leaving his material treasure to them through the diocese. Finally, Father Ben thoughtfully participated in the diocese's priestly governance structures and rendered respectful and obedient service to his superiors, Bishops Quinn, Weigand, and Soto.

On All Saints Day, 2018, when he had completed the diocesan-required planning for his own last rites, Father Ben inscribed this preface at the top of his instructions:

**I hope I have helped to make others happy, filled others with the joy God has intended for all of us to experience, as together, we walk toward our Lord and heaven.**

**“As to the exact day and hour, no one knows it . . .”**

[Mark 13:32]

In early summer 2019, Father Ben had said that he was looking forward to an Internet hiatus during his walk through the Pyrenees. And so in the days after the funeral in Thornton when Father Ben did not respond to his siblings' texts and phone calls, his sister Jane surmised that her brother had gently begun preparing the family for when he would be away from them, quietly praying and walking the Camino pilgrimage.

Midday on Sunday, August 18, after Mass and the social hour at Saint Paul Church, Philip went to Father Ben's cottage and found why Father Ben would never again return texts and phone calls.

Philip communicated word of Father's Ben's death to his siblings and to Bishop Soto. At the cottage, Father John Boll offered the Church's Prayers for the Dead. Within a few hours, Masses and prayers began to be offered throughout the diocese, in Ireland, and in the Philippines for the repose of Father Ben's soul. At Saint Paul Parish where Father Ben had grown up, the Bereavement Committee organized the Novena, the tradition of nine days of prayers and rosary for the dead observed in the Philippines.

In their sorrow and shock, Saint Paul's parishioners gathering in the chapel on the first evening of the Novena marveled at how within fewer than 10 days of receiving Father Ben's blessing at the end of his Thanksgiving Mass on August 11, they and his family and friends were now praying for the repose of his soul.

## THE CHURCH'S LAST RITES FOR FATHER BEN



Photo by John E Boll

### **Awaiting the Funeral Mass at Saint Paul Church, Sacramento**

Father Ben's Vigil and the Funeral Mass were celebrated at Saint Paul Church. Father Phil Wells presided at the Vigil on August 26<sup>th</sup>, and eulogies were offered by Matthew Lucci and Gena Errisuriz, Father Ben's nephew and niece, respectively, and Jane de Leon [see Appendices G and H].

On Tuesday, August 27, 2019, at 10:30 AM, Bishop Jaime Soto, together with Bishop Emeritus William K. Weigand and over 100 priests of the diocese, concelebrated the Funeral Mass with a full church of family, friends and parishioners of Saint Paul and the other parishes where Father Ben had served, as the whole People of God commended him to the loving embrace of God's Love and Mercy.

In keeping with Father Ben's instructions, Father Eric Lofgren was homilist; Fathers Rey Bersabal, Andres Emmanuelli, Jonathan Molina, Jeremy Santos, and nephews Justin and Colin de Leon-Horton were pallbearers; Philip DeLeon and Jane de Leon, lectors; and the Crosthwaite family gift bearers. The reception after the Funeral Mass was hosted by Saint Paul's Bereavement Committee and the Santo Niño de Cebu Society.



Photo by John E Boll

The Funeral Mass at Saint Paul Church, Sacramento

*Eternal rest grant to Father Ben,  
O Lord.*

*May he dwell in the Glorious Light  
Of Your Presence forever.*



Photos by John E Boll

**Concelebrating Priests at Father Ben's Funeral Mass**





Photos by John E Boll

**Bishop Soto Incenses Father Ben's Casket**



**Father Ben's brother priests chanting the "Salve Regina" after his Funeral Mass**



Photo by John E Boll

Directed by John Bartel, Saint Mary Funeral Center, pall bearers were Fathers Rey Bersabal, Andres Emmanuelli, Jonathan Molina, Jeremy Santos and nephews Justin and Colin de Leon-Horton.

On September 3, 2019, Father Ambrose Ugwuegbu was the presider for the family's private Rite of Committal, at the end of which Father Ambrose and Father Joyle Martinez chanted the "Salve Regina."

*If we have died with Christ, we believe that we  
Shall also live with him. We know that Christ, raised  
From the dead, dies no more; death no longer  
Has power over him.*

*Romans 6:8-9*



Photo by Jane deLeon

His casket strewn with roses from his family's garden, Father Ben was laid to rest in the Priests' Circle at Saint Mary Cemetery

*Because God has chosen to call our brother  
Benedict from this life to himself,  
We commit his body to the earth,  
For we are dust and unto dust we shall return.*

*But the Lord Jesus Christ will change our mortal  
Bodies to be like his in glory, for he is risen,  
The firstborn from the dead.*



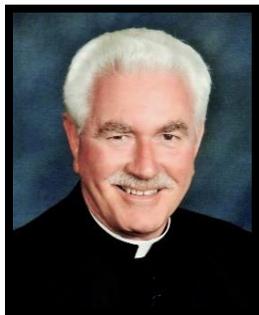
Photo by Jane deLeon

**Marked by flowers from his family's garden, Father Ben's grave in the Priests' Circle,  
Saint Mary Cemetery, Sacramento**

### **FATHER BEN'S FAMILY MEMBERS**

Father Ben was preceded in death by his parents Benedict Santos DeLeon, Sr. and Praxedes de Guzman, and is survived by his sisters and brothers, Dr. Jane de Leon and husband Peter Horton of Wilton CA; Marlene DeLeon and husband Tom Lucci of Foxborough MA; Daniel DeLeon and wife Josie of Sacramento; and Philip DeLeon of Sacramento. He also leaves six nephews, four nieces and four great nephews and two great nieces.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS



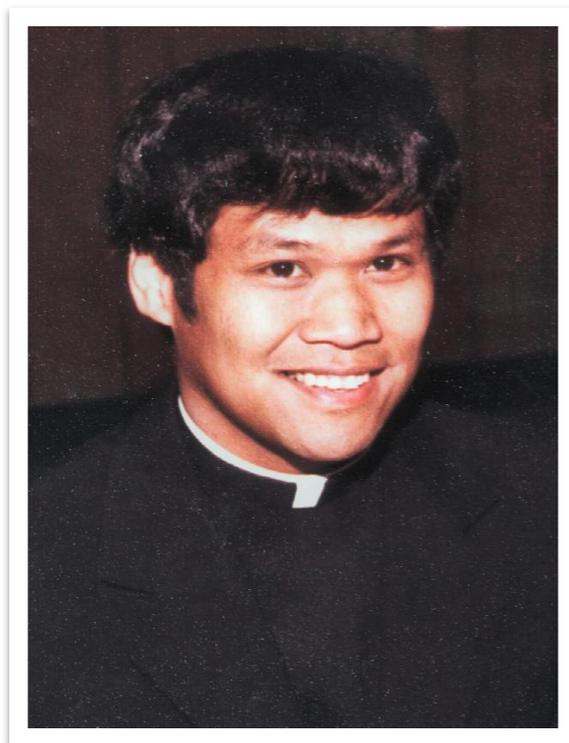
**Father John E Boll**

I am grateful to Jane DeLeon-Horton, PhD, and her brother Philip DeLeon for helping to write this biography, filling in the family background of Father Ben's life and providing family photos for this biography. Jane and Philip were a tremendous help in making Father Ben's life come alive for all of us to see.

From a very young age, Father Ben was quiet and patient, watchful and observant, generous in his willingness to help others. These qualities of his personality were gifts from God that came through his parents and the upbringing they provided.

Father Ben and I served together on the Priests' Personnel Board and the Priests' Council, and we both resided for a year at Presentation rectory, 1982-83.

I was always impressed with Father Ben's keen memory of details of events, discussions, and decisions made in past years. When necessary, he would remind us priests about those discussions and decisions made years ago and his comments always helped clarify issues. He had a clear institutional memory of decisions made years ago.



During his forty years as a priest, Father Ben thoughtfully participated in the priestly governance structures of the diocese, serving as Diocesan Vocation Director for three years (1982-1985), the Tribunal, the Deacon Advisory Board, and the Catholic School Board. He was priest representative of the San Francisco Province to the National Federation of Priests' Councils. He served as a

Diocesan Consultor (1988-1993), Dean of the Siskiyou Deanery, Moderator of the Solano Deanery of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, and Dean of the North Valley Deanery.

He led groups of young Catholics to three World Youth Days: Australia in 2008, Spain in 2011 and Poland in 2016.

At the Houston Conference of the National Assembly of Filipino American priests in November 2017, Father Ben was recognized as the oldest American-born Filipino priest in the nation.

The retired priests living at the Curé d'Ars Retirement Village in Citrus Heights were looking forward to having Father Ben live at the Village. His presence would have contributed a lot to the community life of the Village. We will miss his great laugh, his insights and his friendship.

Father Ben did not have a chance to enjoy years of retirement but has passed on ahead of us to our final goal and joy, eternal life and peace in God's Holy Presence. So, Ben, from your place in the Kingdom of Heaven, intercede for us before the Mercy Seat of God that we may be worthy heralds of the Gospel of God's love until the day we join you in the fullness of life in God's Joyful Presence.

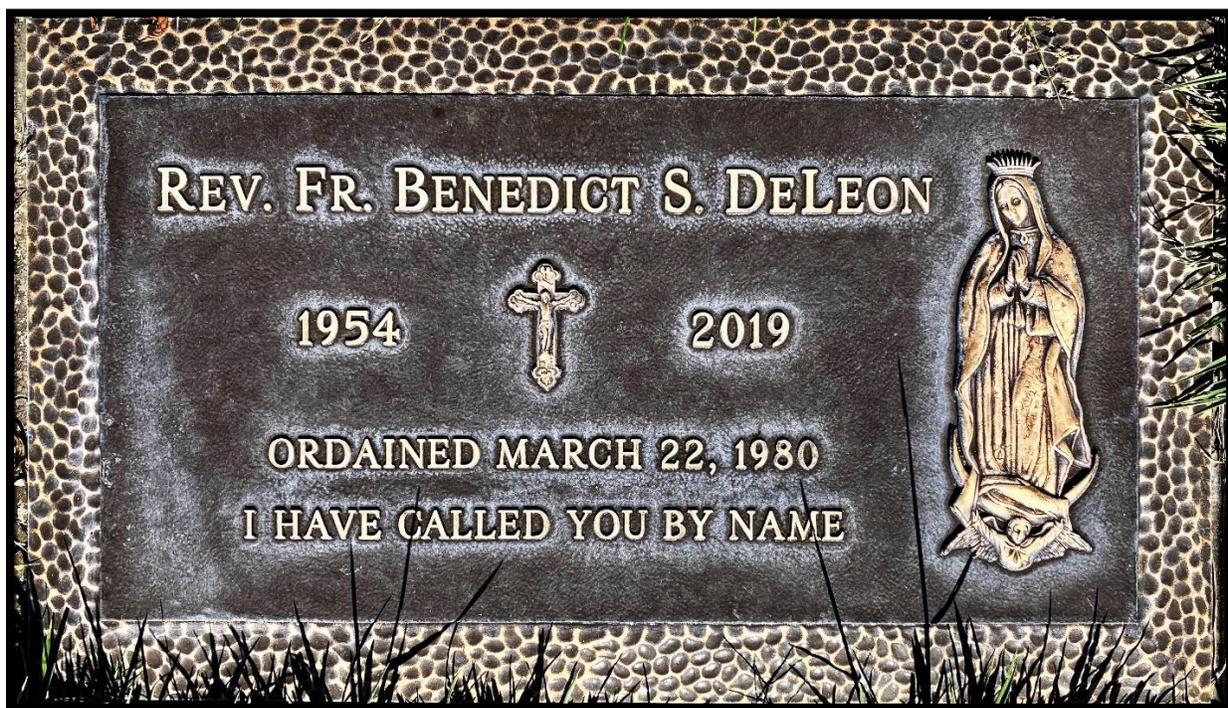


Photo by John E Boll

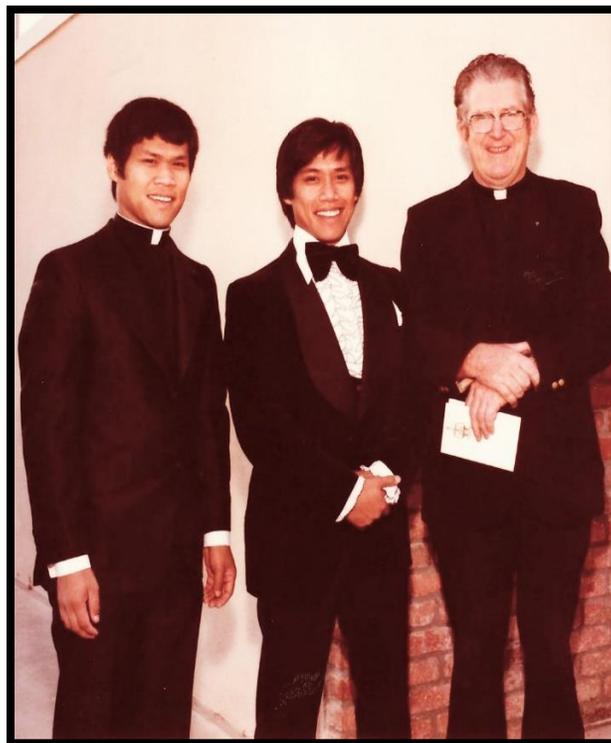
**Headstone of Father Benedict S DeLeon, Saint Mary Cemetery, Sacramento**

## FATHER BEN'S JOURNEY OF LIFE THROUGH FAMILY PHOTOS

Photos courtesy of Philip DeLeon



**Ordination of Benedict DeLeon the Priesthood at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament,  
March 22, 1980, with his brother Philip and parents Benedict & Praxedes**



**Seminarian Ben and Father Doheny with Daniel DeLeon on his wedding day, November 1978**



Photo by Patrick Hu

With Father Ben as godfather, the baptism of Colin de Leon-Horton, Father Ben's nephew, at Saint Ann Chapel, Palo Alto, CA. The baptism was celebrated by Father Benignus Barat, OSB (December 1982)





**The extended DeLeon family with Father Ben at Saint Mary Parish, Vacaville, in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of his ordination to priesthood (2000)**



Photo by Dylan Pletcher

**Father Ben with his mother Praxedes (seated at center), Siblings & siblings-in-law, nieces and nephews (2009)**



Photos courtesy of Phil DeLeon

**Father Ben with his brothers Philip (l) & Daniel (r) at Saint Clare Parish (2012)**



**Father Ben with his siblings and their families after celebrating the wedding of his nephew Mark Lucci to Sara Cochran at Saint Apollinaris Parish, Napa CA, in January 2016**



**Toasting Father Ben on his 65th birthday in January, 2019: (l - r) brother-in-law Peter Horton, sister Jane, Father Ben, sister Marlene, brother-in-law Tom Lucci, and brother Philip.**



Photos by Jane de Leon

**Father Ben blessing the construction of the de Leon & Horton barn in rural Sacramento County, First Sunday of Easter, 2019**



Photos by Philip DeLeon

**Father Ben with the de Leon Horton Family after blessing the new barn construction on the First Sunday of Easter, 2019**



Photo by Chloe Photography

**Father Ben with his siblings and their families after celebrating the wedding of his nephew Kieran de Leon-Horton to Kati Wu at Saint Paul Parish, Florin, CA in June 2019**



Photo courtesy of Phil DeLeon

**With concelebrant Father Ambrose Ugwuegbu, Father Ben at the celebration of his Thanksgiving Mass, Saint Catherine of Siena Parish, Vallejo, in May, 2019**

*Well done, good and faithful servant!  
You have been faithful with a few things;  
I will put you in charge of many things.  
Come and share your master's happiness!*

*Matthew 25:23*



*Father Benedict Santos DeLeon, Jr.*

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### **Reflection on Father Ben by Parishioner Ron Manfredi, as told to Father John Boll Saint John the Evangelist Parish, Dunsmuir CA**

Ron Manfredi, a parishioner of Saint John Parish, Dunsmuir, spoke about Father Ben. Ron attends Mass daily at the Saint John Church and had experienced only Irish-born priests in the parish before. Father Ben was Ron's first experience of a Filipino priest as pastor of the parish. He and Father Ben became good friends and Father Ben spent time with Ron and his family. He often came to the Manfredi home for dinner on Saturday evenings after the Vigil Mass.

Ron owns a grocery store and service station in Dunsmuir. He taught Father Ben how to play golf and in return, Father Ben taught Ron how to use a computer. They went fishing and hunting together and for the first time in Ron's life, the parish priest became part of the Manfredi family. Ron says Father Ben was always ready to help parishioners and he loved having his dog with him. After Father Ben left the parish to become founding pastor of Saint Clare Parish, Ron and Father Ben stayed in touch with each other by telephone.

### Appendix B

#### **Reflection by Parishioner Nelly Verba, as told to Father John Boll Saint Mary Parish, Vacaville CA**

After Father James Walsh left Vacaville for prison ministry in Folsom, the Priest Personnel Board came to the parish to do a consultation with parishioners and people spoke up. Father Ben was appointed by Bishop Weigand as the next pastor. Father Ben was a very positive priest and did his best to bring the various parish groups together.

He requested that the liturgical color of the day be reflected in the banners, the ambo and the altar. He also wanted only real flowers to be used in the church. This added work for those involved in liturgical decorations and décor but they carried out Father Ben's wishes.

Father Ben was very involved with the community. One time early in his ministry, he got in line for food requests at the parish food locker and covered his face. He told those who were serving the needy that he needed some food right away. They fixed him a cold hotdog and he said, "this is cold; I need a hot hotdog." They took the hotdog and put it in the microwave and gave it to him. He then revealed who he was with his hearty laugh.

## Appendix C

### Reflection by Parishioner Merlina Tan

#### Saint Mary Parish, Vacaville CA

Merlina Tan, a parishioner of Saint Mary Parish in Vacaville, shared these memories about Father Ben: "Father Ben holds a special place in my heart. How could he not, since he was the epitome of humor, fun and expertise in making his homilies very lively, true to human experience and still embody what the Gospel imparts.

"I met Father Ben at Saint Mary Church in Vacaville as pastor and as the spiritual director of the Santo Niño de Cebu Society of Vacaville, Fairfield, Suisun and vicinity. He celebrated Mass during novena days and we would take delight when he attended the dinner dances and fiesta days for Baby Jesus, Santo Niño. Needless to say, I not only respected him during the Mass (La Misa) but admired his jovial and friendly fellowship during the feast (La Mesa). He could be easily spotted with his hearty and jolly chuckle anywhere and especially so when he was pulled on the dance floor for Electric Slide Line Dancing.

"I could not forget the best Good Friday's *Seven Last Words* service I attended at Saint Mary Church. There were a lot of attendees and all were listening intently. But all of a sudden Father Ben slammed shut the book. He used that surprising act as part of what he wanted to impart to the group. Most of us were deeply moved and were in tears at the end of the liturgy.

"The last time I saw Father Ben was during his retirement celebration in Vallejo. And because he was 'now retired', he told me that he would join the Pilgrimage to the Philippines with Bishop Soto in 2021. I will not only miss a former pastor of Saint Mary Church, a spiritual mentor of Santo Niño de Cebu Society, but a co-birthday celebrant every January 21. Father Ben, thank you for your friendship."

## Appendix D

### Reflection by Ray Crosthwaite, as told to Father John Boll

#### Saint Thomas Parish, Oroville CA

Father Ben hired Ray Crosthwaite to be the youth minister of Saint Thomas Parish. Ray says Father Ben was a very compassionate man. He always said, "If you make a mistake, make it on the side of compassion." He was no pushover and could stand his ground on an issue but he always said whatever you do, always have fun.

Father Ben was a great proponent of youth. He positively influenced all youth with whom he came into contact and had a great influence on the lives of the youth of Oroville. He took the Oroville youth to the Youth Congress in Los Angeles and then they visited Disneyland after the congress. Eight youth went with Father Ben to World Youth Day in Australia. Ray says, "Father Ben was a Fantastic Man!"

## **Appendix E**

### **Reflection by Father Michael Ritter, summarized by Father John Boll**

When seminarian Michael Ritter served his pastoral year at Saint Joseph Parish in Redding, Father Ben was the pastor of the parish. Mike says that Father Ben was a priests' priest. He was a deeply fraternal person and loved his priesthood and his fellow priests. He was very human and easily approachable. As Father Ben approached retirement, Father Mike says he was thrilled about his upcoming retirement and looked forward to it.

After Michael was ordained a priest, Father Ben would call him to encourage him to send a note of support to the bishop whenever the bishop was being criticized. He even sent Father Michael a copy of the note he sent to the bishop to encourage Mike to write a note to the bishop as well.

Father Ben educated Michael that every priest has a fraternal identity with his brother priests. He genuinely cared about his brother priests and was always ready to support them.

## **Appendix F**

### **Email sent to Philip DeLeon from Saint Theresa parishioner Paul Camacho on September 9, 2019**

The tree fell on Globin Hall in the early afternoon on December 11, 2014. The impact crushed a portion of the roof, and broke the fire sprinkler system which flooded the hall. This caused the whole Church to be red tagged ahead of the Our Lady of Guadalupe Celebration. This means all utilities are shut off and no one allowed entry. After the damage occurred, we were able to coordinate with the local building official, tree removal service, vacuum truck service, local contractor and structural engineer to get the hall secured that evening.

Due to those actions, we managed to get the red tag to apply only to Globin Hall and the Church was able to resume activities with the scheduled Our Lady of Guadalupe celebration the next evening. This was no small feat! Fr. Ben was critical in making the necessary decisions to make this happen. There were many people who rallied to aid the Church and assisted Fr. Ben...."

## Appendix G



### **Eulogy for Father Benedict DeLeon offered at his Vigil service by his nephew Matthew Lucci, Saint Paul Parish Church, Florin, CA on August 26, 2019**

My parents named me Matthew Benedict DeLeon Lucci. I carry the name of my grandfather and my uncle, Father Ben--or as we call him, Uncle Buddy. When I was little I figured that sharing my uncle's name had special meaning for who I was and who I was expected to be. So who was Uncle Buddy for me?

#### **Matthew DeLeon Lucci**

We grew up in Boston, and every few years we flew to Sacramento where we stayed with Grandmother and Uncle Ping in the family house. My mom's siblings and their families would drop by for a week-long family reunion of sorts: Auntie Jane with her boys, Uncle Dan and his daughters, and Uncle Buddy with a menacing looking, but mostly gentle, dog who was loyal, obedient, and friendly--taking after his master.

After a brief round of "Hello", Uncle Buddy would grab a spot on the couch where he'd ask us about life. He'd lean forward with an open-mouthed smile and eager eyes. When the moment was right, he'd casually begin telling a related story of his own. He explained the cast of characters and how he knew them, some dilemma they were in, and more often than not, the story concluded with a knee slapping punchline. As a young kid, I didn't always get the joke, but he was hollering in laughter with mouth agape, and you couldn't not be infected by his laugh. No one was immune from being the center of a good-natured punchline—family members, fellow priests and parishioners, friends, both the living and those who'd passed. But he laughed with love and never with malice or ill-will. Uncle Buddy was a master storyteller, and the template with which he told stories suggested that for every person, the events of life always ended in joy.

Uncle Buddy's brother, Phil, had a speed boat. I remember spending a morning watching my uncles hitch the boat to the truck, and I was so excited to zip around the lake in that boat. But when we got there, it was decided that instead of riding in the speed boats, my mom and I would ride with Uncle Buddy in his much smaller and much slower fishing boat. I remember the quiet conversation he and my mother shared on the mostly calm lake, interrupted occasionally by the wakes of the speed boat zooming by. I got a taste of Uncle Buddy's pace—who elected at times to stay outside the hustle in order to have a deeper connection with others and experience God's creation more peacefully.

But Uncle Buddy also knew how to get a thrill in life. My Aunt Josie reminded me of when she and our uncles brought us to Disney Land in '97. When we arrived, Uncle Buddy led his brothers, Aunt Josie, and his 10 nieces and nephews, to the opposite end of the park to initiate us in the family tradition of riding "It's a small world" first thing in the morning. But after this gentle introduction to Disney, we went straight to the roller coasters, where the first big drop revealed that he would be the loudest screamer in not just our group but in practically the entire park.

During our vacations to Sacramento, days of the week ran together, but we knew it was Saturday when Uncle Buddy hopped in his car to celebrate weekend Masses for his own parish. This meant we'd soon be going back to Boston.

When we arrived home after our journey, my twin sister and I always cried. My mom explained that we were sad because our spirits were still in California with Grandmother, Uncle Buddy, and the rest of our relatives here in Sacramento. So at night we did as my grandmother had taught my mom, and she'd help us to call our wandering spirits back home—"come back home, Matthew Benedict Deleon Lucci, come back home." I felt better knowing my spirit would soon return home.

Having a priest in your family is a special kind of blessing. Uncle Buddy concelebrated my wedding Mass and gave the nuptial blessing, as he had done for my parents and siblings. He baptized my cousins and gave the anointing of the sick to my grandmother. Uncle Buddy was our family priest, and he had a central role in virtually all the most joy-filled and sacramental days in our lives.

But he was not our priest alone. On the last evening we spent with Uncle Buddy in July, my wife asked how many parishes he'd served. Instead of a number, he began naming the places and reminiscing about all the parishioners and communities whom he so fondly remembered in each place, especially members of the youth groups who'd grown up and were now raising their own children in the faith. He was proud of the fact that so many of the communities he'd been able to shepherd were rich in diversity, with multiple generations.

Several years ago, I remember Uncle Buddy recounting a story in which he proclaimed during a meeting with his fellow priests and local bishop that he was not just any priest, but a parish priest.

When I learned of Uncle Buddy's passing, I was in disbelief: "How could this happen to him?" He had just begun his retirement and was moving into a community with his brother priests. He was scheduled to go on pilgrimage on the El Camino de Santiago in less than one month.

Uncle Buddy passed away [near] the feast of the Assumption. And in the Gospel that day at the Visitation, Elizabeth expresses her own disbelief at an unexpected event, not in sadness, but of God's abundant goodness. How could it happen to me that the mother my Lord should be here? Why is God so good to me?

In Uncle Buddy's unexpected death, I can't help but reflect on God's goodness to him. How could it happen to him, that God would bless him with such loving siblings and parents, who taught him the joy of following Jesus? How could it happen to him, that God would call him to be his holy priest and that he would respond with such willingness? How could it happen to him, that God would give him such close friendships at each parish in which he served? How could it happen to him, that in the months surrounding his retirement, God would give him countless celebrations and recognition for his 39 years as a priest? How could it happen to him, that just days before he passed, God would have him celebrate his Mass of Thanksgiving here in St Paul's parish, the very first place where he served at the altar?

In the arc of Uncle Buddy's life and particularly in the months and days leading up to his death, it is almost as if God is ending the story as my uncle would tell it, in great joy.

Uncle Buddy's--Fr. Ben's-- given name is Benedict Santos, which means "Blessed Saint." In God's great goodness, he allowed my uncle to completely fulfill his vocation as a parish priest, and when that work was done, God called him home to be with him and all his blessed saints. Words cannot express our sadness that Uncle Buddy's earthly journey with us has ended, but we believe that God, his father Benedict, and mother Praxedes are now calling to his spirit: Come back home, Benedict Santos, Come home.

## Appendix H

**Eulogy for Father Benedict DeLeon offered at his Vigil Service by his sister Jane deLeon, PhD, Saint Paul Parish Church, Florin CA, on August 26, 2019.**



**Dr. Jane DeLeon, PhD**

On behalf of the De Leon family, I extend welcome and appreciation to Fr. Ben's brother priests, to his many friends and parishioners, to Fr. Joyle and Saint Paul Parish for praying with us in these final celebrations, and to Saint Paul's Bereavement Ministry group for leading the Novena prayers here at Saint Paul's. We are deeply grateful for the Masses which parishes throughout the Diocese began to offer for the repose of Fr. Ben's soul within only a few hours after the sad news of his death was conveyed from the Bishop's office. In these first terrible days of mourning our brother, your prayers and messages have lovingly consoled our family.

### ***Eulogies Sequence***

In his instructions for the Final Celebrations of his Life, my brother specified Fr. Wells as presider and homilist for this Vigil with the provision that family members be invited to speak if they wish. Accordingly, the family's eulogies will be presented for our younger generation by our niece Gena Errisuriz and our nephew, Matthew Lucci. I am Jane de Leon, and my eulogy comprises the memories of Fr. Ben's siblings and siblings-in-law.

Fifteen days ago on August 11, 2019, here at Saint Paul's, my brother Father Ben celebrated his Mass of Thanksgiving. As he stood at this ambo, how could we have known he was giving us his parting words? As always, his homiletic skills were in full play, his manner engaging and winning. He had our full attention for his intended message: that despite the busy-ness of our daily lives, no matter how seemingly or even truly important our work, we must strive consciously and thoughtfully and daily to listen for and to hear the voice of God. He reminded us of the passage from the Book of Kings in which the prophet Elijah sits in a cave, listening for the voice of God, ready to leave the cave to acknowledge that voice. Elijah hears terrifying loud sounds: a ferocious wind, a destructive fire, an earthquake, but in these terrible sounds, my brother reminded us, Elijah does not hear the voice of God. So the prophet remains in the cave waiting patiently and

faithfully, and (finally) in a moment of stillness, Elijah discerns in a *whispering* breeze the voice of God.

Occurring only a few days after delivering this homily for his Thanksgiving Mass, my brother's sudden death has been a jolting earthquake to us whom he has left behind. In these first days of our mourning, our sense of loss and our profound sadness have made it difficult to find the stillness.

Yet, we remain a faithful people, and knowing that our Lord is kind and merciful, we must, and we do seek the stillness to hear the voice of our God.

When my siblings and I met at the diocesan funeral center, we learned that our brother Father Ben had prefaced his instructions for these final celebrations with these words from the Baltimore catechism: 'Whatever the Lord permits to happen or sends against us, He does with a good end in mind.'

And so, though our hearts are heavy with grief, Father Ben reminds us that our Lord is kind and merciful, and we have faith that our sorrow will have a good end.

Benedict Santos DeLeon, Jr. was the fourth son of Benedict and Praxedes, and we his siblings affectionately called our little brother Buddy. He was always considerate and loving to our parents and to us, his four siblings. My sister Marlene recalls that whenever we asked him to do a task or requested some help with our chores, we had only to ask once, and he quietly and skillfully responded. He was quieter than his two voluble older sisters and rambunctious older brother. Because Buddy was quiet, he became keenly observant of everything around him. His vacuum cleaner memory recorded the minutest details of our daily family life – details that would emerge decades later in the stories he would recount and the jokes he would tell at our family gatherings. And now, we take our turn to tell the stories.

As we shared this week our memories of our brother Father Ben, specific words and phrases consistently emerged:

- ***Joyful, jovial, loving and lovable:*** Father Ben had a sense of irony and often told the funniest jokes, especially on us, his listeners, and we loved hearing his loud and hearty laughter.
- ***A good cook and healthy eater:*** Father Ben appreciated the hard work of preparing good food, and at parties, his blessing before the meal recognized both those who had prepared the food and the less fortunate who did not have enough to eat.
- ***A skilled karaoke enthusiast*** (for we know that all Filipinos think not only that they can sing but that they can sing well: Father Ben enjoyed serenading captive audiences, and

his favorite songs included 'New York, New York,' 'My Way,' and 'I Left My Heart in San Francisco.'

- ***Appreciative of our Filipino roots:*** our cousin Teresing describes how in the Philippines as part of a drive around our mother's town and region, my brother followed the local practice of summoning the local jeepney transport by running after the jeepney. At the end of the ride, though he did not speak the language, he also learned how to shout to the jeepney driver, 'Para' meaning, 'Stop' at exactly the right moment for landing in front of the family compound. Father Ben was thrilled to learn and to show off his proficiency as a jeepney commuter.
- ***Thoughtful and well-read, a skillful and effective homilist:*** Father Ben kept his engaging and well-organized homilies within the 7 to 12 minute time frame learned during his seminary training. As his listeners throughout the last 39 years can attest, his homilies were effective because of their brevity, his carefully chosen anecdotes, and his thoughtful and even lyrical language that uncovered for us the truth and beauty of Scriptural texts.
- ***Approachable, compassionate and charitable:*** Catholics and non-Catholics on meeting Father Ben consistently expressed their appreciation for his courtesy and kindness and for being a so-called regular person. Our brother Daniel and sister-in-law Josie remember that at parish gatherings, Father Ben sought out the individuals sitting alone at tables. He welcomed them and helped them to know they were appreciated and part of the community. On meeting Father Ben, those who had previously left the Church received from him compassion and understanding and felt compelled to think about returning to Holy Mother Church.
- ***A good priest:*** And for this description of Father Ben's vocation, I share two examples. First, a few days before his August 11<sup>th</sup> Mass of Thanksgiving, Father Ben told our family that he had received permission from the Diocese of Stockton to preside at the funeral Mass of a family friend, the last survivor of our mother's circle of Manaoag town mates. It would be his last presiding at a public liturgy.

The second example: Earlier in this calendar year when our son and his betrothed were planning their nuptials, they were considering whether the ceremony should include both the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Their Uncle Father Ben's advice was to choose the liturgical form best reflecting courtesy toward their friends and family who are not Catholic and who thus might not understand and perhaps might even feel uncomfortable during Mass. Just as for the previous liturgical celebrations over which he had presided for almost four decades, the funeral Mass for the family friend and the wedding ceremony for his nephew Kieran and now-niece Kati, reflected the solemnity, beauty, and joy of his profound faith, a solemnity, beauty and joy in which all who

attended the funeral and wedding could participate and for which many expressed appreciation.

A few days before his death, I had texted to Father Ben and said, 'Thank you for always being our family priest; and he promptly responded, 'It is my privilege.'

Prefacing his specific instructions for the final celebrations for his life, my brother Father Ben wrote: 'I hope I have helped to make others happy, filled others with the joy God has intended for all of us to experience, as together, we walk toward our Lord and heaven.'

In these final celebrations and prayers for the repose of the soul of my brother Father Benedict, I remember and can hear his voice intoning the Preface said in Masses for the Dead:

*In Christ the hope of blessed resurrection has dawned, that those saddened by the certainty of dying might be consoled by the promise of immortality to come. Indeed for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended, and, when this earthly dwelling turns to dust, an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven.*

With my brother Reverend Father Benedict Santos DeLeon, Jr., we believe Saint Paul's teaching to the Corinthians:

*'Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For that which is corruptible must clothe itself with incorruptibility, and that which is mortal must clothe itself with immortality. And when this which is corruptible clothes itself with incorruptibility and this which is mortal clothes itself with immortality, then the word that is written shall come about "–Death is swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?'*

*'The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'*

Eternal rest grant unto the soul of Reverend Father Benedict DeLeon, O Lord, and let the perpetual light shine upon him.

May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace. Amen.

## Appendix I

### HOMILY BY REV. FATHER BENEDICT DE LEON

#### Launching of the 50th Year of RVM Presence in Sacramento, California

Given on July 18, 2008, at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament at the RVM's 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Mass, Sacramento, California

In the sacred rituals of our Church pertaining to Religious Profession, the instructions state that during the ceremonies of Religious Profession, the Church:

- Accepts the vows of those making profession
- By its public prayer seeks help and grace from God, commending them to God
- Bestows on them spiritual blessings, adding their offering to the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

It is such a wonderful and comforting thought that for those making profession into the religious life, their life's sacrifice and commitment to God is fittingly enfolded and integrated into the holy sacrifice of the Eucharist celebrated on the altar.

As I reflect upon that beautiful notion, that the Church integrates the sacrifice and commitment of religious profession into that of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, I am also reminded of the beautiful liturgy of the eastern rite Byzantine Mass, the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, where immediately after consecration, glory and honor is rightfully proclaimed to our Blessed Mother the Virgin Mary, for dedicating her life to the will of God -- because, in so doing, she gave the world our Redeemer and Savior. In the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, we express our gratefulness to Mary, as we enfold her sacrifice and commitment into the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

In a similar way today, it is very fitting and appropriate that we are celebrating this beautiful Mass here in the Cathedral Church of our Diocese, around the table of God's holy altar, as we celebrate and give thanks to the Religious of the Virgin Mary for 50 years of unselfish and invaluable and immeasurable service to the Catholic people of Northern California. And as we enfold and integrate your jubilee celebration into our Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on this Cathedral altar, we give thanks to God for 50 blessed and grace-filled years of these wonderful, dedicated Sisters working in our Diocese. While their original mission was to care for the souls of the Filipino immigrants in our diocese, they have touched the lives of so many souls in our diocese, regardless of ethnic background, through their apostolates in parish Religious Education programs, teaching in Catholic schools, comforting the sick and the dying and their families, acting as liturgy coordinators.

I remember as a little boy when they first arrived in our Diocese at the invitation of Bishop Joseph McGucken, and they came to visit my family in our home. Even as a little boy I came to look up to them with respect and admiration, knowing that they were dedicating their lives to the Lord and helping people come to know God in the unselfish work they

did. In an unselfish, untiring way they would visit innumerable Filipino families and individuals, making sure that Filipino parents would bring their children to Church, go to weekly Mass, and receive the Sacraments in a timely way.

And the Filipino Sisters would organize family rosaries, the annual crowning of the Blessed Mother every May, the renewal of wedding vows for Filipino husbands and wives, always promoting the sacrament of marriage and the values of Christian family life. The Sisters would regularly visit the sick every week and comfort bereaved families at the time of death. Our Filipino Sisters have helped in the planning of important liturgies and Masses in our parishes, often times providing music and choir voices for funerals or weddings or anniversaries. When I was Vocations Director for our Diocese, the Sisters invited me to many gatherings for Filipino young people, teaching them and instilling in our children the beauty and importance of our Catholic traditions.

And of course, all these things were done so often under the auspices of the Filipino Family Fraternity, a Catholic ministry and organization whose membership has brought in hundreds and hundreds of people through these past 50 years, getting Filipino Catholics pro-actively involved in supporting their local Catholic parishes and providing spiritual and social activities for the Filipino community and especially families.

I reminisce and so constantly offer my prayers of gratitude to the Filipino Sisters who have touched my life and the life of my family, and with whom I have the honor and privilege of now being a co-minister, in my life as a priest. I think of those dedicated Sisters in my life such as Mother Catalina, Mother Amada, and Sister Primitiva.

A few times Mother Amada would share with me how in a particular week she might have visited an old *manong*, an elderly Filipino man, having lived all his adult life here in California by himself, all alone in a small cottage somewhere in the Delta area. All his life such a man lived a simple existence, picking fruits in the orchards, never having the opportunity to marry or have children because of the racial discrimination laws that existed here in California until 1963 forbidding marriage to persons outside of their race. These men had resigned themselves to living a simple life of solitude, maybe going to Church, maybe not. Mother Amada would tell me so poignantly how these men, even with all the struggles and difficulties and injustices that they may have experienced, would still always have a special shrine area in their living rooms where they would pray, giving honor and reverence and seeking the help of the Sacred Heart and the Blessed Mother.

Visits like that by Mother Amada and the Filipino Sisters were so common and a normal part of their ministry. During those visits they would bring hope and comfort to our old *manongs*, and let them know that they weren't forgotten, that the Sisters and the Filipino Family Fraternity were always praying for them -- and suggesting that maybe those *manongs* could pray for us as they offered their own daily, sincere and faith-filled prayers.

I could go on and on for so many more minutes about all the contributions by the Filipino Sisters here in our Diocese. I know that all of you have your stories about how the Sisters have touched your lives and the lives of your families and loved ones.

But before I close, I would like to also make mention of the life and ministry of Monsignor Raymond Renwald, that beloved, kind priest of our Diocese who dedicated so much of his priesthood to working with the Sisters and our Filipino people. So often, Monsignor James Murphy and I worked alongside of Monsignor Renwald, concelebrating Masses with him during Filipino festivities and witnessing his love and care and devotion to our Filipino Catholics and the Religious of the Virgin Mary. And so we feel his spirit and love with us today, and we pray that as he smiles down upon us from heaven, he will continue to help us and be with us. May he live forever in peace.

To my dear friends, my co-workers in the Lord's vineyard, the Religious of the Virgin Mary: on behalf of all of us present with you today in this beautiful celebration of the Eucharist, giving honor for 50 years, working with us, being with us, praying for us, we thank you for your devotion, your commitment and your unselfishness in bringing God's comfort and love and hope to all of us and to all the Catholic faithful throughout the Diocese. We pray that our good and merciful God will continue to bless you, to give you his strength and wisdom and guidance as you continue your ministry and apostolate in our Diocese.

Above all, as a grateful people offering our prayers during this beautiful Mass, the greatest gift we can offer you, in gratefulness and thanksgiving, is to enfold your lives and your commitment into the beautiful and special sacrifice on God's altar, faithful that God's graces will always surround you and uplift you.

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

