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## **Norma Marie Mazzier Cappello, First Executive Secretary of the California Conference of Catholic Bishops**



***Norma Marie Mazzier Cappello***

### **BORN IN WEED, CALIFORNIA**

Norma Marie Mazzier was born in Weed, California on August 19, 1931, the first child of Ernesto Mazzier and Linda Pillon who were immigrants from Italy. The second child born in the Mazzier family was a son, Lave Mazzier, born on February 13, 1934 in Weed.

### **AFTER HIGH SCHOOL, NORMA ATTENDS ARMSTRONG UNIVERSITY IN BERKELEY**

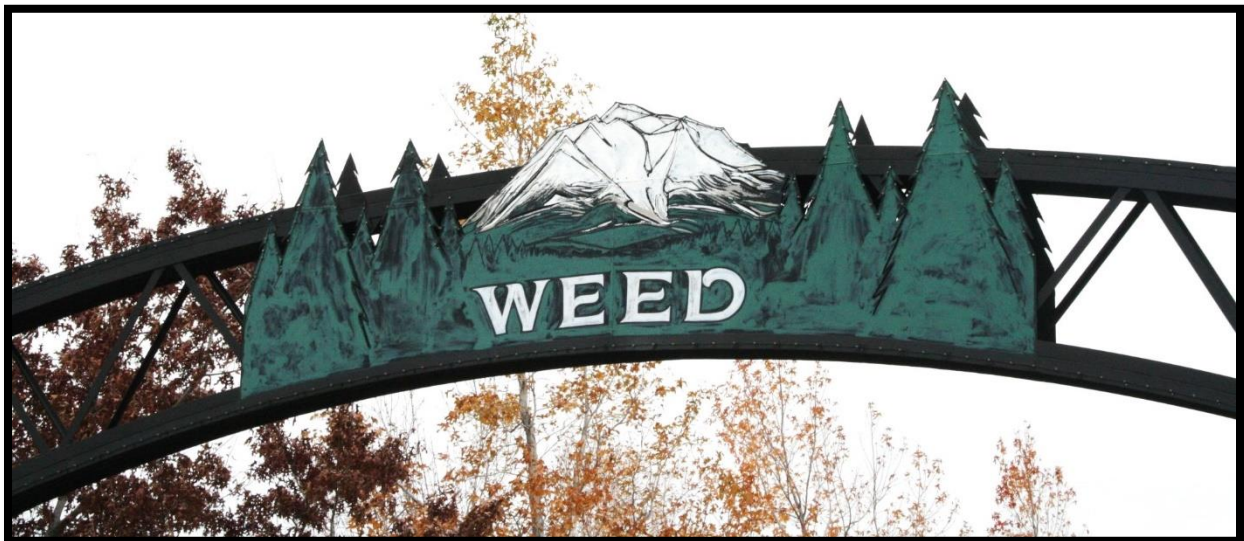
Norma attended both grammar school and high school in Weed. After graduating from high school, she attended Armstrong University in downtown Berkeley, CA, where she focused on developing her executive business secretarial skills. After two years, she received her diploma as a secretary. One of her professors suggested that Norma consider going into law or psychology.

Norma remembers walking along Lake Merritt pondering her future. She knew that her parents had done all they could to provide for her growth and education, and there were no such things as government grants for students in those years. Her parents did not have the money to support her for graduate school, so she decided to get a job and support herself.

The president of Armstrong University had his wife call Norma to see if she was willing to work for him as a secretary. Norma was grateful for the call but decided to return home.

### **NORMA RETURNS TO WEED**

Norma began to feel homesick and she decided to return to Weed so she could be with her family. She found a job as a secretary for the County of Siskiyou in Yreka. After working there for a short time, she discovered that this was not the place or the type of work for her, so she quite this job. She decided to move to Sacramento where she found a job working for an architectural firm that assisted the State of California in designing Sacramento State University and other government buildings in Sacramento at that time.



**Back Home to Weed Where it All Began**

### **A MOVE TO SACRAMENTO**

Norma's grandmother, Caterina Pillon, lived on the Oregon Coast in Klamath Falls. She decided that Oregon was too cold and damp for her, so she and her husband moved to Sacramento. Norma's grandparents purchased a small 900 square-foot home in Sacramento, and Norma decided to move to Sacramento as well. Norma and her grandmother talked together about what would be a fair rent for Norma to pay for living with her grandparents. Norma's grandmother told her that if she agreed to clean the house once a week and pay \$50 dollars a month for groceries, she was welcome to stay with her grandparents. That is what Norma agreed to do.

### **VIC CAPPELLO MEETS NORMA MAZZIER**



**Young Vic Cappello**

Norma's grandparents lived in an Italian area in Sacramento and would oftentimes gather at friends' homes who came from the same town in Italy. On one such occasion, Norma went to pick up her grandmother. While she was walking up the driveway, another Italian friend who lived next door stopped her and said he wanted to introduce her to his son who just returned from military service in Korea a few days before. The young man's name was Victor Cappello, a cousin of Sister Catherine Cappello who was a Canossian Sister who served in the Diocese of Sacramento.

Shortly after this first meeting, an Italian neighbor suddenly died, and the whole Italian community came together to help prepare for the funeral. Since the deceased man's relatives who lived close by had no telephone, Norma stepped in to help make funeral arrangements for the relatives of the deceased man with Saint Mary Church in Sacramento.

Since the priests that served Saint Mary Parish were Oblates of Saint Joseph and spoke Italian, Saint Mary Parish became the Italian Parish in Sacramento in those days. Vic became the spokesman for his family who were the relatives of the deceased man and talked with Norma Mazzier by telephone to coordinate the Funeral Mass.

### **VIC AND NORMA MARRY IN WEED**

About a week later, Vic called Norma to invite her to go to a movie with him. When Norma's grandmother found out, she told Norma that since Vic's family came from the same village as they did in Italy, Norma was not to date anyone else, since Vic was like family. Norma found Vic to be a very handsome man, and little by little, they fell in love and were married on May 22, 1954 in Holy Family Church in Weed.



**Holy Family Catholic Church, Weed, California  
Where Norma Mazzier and Victor Cappello were Married on May 22, 1954**



**Wedding of Victor Cappello and Norma Mazzier with Norma's Parents (right), Ernesto & Linda Mazzier,  
and her brother Lave (left)**



**Newlyweds, Mr and Mrs Cappello, begin their Married Life Together**

#### **VIC AND NORMA BEGIN THEIR FAMILY**

Norma found another job in Sacramento working at the Crocker Bank. After a couple years of marriage, Norma became pregnant with her first child, Lynette, who was born on April 25, 1956. Because Norma was pregnant, she had to quit her job at the bank because in those days, pregnant women were not allowed to work.



#### **FOUR GENERATIONS**

**Grandmother Caterina Pillon, Norma's Mother Linda Mazzier,  
New Mother Norma Cappello and her First-Born Child, Lynette Cappello**

Two years later, her second child Mark was born on August 20, 1958, and two years after his birth, the third child, Lori, was born on August 1, 1960. Because Norma and Vic had these three children, Norma did not work until Lori began school.



**Vic and Norma with Their two Babies, Lynette and Mark**

#### **HOW NORMA BEGAN WORKING FOR THE CATHOLIC CONFERENCE**

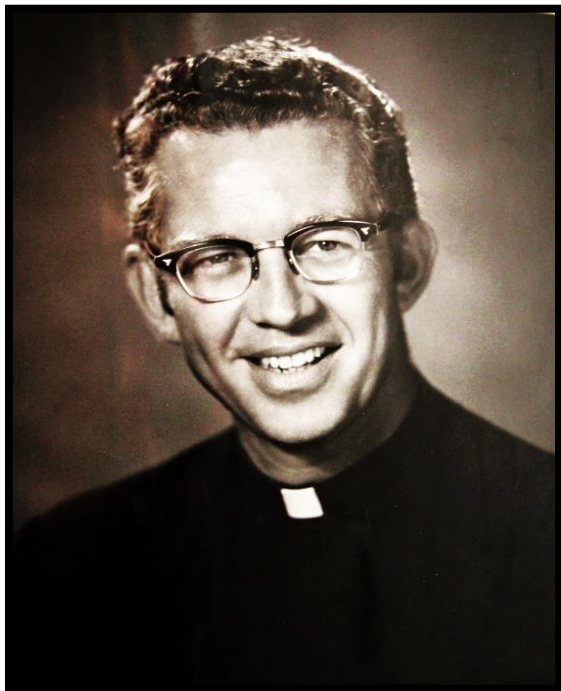
One evening, Norma participated in a card game with long-time family friends. During the card game, Emily Ziliotto mentioned that Bill Burke, who worked for the Bishop's Legislative Counsel in 1965, was looking for a part-time secretary. Jean Tamaki, Bishop Bell's secretary, had been helping Bill Burke with secretarial work, but the pressure of her work as secretary of the Bishop, was becoming more demanding and she could no longer help Bill Burke.

When Norma heard that the work was part-time, she thought she might be able to begin working part-time while her three children were in Catholic School at Saint Anne Parish School in South Sacramento. She talked to her husband Vic about the possibility of becoming a part-time secretary and he encouraged her to apply. Norma applied for the job and was hired as part-time secretary to the then Legislative Counsel, working as Bill Burke's secretary. A few years later, Joe McElligott was hired to manage Catholic Schools issues at the Legislative Counsel Office.

#### **MONSIGNOR CUMMINS APPOINTED DIRECTOR OF THE CALIFORNIA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE**

In 1971, when the California Catholic Conference came into being, Monsignor John Cummins of the Diocese of Oakland was appointed the director of the Catholic Conference. The staff was quite

small with Monsignor Cummins, Joe McElligott and Bill Burke as the Conference's lobbyist, with Norma Cappello as the secretary.



**Bishop John Stephen Cummins**

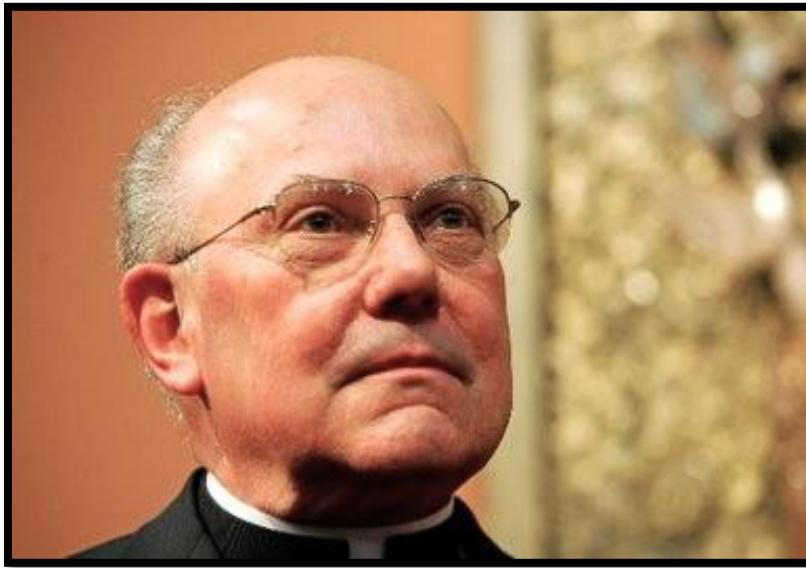
Norma says that Monsignor John Cummins, who became Auxiliary Bishop of Sacramento to help Bishop Alden J Bell, was a perfect executive director of the Catholic Conference. He was approachable, a good listener, knowledgeable, and knew people in the United States he could call upon for information and advice. She says Bishop Cummins was also a wonderful boss who approached the staff with such kindness.

Norma had a young family at this time and was allowed to have flex time. This was not allowed in many organizations at that time. She was allowed to keep this flex schedule until her children were in high school and could drive themselves to school and social events.

As a lay woman, Norma was always included by Bishop Cummins in all the meetings where she took the minutes of those meeting. Because of her presence at those meetings, she learned much about the issues that challenged the Church and all the great work the Church was doing in the communities of the state around education, social services, justice issues and Hispanic affairs.

During the whole time Bishop Cummins worked at the California Catholic Conference of Bishops in Sacramento, Norma served as his secretary. She says it was such a privilege to work with Bishop Cummins. They have remained friends to this day and still talk with each other from time to time by telephone. The only problem is, they both are in their 90s and getting hard of hearing, so trying to communicate by telephone can be a challenge.

Norma worked for the next four directors – all different in style, but she grew to appreciate each and every one of the directors. The only director she never had the privilege to work for was Ned Dolejsi who also retired as director of the California Catholic Conference of Bishops in recent years.

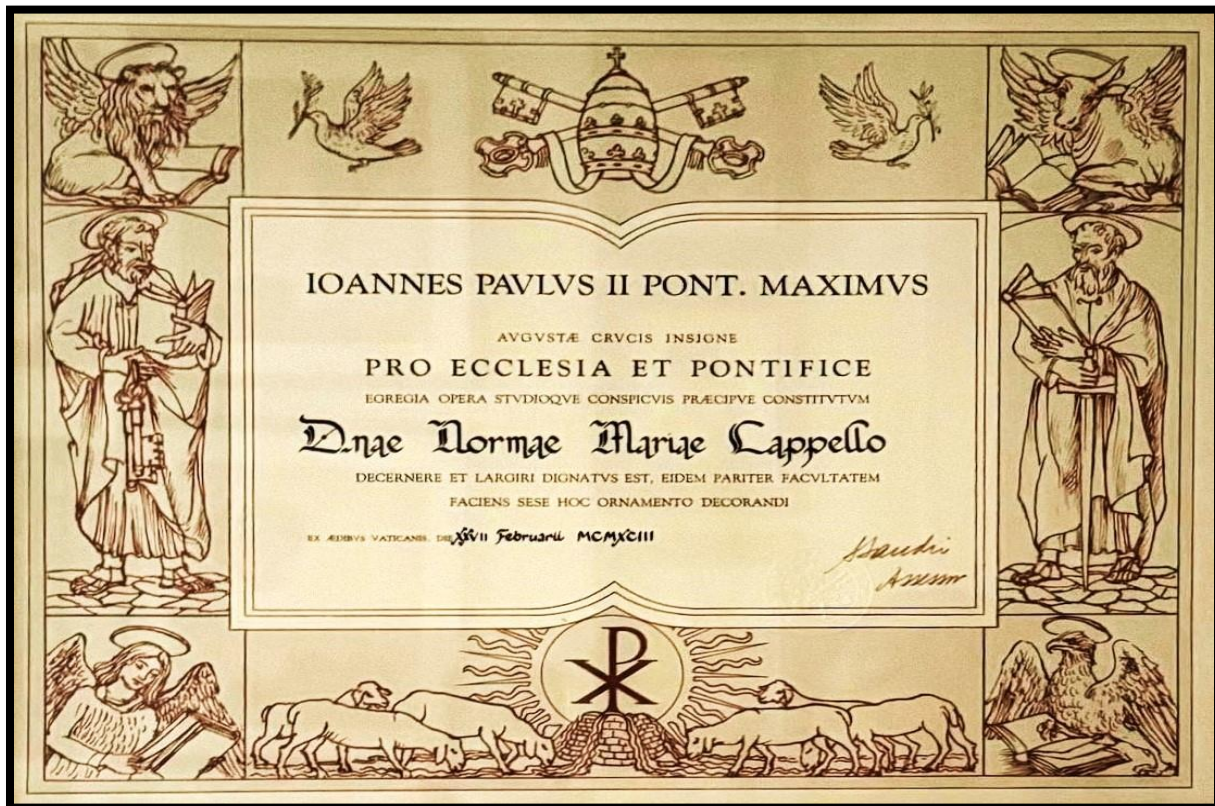


**Cardinal William Levada**

Norma also worked for then Monsignor William Levada when he was appointed Executive Director of the California Catholic Conference in 1982 by Cardinal Timothy Manning, Archbishop of Los Angeles.

It was Cardinal Levada who arranged for Norma and her husband Vic and daughter Lori to have an audience with Pope John Paul II when they

travelled to Italy to visit their families. Norma never thought she would meet the Pope, chat with him and shake his hand. She says it was a privilege to have been part of the Conference when it started. Norma Cappello worked as the first secretary at the California Catholic Conference from 1965 to 1993, a period of 28 years.



**Norma was Honored by Bishop Francis A Quinn with this *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* Award When she Retired in 1993**





**Norma Marie Mazzier Cappello**

*Thank you, Norma, for your many years of service to the California Catholic Conference as the Executive Secretary to the various Directors of the Conference. We wish you God's Blessing as you continue your journey forward!*



**Norma Cappello With Five of her six Grandsons on her 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday**

Back row, l-r, Grant Dangberg, Garrett Cappello, Justin Cappello  
Front Row, l-r, James Kilton, Norma Cappello, and Carson Dangberg

**NORMA CAPPELLO RETIRES**

Norma retired from the California Catholic Conference in August 1993, and she and her husband Victor enjoyed their retirement years together.

In 2013, Victor Cappello was diagnosed with mesothelioma and died on December 5, 2013. A Funeral Mass was celebrated for him at Saint Anthony Church in Sacramento on December 14. Victor was buried at Saint Mary Cemetery in Sacramento.

After Vic's death, Norma continued to live in her home in South Sacramento where she remained very active – cooking family dinners, driving, outings with friends, golfing on a weekly basis, and she wrote a "Sunday Dinner" cookbook with family recipes. Then one evening in March 2023, she hosted a dinner for friends at her home. As they were leaving, Norma walked them to the door, said goodbye to them, and closed the door. As she turned from the door, she accidentally slipped and fell to the floor, breaking her left hip. After recovering from surgery, Norma decided to move to a Senior Living Community in

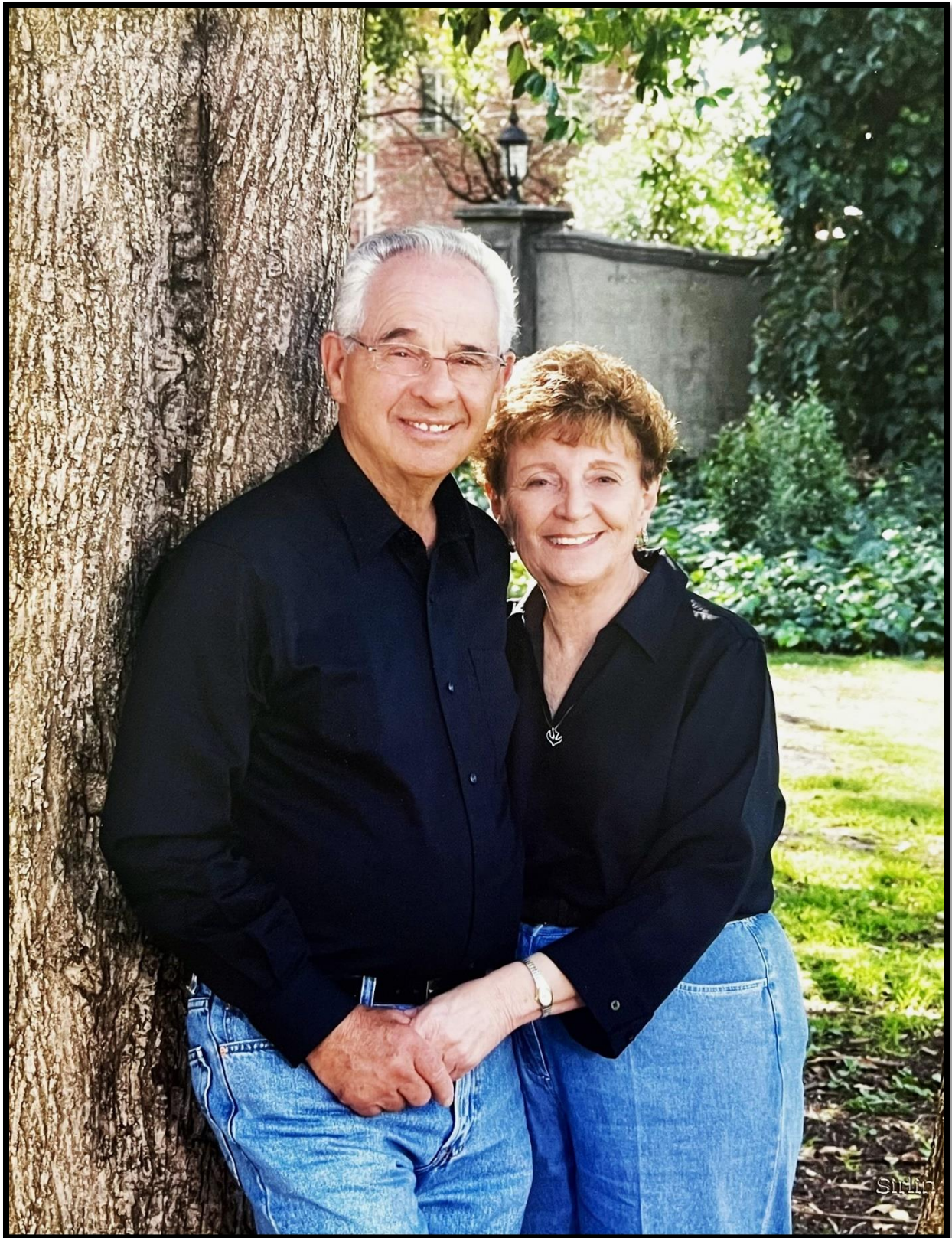
Sacramento, and has since moved to another Senior Community in Granite Bay to be close to her daughter, Lori.

As of this writing, Norma is 92 1/2 years of age and her brother Lave just turned 90. God has blessed both of them with longevity of years. We wish both Norma and her brother Lave good health and much happiness as they continue their journey with us.

Thank you, Norma, for your service to the Bishops of California as the First Executive Secretary of the California Catholic Conference in Sacramento.



**Norma and Victor Cappello  
On Norma's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday**



*Victor and Norma Cappello*