

Father Walter Dev Burke, retired priest, dies in Ireland

By Herald staff

Bishop William K. Weigand celebrated a memorial Mass June 19 for Father Walter Dev Burke, a retired priest of the diocese, who died of a brain tumor June 2 in Ireland. He was 72.

During the Mass in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Sacramento, Father Burke was remembered as a priest who brought joy to people's lives by Father Eric Lofgren, pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Anderson, who gave the homily. Father Lofgren met Father Burke during their studies for the priesthood at St. Patrick's Seminary in Menlo Park.

Father Burke thought a priest is someone who cares for people "not because of what they have done, but simply because they are human beings," Father Lofgren said. "A priest, he believed, is one who steps outside his own problems and uses his experiences for the good of others.

"He felt that as a priest he was called to express above all else that God is forgiving, that he must affirm, give support and counsel. A priest is also called to give hope to those in despair and to comfort the afflicted, all in the name of Jesus. Father Dev had this vision and lived this vision to the best of his ability."

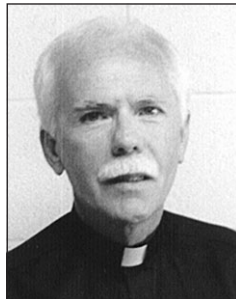
Prior to this retirement in June 1999, Father Burke served as pastor of St. John Parish in Quincy since October 1997. A focus of his ministry there was bringing a parish community together following a series of different pastors in years before he arrived, he told The Herald in June 1999.

"We needed to accomplish a sense of unity," he said. "People will do anything when you let them know that it's their church and we can do things together."

One of the examples was giving a face lift to the small hall that was used as the teen center and was in desperate disrepair. Father Burke set about organizing an adult painting party to fix it up.

At St. Anthony Mission Church in Greenville, he helped to start a bilingual Mass and the celebration of feast days such as Our Lady of Guadalupe. He was also very involved in visiting the elderly and the sick.

Father Burke came to the priesthood later in life than many when he was ordained in 1990 at the Cathedral



of the Blessed Sacrament in Sacramento, after studies at the former St. Joseph College in Los Altos and St. Patrick's Seminary.

Born and raised in Scranton, Pa., he grew up in the company of priests who were friends of his father. He would often accompany his father to visit a friend who was a teacher at the seminary.

"The life appealed to me – the discipline and comradery seemed to combine the best of both worlds," he said in 1999. "It was a chance to channel energy to people in a spiritual setting."

But while he considered religious life as early as age 14, Father Burke's parents felt he was too young for such a commitment and he found himself entering the Army while yet in college. He then traveled extensively in Europe and lived for a time in London and Paris before returning to the United States and moving to Nevada

Father Walter Dev Burke served as pastor of St. John Parish in Quincy from 1997 to 1999 and of St. Francis Parish in Burney from 1993 to 1996.

Herald file photo

City in the early 1970s. As a member of St. Canice Parish, he met some Redemptorist priests who were visiting the parish and decided to enter the seminary. He was part of the Redemptorists for three years, but eventually left the order.

Seven weeks after leaving the order, he entered St. Joseph College for studies for the priesthood in the Sacramento Diocese.

Father Burke's first assignment after ordination was as parochial vicar of St. Isidore Parish in Yuba City from 1990 to 1993. In 1993, Father Burke was assigned to his first pastorate at St. Francis Parish in Burney, and its two missions at Fall River Mills and Bieber, where he served until 1996.

One unforgettable moment there came one Christmas Eve, when he had fallen on the ice and broken a rib but proceeded to drive through a blizzard 43 miles to celebrate Mass at St. Stephen Mission in Bieber.

Father Burke also served as parochial vicar at Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Redding in from 1996 to 1997.

As Father Burke looked forward to retirement in 1999, he told The Herald that being a priest was the gift of a lifetime.

"There is a great joy and privilege in being on the altar, helping people realize how much God loves them," he said.