

June 21, 2010 • VOL. 48, NO. 12 • Oakland, CA

Comes from: (With a “Thank You”):

<http://www.catholicvoiceoakland.org/2010/06-21/inthisissue3.htm>

## **Father Jerry Kennedy, retiring after 44 years, values being post-Vatican II priest**

By Carrie McClish  
Staff writer

Father Jerrold Kennedy couldn't mask the gratitude in voice for having been called to the priesthood and for being able to answer that call as a priest in the Oakland Diocese.

“I consider myself a part of the home team,” said the priest, who will retire on July 1 after 44 years in active ministry. “I’ve known the diocese as a youngster and a layperson, so to grow up and be a priest for the diocese has been a blessing for me. It turned into a very rewarding life.”

One of nine siblings, Father Kennedy was born at Oakland's Providence Hospital in 1940 and grew up in Oakland's St. Leo the Great Parish and Piedmont's Corpus Christi Parish. After attending St. Joseph's College in Mountain View, the future priest enrolled at St. Patrick's Seminary in Menlo Park just prior to a momentous time in Church history — the Second Vatican Council.

“I had the good fortune to be in the seminary during the Council, which prepared me to be a post-Vatican II priest,” he said. What made those years of study and discernment quite memorable was the presence of theologians on the faculty who could comment on the progress of the Council.

### **‘Amazing years’**

“The faculty not only brought back news about the Council, but about the theological background being discussed and the changes being made,” he recalled. “Those were amazing years to be in the seminary.”

Ordained to the priesthood on May 26, 1966, by the diocese's founding bishop, Bishop Floyd L. Begin, Father Kennedy embarked on a ministry of service at both the diocesan and parish levels. He served as secretary to Bishop Begin and vice chancellor of the



diocese before becoming vocations director in 1971, a position he held for nine years. Two decades later he served a second term as vocations director as well.

Father Kennedy said he was fortunate to have lived and worked closely with both Bishop Begin and the diocese's second bishop, Bishop John Cummins. He felt especially privileged to have attended to Bishop Begin in the months before his death in 1977.

### **Bishop Begin 'very inspiring'**

"I admired Bishop Begin for many years and to see how he accepted his illness and prayerfully faced death when diagnosed with a brain tumor was very inspiring," the priest recalled.

He said that Bishop Begin was very organized, so that when God called him home, everything had been prepared. No commitments were cancelled. The ailing prelate even insisted on ordaining several priests on April 22, 1977. He died just four days later.

"It was his last opportunity and he was not going to be talked out of it even though his health was poor," Father Kennedy said.

A few days after Bishop Begin's death, Father Kennedy was delighted to learn that Bishop John Cummins, another native son of the diocese, would succeed him.

"A visit to Bishop Cummins' family home on Woolsey Street in Berkeley was always a special treat because it included a visit with Mike and Mary Cummins, the bishop's parents," Father Kennedy said.

Father Kennedy recalled two special occasions with the now emeritus bishop. One was Bishop Cummins' installation Mass at the Oakland Auditorium where Father Kennedy served as the master of ceremonies. The other was the 40th anniversary celebration for the diocese at Oakland's Paramount Theater. The priest helped to produce that commemoration.

In addition to his two terms as diocesan vocations director, Father Kennedy also served on the staff at St. Patrick's Seminary as director of the field internship program.

"It was unusual to be asked to return to the seminary that trained you, to train future priests," he said. Along the way, he worked with a number of seminarians who went on to become priests. "It was very satisfying to watch these men move from formation to ordination and to work in the diocese."

### **Past service**

Father Kennedy also provided leadership in parishes around the diocese. He served as pastor of Santa Maria in Orinda (1979 – 1983), Sacred Heart in Oakland (1983 – 1985), St. Philip Neri in Alameda (1990 – 1998) and St. Jerome in El Cerrito (2004 – 2008). He also served as parochial administrator at St. Leander in San Leandro in 2004. He is currently parochial vicar at the Catholic Community of Pleasanton.

While he enjoyed both his diocesan and parish assignments, Father Kennedy said the best part of being a priest has been the people he has met over the years.

“The Church has really been for me the people of God,” he said, and witnessing their spiritual growth and generosity in the community has been an inspiration. “Year after year, I have seen people stepping forward more and more prepared to be of service to their brothers and sisters. We would be nowhere without them.”

As for himself, Father Kennedy said that while he is looking forward to a slower pace as a retired priest, he plans to continue to be involved in ministry and most importantly, to remain in his home diocese.