

# SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 5

Father John E Boll

No 21

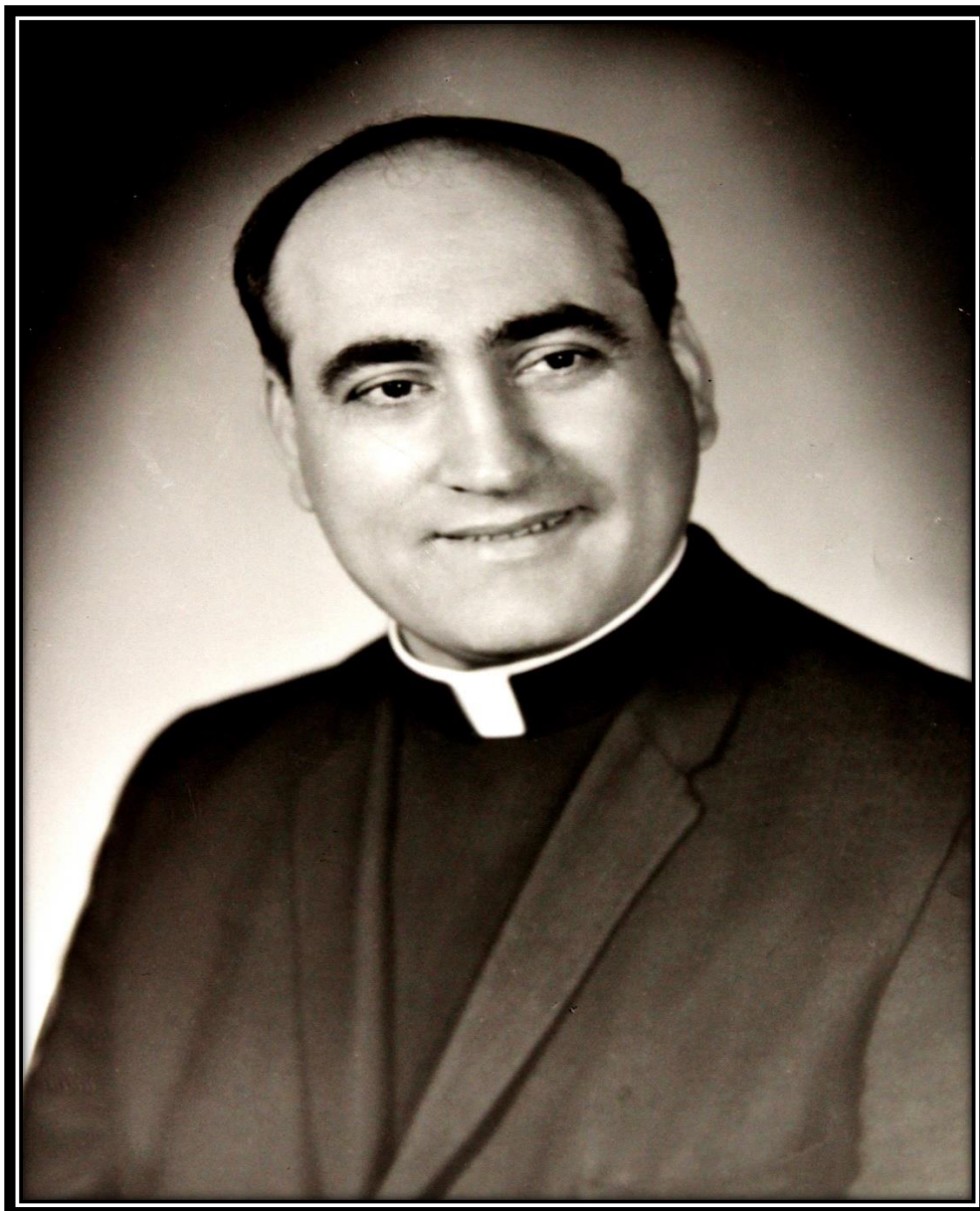
## *Monsignor Vito Francis Mistretta*

Native Son of Brooklyn, New York

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Founding Pastor of Holy Family Parish, Citrus Heights, CA

January 27, 1917 – October 13, 2009



**Vito Francis Mistretta**, was born on January 27, 1917, the eldest of three children born to immigrant parents Antonio Mistretta and Catherine Cangemi who had recently arrived in Brooklyn, New York from Sicily. He attended Public School 145 for grammar school and then on to Bushwich High School 1930-1934. He then went to Saint Francis Seminary in Loretto, Pennsylvania from 1935 to 1942. He was incardinated into the Diocese of Sacramento on October 15, 1940 and was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Sacramento on March 21, 1942 by Bishop Eustace in Camden, New Jersey.

### **FIRST ASSIGNMENTS**

Father Mistretta's first priestly assignment was as assistant pastor of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Sacramento for four years, April 1942 to May 1946. His next assignment was to Saint Rose Parish in Roseville as assistant pastor to Father William Daley, pastor, from May 1946 to October 1949.

### **FOUNDING PASTOR OF HOLY FAMILY PARISH**

In 1947, Father Mistretta was instrumental in securing a surplus Army barracks building from Camp Kohler in Sacramento and had it moved to a three acre site on Old Auburn Road in Citrus



Photo courtesy of Holy Family Parish

**Original Holy Family Church in 1950**



Heights which was purchased from Lorenzo Roskelly. Father Mistretta began celebrating Mass at the Holy Family mission church which was part of the Roseville parish.

### **ESTABLISHMENT OF HOLY FAMILY PARISH**

On June 5, 1949, Bishop Robert J Armstrong dedicated the church to the Holy Family of Nazareth and on October 1, 1949, the bishop raised the mission church to the status of a parish, naming Father Mistretta as the founding pastor. He served as pastor of the parish for 41 years until he retired from active ministry on March 1, 1990 when he was named pastor emeritus.



**Interior of the Original Holy Family Church in the 1950s**



**Parish First Communion 1950**

## BUILDING OF A PARISH SCHOOL AND CHURCH

Father Mistretta's first task was to build a parish school and staff it. In 1953, he met with Mr and Mrs John Barden to start construction of a three classroom school wing. The building remained vacant for several years while Father Mistretta tried all means to obtain teachers to staff the school. He was able to persuade the Sisters of Charity of the Infant Mary, a teaching order based in Milan, Italy, to send sisters from Argentina to help establish the parish school in 1959.

Once the school was up and running, he turned his attention to the design and building of a new parish church. Father Mistretta received permission from Archbishop Joseph T McGucken of San Francisco, former bishop of Sacramento, to begin plans for a new and larger church.

He met once again with the Bardens and building plans for the new church began to take shape. He wanted a church that accommodated all the liturgical changes of Vatican II. The physical shape of the new church was cruciform. On July 6, 1964, the ground breaking for the new church took place. Father Mistretta closely supervised the construction of the new church which was the first church in the diocese constructed after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council. This church had no Communion rail and the altar, in the center of the cruciform, faced the people.



Photo by John E Boll

**Holy Family Church**



### **AHEAD OF HIS TIME**

Father Mistretta designed an addition to the front of the altar where the tabernacle for the reserved Eucharist was placed. In those post-Vatican days when the Universal Church was in the process of revising its liturgical practices, Father Mistretta was ahead of his time by designing an altar facing the people.



Photo by John E Boll

**Tabernacle was placed on the lower level of the altar**

### **EMPOWERED THE LAITY**

In 1982 to 1993, Linda Schumate worked closely with Father Mistretta in the area of religious education. She said that Father Mistretta empowered laypeople, encouraging even non-Catholic family members of parishioners to take active roles in parish ministries. Even Mrs Schumate's two daughters became altar servers at the parish and were the first girl Mass servers in the diocese to carry out the traditionally all male role.

### **COMMITTED TO CATHOLIC EDUCATION**

Louise Laing, Holy Family School's first lay principal, said that Monsignor Mistretta was committed to Catholic education. When the Sisters of Charity of the Infant Mary were recalled from the diocese in 1972, he chose to keep the school open. The parish school became the first parochial school in the diocese with an all lay staff. To compensate for the absence of religious sisters, Monsignor Mistretta and his assistant priests taught at the school weekly and visited the school regularly.

Over the years, the parish school grew in size and importance. It provided a Catholic education for students whose parents commuted to Sacramento for work. At its zenith, Holy Family School was the largest Catholic grammar school in the diocese with a student body of some 700 students.



Photo by John E Boll 2017

### Holy Family Parish School

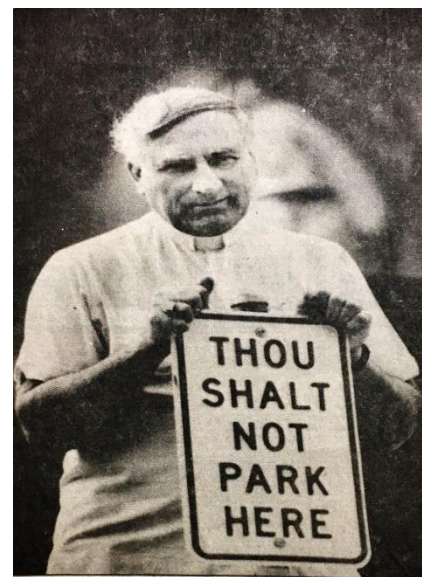
#### NAMED MONSIGNOR

In recognition of his ministry, Pope John Paul II honored Father Mistretta by naming him a Prelate of Honor on May 4, 1979. No doubt Father Mistretta felt proud of this papal honor of being named a monsignor.

#### MONSIGNOR MISTRETTA'S PERSONALITY

Monsignor Mistretta was a very strong personality. He obviously had the support of his parish community in order to build a whole parish plant with a vibrant school and a large church.

For some, he was held in great love and esteem and for others he was feared. He had a strong Sicilian temperament and sometimes came across as gruff. But for those who knew him well, they would say that deep within Monsignor Mistretta was a generous, gentle, sensitive and loving man.



**The 11th Commandment:** Monsignor Vito Mistretta, pastor of the Holy Family Catholic Church in suburban Sacramento, Calif., displays the sign he recently put up on the church's grounds to warn certain drivers of the error of their ways. AP Laserphoto



## RETIREMENT

After 41 years as pastor of Holy Family Parish in Citrus Heights, Monsignor Mistretta retired in 1990 and moved to his own home within the boundaries of the parish. He celebrated morning Mass in his home and some parishioners attended his weekday Mass. This continued until the bishop asked him to discontinue his practice of celebrating a public Mass in his home.

## DEATH OF MONSIGNOR MISTRETTE

Monsignor Mistretta had two nephews in New York and his nephew Robert Mistretta in Sacramento. He spent his last two years living with Robert in Sacramento. Robert spoke with the *Catholic Herald* after his uncle died saying “He was a very strong, very stubborn man, but had a heart of gold.”

Vito Mistretta died on October 13, 2009 at Sutter Roseville Medical Center at the age of 92. Bishop Jaime Soto presided at Monsignor Mistretta’s Funeral Mass on October 19 in Holy Family Church, the church designed and built by Monsignor Mistretta four decades before. Father Michael Kiernan who was serving as parish administrator of Holy Family parish at the time was the homilist at the Mass.



Photo by John E Boll 2017

Interior of Holy Family Church

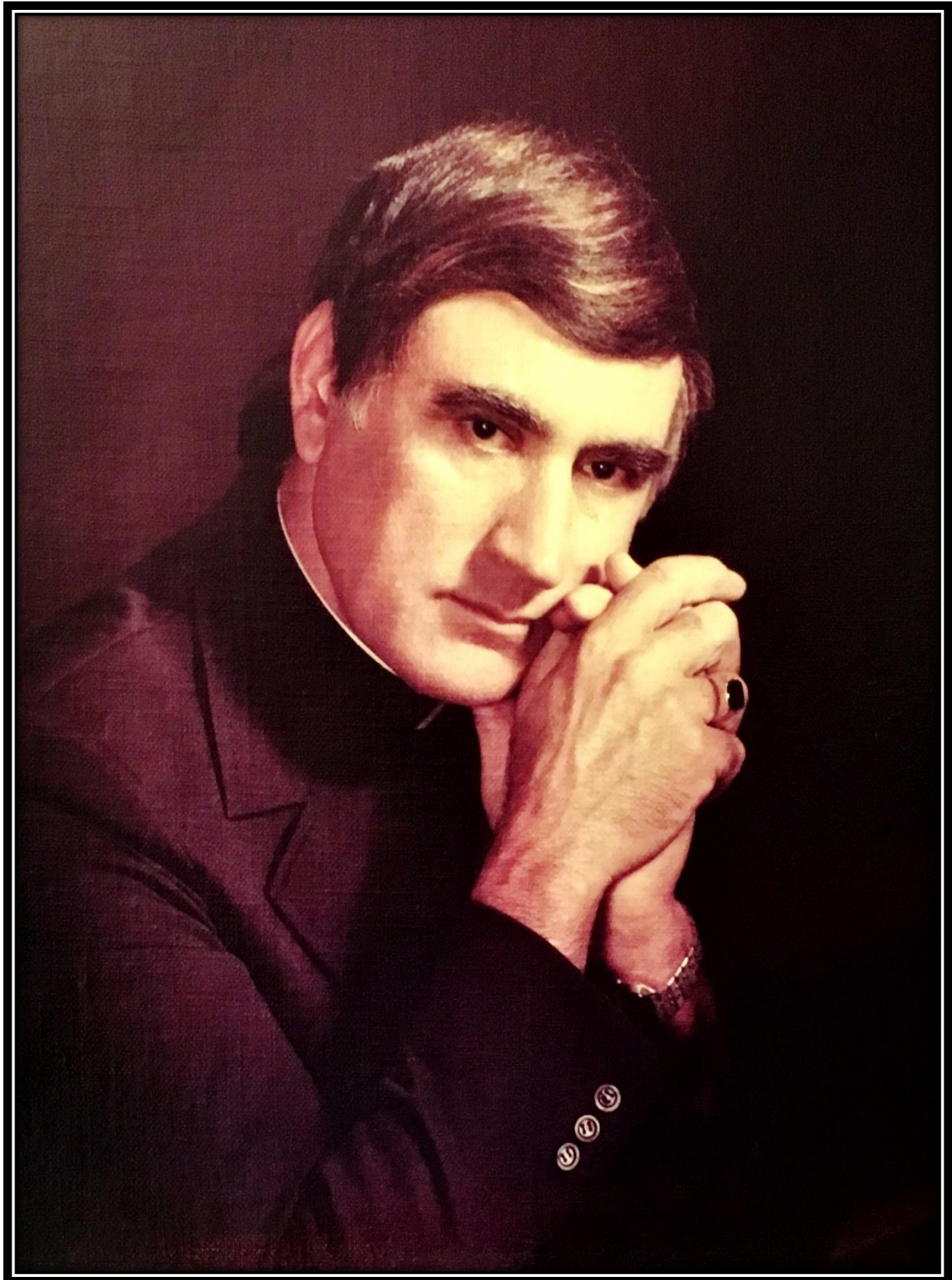


Holy Family Statue at the Parish

*Monsignor Vito Mistretta  
Served the people of Holy Family Parish  
For forty-one years as pastor.  
Even though he had a hard exterior,  
He had a sensitive and gentle heart.  
He has gone home to God; may he be  
Eternally joyful in the loving presence of God.*

*Rest now in peace, Vito!*





*Monsignor Vito F Mistretta*