



DIOCESE OF SAN BERNARDINO

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

March 19, 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Our Lord:

In this special time of preparing for the sacred events of Holy Week and the Easter Season, please allow me to share the news of the passing away into eternal life of our dear brother, Reverend John F. Wagner on March 17, 2024, in Temecula, California. Father Wagner had only recently been hospitalized and departed our earthly world in peace and supported by the prayers of many friends.

John Francis Wagner was born on April 9, 1938, to Edward W. and Eileen Marie (Kelly) Wagner in San Diego, California. He is survived by a sister, Mrs. Joann Marie Musser, and a niece, Laura Ann Zegler, a nephew, Jeffrey Joseph Musser, and numerous great nieces and great nephews. He attended Catholic elementary schools in the greater San Diego area and was a graduate of Saint Augustine High School in San Diego (1952-1956). He also studied at the University of San Diego from 1957 to 1961 obtaining the Bachelor of Arts Degree in Philosophy. Concurrently, he entered Immaculate Heart Seminary for the Diocese of San Diego as he pursued a vocation to the Priesthood and was ordained to the Priesthood by Most Reverend Francis J. Furey, STD, at St. Joseph's Cathedral, San Diego on March 19, 1964.

Father Wagner dedicated 60 years to his priestly vocation, serving with great joy and enthusiasm. He served as Associate Pastor at Immaculate Conception Parish, Colton (1964-1968); St. Edward Parish, Corona (1968-1971); St. Catherine Laboure Parish, San Diego (1971-1975); St. Charles Borromeo Parish, San Diego (1975-1976); and St. Francis de Sales Parish, Riverside (1976-1978). With the creation of the Diocese of San Bernardino in 1978, Father Wagner began a long tenure in the Office of Pastor at St. Charles Borromeo Parish, Bloomington (1978-1987); St. Matthew's, Corona (1987-1999); and St. Catherine of Alexandria Parish, Temecula (1999- 2014). Father Wagner retired from active ministry in 2014 on his 50th Golden Jubilee anniversary as a Priest and after having led the successful building campaigns for the new church buildings at St. Matthew's Parish, Corona and St. Catherine of Alexandria Parish, Temecula. In his retirement years, he kept a very busy schedule of helping brother priests in the Hemet Vicariate parishes as well as leading many preaching missions on behalf of the Food for the Poor Ministry nationwide.

In the midst of his busy pastoral ministry which included a very active time as a church builder and strong supporter of vocations to the Priesthood and the Permanent Diaconate, Father Wagner was an accomplished musician and shared his unique gifts in the areas of music composition, choral singing and orchestral conducting. As the guest homilist of the 2007 Annual Priests' Convocation Jubilee Anniversary Mass, Father Wagner noted:

“Getting past the notes to the music’ implies that choral music demands much more from a group of people than merely singing intervals correctly from a music score. What it really addresses is the task of the choir master to blend the many individual voices into one perfect, harmonious sound. And when that happens, music becomes a living art form. The sound of one hundred voices blended perfectly together creates a richer sound with a much greater range than that which any voice could ever achieve by singing alone. There is much to be said about ‘becoming one.’ This is the point of Jesus’ message at the institution of Holy Communion in John’s Gospel...In the ritual of Holy Communion we partake of the one Bread and the one Cup and become one in Christ.” In line with this, one of Father Wagner’s proudest achievements was his appointment as the Head Director of the Diocese of San Diego Combined Choir which sang at many ordinations of Priests and Bishops.

We offer thanks to Our Lord for the very dedicated ministry of Father Wagner which spanned 60 years and two Dioceses. His love for the beauty of sacred Church art and his commitment to serve the People of God in his priestly ministry in the daily offering of the Holy Eucharist were wonderful blessings from Our Lord to this local Church.

I invite you to join in the Church’s official prayer for the happy repose of the soul of Father Wagner in the upcoming Easter Season. Viewing will be held on Monday, April 1, 2024, from 4:00 PM to 6:00 PM at St. Catherine of Alexandria Parish, 41875 C Street, Temecula 92592. A special recitation of the Divine Mercy Chaplet and the Holy Rosary will take place at 6:00 PM, followed by the Vigil service at 7:00 PM at St. Catherine of Alexandria Parish, Temecula. The Funeral Mass will be celebrated on Tuesday, April 2, 2024, at 10:00 AM at St. Catherine of Alexandria Parish, Temecula at which I will preside, and which will be concelebrated by our Diocesan and Religious priests. The Rite of Burial will take place at 3:00 PM at Our Lady Queen of Peace Cemetery, 3510 E. Washington Street, Colton 92324. Special parish receptions will be held after the Vigil service and the Funeral Mass.

May Our Lord grant Father Wagner eternal peace and joy as he rests from the labors of his very long priestly ministry. I ask the priests of the Diocese to offer the customary three Masses of suffrage for the eternal repose of our brother. May the choirs of angels lead Father Wagner into the joy of the New and Eternal Jerusalem and may Our Lord bless us all as we prepare for the sacred days of Holy Week.

Sincerely in Our Lord Jesus,



Most Reverend Alberto Rojas, DD
Bishop of the Diocese of San Bernardino