



## SCRIBE II CLASS OF '58

*... a curated collection of hearsay, news and sometimes  
opinions in our own private space.*

January 25, 2018

Deceased: Fr. Michael P. Norkett '58  
Brother of: Martin P. Norkett '63  
William A. Norkett '54 RIP

Fr. Michael P. Norkett '58 peacefully journeyed home to God Thursday night. He was a pastor here at Saint Joseph Parish, Old Mission San Jose from 1981 through 1990. Please keep him and his family in your prayers.

Funeral will be held Friday, January 26, 2018, 10:30 am at Cathedral of Christ the Light in Oakland. A reception in the Cathedral Event Center immediately following the Mass.

In retirement, Father Norkett takes on new assignment  
By Carrie McClish, Staff writer  
September 6, 2010

Although he officially retired as pastor at St. Paschal Parish in Oakland on July 1, Father Michael Norkett had to put off retirement because he doesn't have the time for it — at least for now.

Bishop Salvatore Cordileone has asked the priest to assume the responsibilities of interim administrator at St. John the Baptist Parish in El Cerrito, after the death in early June of its pastor, Father John Maxwell.

"When the bishop called, he asked me to sit down," said Father Norkett with a laugh as he recalled the conversation. Part of his role at St. John's is to oversee a process that will lead to the selection of a new pastor. Parish leaders will work with the



Father Michael Norkett

diocesan personnel board to take stock of the life of the parish and begin a conversation about the future of the parish community and the kind of leadership that will best suit its needs.

“It is a very positive thing,” Father Norkett said of the process, which will likely take place throughout the fall. “Maybe by the first of the year they will have a new pastor.”

The challenge of finding a successor for Father Maxwell is enormous. He will be “a very hard act to follow,” said Father Norkett, noting that the late priest was known for years of dedicated ministry to the marginalized. “He was so good; he was the pastor of all pastors.”

Father Norkett, 70, who recently moved to the cathedral rectory, commutes to the parish several times a week and presides at weekend Masses. He is in frequent communication with Father Rolando Bartolay, the parochial vicar at St. John’s.

Far from sounding disappointed by the change in his retirement plans, Father Norkett is upbeat about his sudden assignment because being a priest and being available to serve where he is needed the most brings his life meaning and joy.

The veteran priest’s road to ministry began in Chicago, where he was born. He spent a couple of years with the Jesuits before returning to college, earning a bachelor’s degree in sociology at Loyola University in Chicago in 1964. Around this time, while on vacation in Rome, he met Oakland Bishop Floyd Begin who was attending the Second Vatican Council. The bishop encouraged his vocation to the priesthood.

After returning to Illinois, Father Norkett studied at St. Procopius Seminary for three years and completed his studies at St. Patrick’s Seminary in Menlo Park. He rejoined his seminary classmates and was ordained by Bishop R.R. Blanchard in Joliet, Illinois, in 1968.

The priest, who was incardinated to the Oakland Diocese, served first as an associate pastor at St. Cyril Parish in Oakland, then at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Pittsburg and St. Theresa in Oakland.

He spent much of the past three decades as a pastor — at St. Columba in Oakland (1978-81), St. Joseph (Mission San Jose) in Fremont (1981-90), St. Bonaventure in Concord (1994-96), St. Mary, Immaculate Conception in downtown Oakland (1991-93), and as co-pastor with the late Father James Keeley at St. Mary-St. Francis de Sales in Oakland (1993-94). He had been pastor at St. Paschal Parish in Oakland since 2001.

For several years he was diocesan director of clergy services. In 2007 he was named priest co-chair of the Cathedral Campaign, a position he still holds.

At his retirement ceremony in June and during his Voice interview last month, Father Norkett preferred to highlight and pay tribute to those who touched his life. He cited two late priests, Father Louis Dabovich, founding pastor at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Pittsburg, and Msgr. Michael Lucid, a former pastor at St. Theresa Parish in Oakland, as model pastors who served as his mentors. “They taught me to be a decent human being,” Father Norkett said.

Among the biggest challenges he faced as a pastor, he said, was helping people who were experiencing pain, frustration and other personal difficulties.

He recalled his assignment as pastor at St. Mary Parish in downtown Oakland after the Oblates of Mary Immaculate returned administration of the parish to the diocese. Many people in the neighborhood were living lives of trial and desperation. “Most of the residents had AIDS, many were very much on drugs,” Father Norkett said. “They had nobody.”

As part of his ministry he became a representative payee for a number of people living near the church who were unable to handle their finances. “Some people asked me, ‘How come you did that?’. I said because each one of them had a story.” And “but by the grace of God that person could have been me or a member of my family.”

Father Norkett also cited the challenges he faced as director of clergy services. Working with Father Paul Schmidt, a former director of priest personnel and current pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Pinole, he met with priests who were struggling with personal issues and “walked with them” on their journey. “Nobody is perfect, everybody has issues, and Paul and I served them as best as we could,” he said.

Asked what he would do when he finally does retire, Father Norkett said he would like to write a book. The book, like the priest’s personality, would be anything but grim. “If I wrote a book, it would be a fun book about joyful experiences,” he said, adding that he would like to incorporate writings from his late mother, who was an author and a professor of English. “I would love to bring her writings and my writings together.”

“All in all, I can truly say that I have loved being a priest,” Father Norkett told family and friends who gathered in June for his retirement celebration. “For the past 42 years there were good times and difficult times, some mistakes. I wonder where did the time go?”

Condolences can be sent to the:      Norkett Family  
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Clergy Services  
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