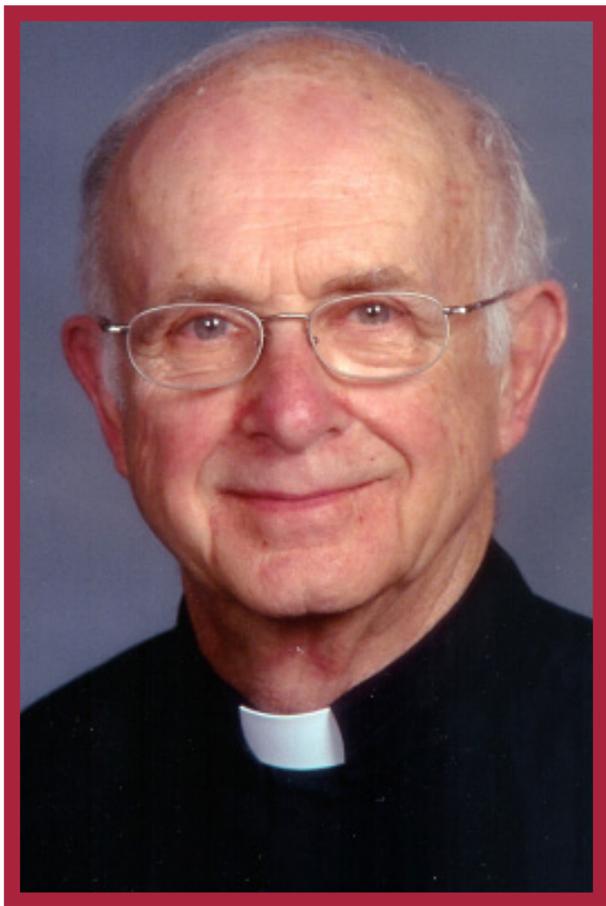


Father James Edward Straukamp, Ph.D.

“Always the Gentle Rebel”



50th Ordination Anniversary

June 15, 1957 ~ June 15, 2007

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James Edward Straukamp came into the world on June 23, 1927, in Chicago, Illinois, born to Albert Joseph Straukamp (d. 1943) and Josephine Rafferty (d. 1982). Along with his older sister (by three years), Elizabeth (Betty), he became part of a tight-knit, fairly devout Roman Catholic, working-class family.

Albert worked as a sales representative for the Wonder Bread Co. in the Chicago area; Josephine was the ever-present mother and housewife providing a loving home for Betty and "little Jimmy."

Advancement was difficult during the depression in the Chicago-based Wonder Bread market. Josephine was close to her twin sister Marie who was married to Byron Law, a middle manager for Wonder Bread Inc. in Illinois. The two families were close, and Byron hoped to help his brother-in-law with a position in the company. Nothing was available in the Chicago area, but with Byron's help, Albert secured a sales position in Michigan where the family moved in 1928. In the mean time, Byron and his family had



James and his mother, Josephine, Chicago

been transferred with the Wonder Bread Company to San Francisco. The families had never been separated by such a geographic chasm, so when the opportunity appeared, Byron was able to get Albert and his family transferred into a position with a subsidiary, Hostess Cakes Inc., in San Jose, California. So in 1930, the Straukamps packed their bags and headed West! James remembers almost monthly trips from San Jose to San Francisco and sleeping on the floor of the family car. Jim and Betty were close to their cousins, Virginia, Bette, and Jeanette Law; the three were more like sisters and brother, although when the four cousins played together the girls wanted nothing to do with the mischievous Jimmy.

Albert found the new job challenging and lucrative. The family settled into St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Parish; Betty attended St. Patrick's School and was later joined by Jimmy when he turned five. The family enjoyed financial security in a

semi-rural area of San Jose; Betty and “Little Jimmy Straukamp” (as he became known) had the run of the neighborhood. Betty, although keeping an “older sister’s” distance in play groups, was always the “Big Sister” on the lookout for her little brother’s welfare. Growing up, these two became devoted friends and remained so until her death in 2004.

From the age of six or so, young James demonstrated a devout attitude uncommon among most of his peers. He served daily Mass at the school and Sunday Mass in the parish. He loved serving at the altar; he was encouraged by his family and parish priests who recognized that he might have a “calling.” In school, although social and likeable, he evinced more interest in his studies and in reading rather than in “rough-housing”; this “scholastic” bent along with inquisitiveness and a curiosity about new things, ideas, and places would be with him all his life and direct him in marvelous ways. Father James writes: “I wasn’t very good at soccer and was happiest when reading and studying.”

In San Jose, Albert worked hard and was able to provide comforts for his family, such as summers in Felton in the Santa Cruz Mountains, a place of great relief from inland summer heat and job pressures. Fr. James writes that his father fell in love with the area and dreamed of “a cabin in the woods”; the entire family loved the coolness, the ocean, and, of course, the Santa Cruz Boardwalk full of wonders, games, and rides. In Felton, the family started their vacationing in real tents located in a



Dad Albert, James, Betty in San Jose

campground along with other families who were regulars in a summer sort-of commune. The family “roughed it”, and the kids felt like real pioneers. This spirit was encouraged by the tents, common washrooms, and evening campfire gatherings with singing and stories. Conditions were primitive compared to today’s Santa Cruz, and the roads were long and winding from San Jose to the Santa Cruz area. In the surrounding woods, the “camp” boys played “Cowboys & Indians”, with Jimmy always an Indian, from morning until the noon bell rang; afterwards, they were back to the magical forests whooping it up until the dinner bell in the evening. James also remembers the swimming hole on the Fern River where all the children swam, dived, and swung from ropes into the water—typical Norman Rockwell-esque activities.

On those summer rides over the coastal ranges, Jimmy and Betty were often carsick . . . but the joy, play, and freedom of the summers made up for this

inconvenience. The family spent the entire summer in refuge from the valley heat “tenting” in Felton; Albert drove over on Fridays for the weekends. Father Jim writes: “Dad loved to sit outside . . . amongst the trees relaxing “ and daydreaming.” Mother found it less relaxing since she was doing the cooking”, laundry and other domestic chores under less-than delightful conditions. Jimmy and Betty loved to swim in the Pacific Ocean. Eventually, life became more civilized as the families of “Felton Camp”, the Straukamps among them, built somewhat more permanent cabins with modern conveniences such as running water, electricity, and indoor plumbing.

Spiritual Calling

Father James felt “that special calling” early on in life. His love of the sacraments grew along with his service at the altar; he loved being an altar boy. His favorite game was playing priest with other children. Also, he especially loved reading stories written by a Jesuit, Fr. Francis Finn, about several young lads: Tom Playfair, Percy Wynn, and Harry Dee . . . he still recalls them fondly to this day and smiles when he talks about their adventures. These stories were morality tales of “daring-do” and always doing the right thing while being kind to others. They fit perfectly with Jim’s gentle, fun-loving temperament. Jim’s parents were lucky in that he never got into real mischief or into real trouble.

However, Jimmy’s sunny outlook on life was brought to an abrupt end when Albert, his dad, died in March, 1943, of heart failure; Jimmy was fifteen and very close to his dad. He recalls that all that spring week, his dad had not been feeling “quite right.” The family had not yet taken up its usual summer residence in Felton. On Saturday, Jim went to the movies alone as he usually did. He came home to a dark house which was unusual; he was filled with a sense of something being wrong. He found his mother Josephine on the bed crying; she told him that his dad had died. Jim’s sense of terror and uncertainty filled him and still leaves him at a loss today. He says of himself: “I didn’t handle it very well and cried a lot.” Albert, as was common back then, was THE breadwinner, and the family had very little to fall back on. Josephine, exhibiting great strength and courage, resolved to see her family through this and to become the breadwinner. She got a job as a bartender, something unusual in that day. Things were a bit tight financially, but the family remained very active in St. Patrick’s parish. Betty finished high school and then shouldered her part of the family burden working in a women’s dress shop. She demonstrated a spirit of sacrifice by electing not to attend college; the family’s hope for a college educated member rested on “Little Jimmy.” James became a weekend stock clerk for a local department store. The entire family pulled together and “made it.” One thing Jim regrets to this

day is that he never shared his desire to be a priest with his dad; that would have made Albert very happy and proud.

In the San Jose of the 1930's and 40's, the Jesuit-run Bellarmine High School was, and still is, the epitome of higher education for Roman Catholic youths. James had looked forward to attending and had become a freshman in 1941, after the family had saved \$100 for his entrance fee. The death of his father seemed to make continuing at Bellarmine an impossibility. To Jim's good fortune, the parish priest at St. Patrick's and one of Jim's teaching nuns, Sister Mary Paschal, had been nurturing Jim's vocation and sense of calling. They also realized his scholastic possibilities. With their help and "lobbying", a scholarship to Bellarmine was awarded him at age 15, and young James was able to continue attending Bellarmine as a day student. He took classes on campus but lived at home commuting to the campus daily by bus or on his bike. He also worked as a soda jerk in the school cafeteria during the lunch breaks. His 1942-43 Bellarmine report card testifies that James was an "A" student in Christian Doctrine, English, Elocution, Latin, History, Geometry, and Greek!!! However, in Department/Conduct he maintained only a straight "B" average... Alas! Notes from his teachers were complimentary and encouraging; Jimmy was not a delinquent!

World War II & James' Education

With World War II raging against the Nazis in Europe and against the Japanese in the Pacific and Asia, James was to reach the draft age of 18 on June 23, 1945. Although certainly supportive of the war effort and aware of the need to defeat the evils of Nazism and Imperial Japanese expansion, the Jesuits allowed three of its most promising Bellarmine students whom they judged to have priestly vocations to enter their novitiate. James and two others were admitted to Sacred Heart Novitiate of the Society of Jesus in Los Gatos in the summer of 1944, and for draft purposes were designated "ministerial students." This action gave the three young men clerical status making them exempt from military service. James and the others were embarking on a 15-year process to become Jesuit priests and ministers of Christ. The first two years as a novice would be spent in strict observance of The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. After taking simple vows as "regulars" (chastity, poverty, obedience) the next thirteen years were spent as "scholastics" in higher education and teaching culminating in ordination to



Novice Jim and Josephine, Los Gatos

priesthood and taking a special vow of obedience to the pope which made the Society of Jesus unique among the religious orders of the Roman Catholic Church.

Since James did not officially graduate with his Bellarmine senior class, he is fond of quipping that “I only got a GED” while a novice. While he was in the novitiate, James’ mother Josephine married Oliver Berg in 1946. Jim, even though no longer at home, became very fond of “Ollie” who owned various rental and commercial properties in the San Jose area. Ollie treated Jo, as his mom was known, like a queen, which James never forgot. After two years as a novice at Sacred Heart, James went on to prove himself more than able in further studies: he was awarded his B.A. from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, in 1950, and his first M.A. in Philosophy from Gonzaga in 1951. While in Spokane, he led a fairly cloistered life living in the religious community of the university.

From 1951 until 1954, James was assigned to teach history at St. Ignatius High School in San Francisco where he continued to live in the Jesuit community, making few waves. It was decided by his superiors that he was best suited for extracurricular activities as the school’s swim team coach (spiritual more than actual since Jim admits not being a very accomplished swimmer). Rather than proving all wet in this capacity, his team took several high school league championships.

He entered the University of Santa Clara in San Mateo, California, continuing to grow in the spiritual life of the community on its campus. He was required to study theology for his priestly studies, and received his second M.A. in Theology (S.T.M.) in 1958. His nonconformity notwithstanding, James Edward Straukamp was ordained to the holy priesthood on Saturday, June 15, 1957, by the Most Reverend Hugh Donohoe, Auxiliary Bishop of San Francisco in the historic St. Mary’s Cathedral. The ordination was the culmination of 15 years of an exacting, demanding, and spiritually rewarding process for every Jesuit. Father James Straukamp



Scholastic James, teaching at St. Ignatius High School, San Francisco



Fr. James’ first mass, St. Patrick’s, San Jose

celebrated his First Solemn Mass on his 30th birthday, June 23, 1957, before family, friends, and fellow parishioners at St. Patrick's in San Jose. James had embarked on his spiritual and priestly sojourn. The newly minted Father James then was sent to complete his Tertianship in Port Townsend, Washington, before taking final vows as a Jesuit in 1958.

At Mount Saint Michaels, Spokane, through his three years philosophy program (1949-1951), Jim volunteered to help as infirmary assistant to Brother O'Shea and presided over the care of the sick and invalid retired priests and brothers. Later at Alma College for theology, he took on the same office, caring for the minor health needs of his classmates, especially on their vacations at Villa Joseph.

Fr. Jim & His Berkeley Days

After taking his final vows, Fr. James returned to the Bay Area to further his studies in history at the University of California, Berkeley. He was allowed to live with other Jesuits in a “funky” student apartment near the campus where “the action was.” James was already proving to be a lightning rod for avant-garde ideas and clerics seeking revolutionary changes in what they viewed as a calcified institution bound too much by nearly 2000 years of history and tradition—the Roman Catholic Church. Along with other Jesuits, James took some classes in history and theology at the UCB-affiliated, interdenominational seminary, the Church Divinity School of the Pacific (CDSF), or “Holy Hill” as it was/is affectionately known. He said masses in Holy Spirit Newman Center student chapel and counseled students who were involved in anti-war peace activities swirling around the Vietnam War.

It was the era of Pope John XXIII, and many Roman Catholics, both lay and clerical, welcomed the fresh air of reform being encouraged by His Holiness in the movement known by the Italian term *aggiornamento* (renewal) ushered in by the Second Vatican Council begun in 1962. There was a great feeling of optimism and hope for change throughout the Church, and James very much identified with the spirit of change—new ideas and experiences abounded all around him, and he felt “renewed.”

In 1960, he received his third M.A. in Renaissance History from UC Berkeley. After this, during a spiritual retreat, it was suggested to James by his spiritual guide, Fr. MacShaine, that he might want to consider going on for his Ph.D. in London where the English Jesuits had requested a few American Jesuits in their doctoral programs. James writes: “I had no idea that any of us had that opportunity to do such a thing! So, for the first time in my life, I took a train to New York where I spent a week with other overseas-bound Jesuits seeing the sights of the Big Apple.” After a week of play and tourist-type activities, armed with his first passport ever, he embarked on the USS

United States for Europe. He goes on to say: “It was exciting when I got on the ship and passed the Statue of Liberty. However, my happiness did not last long . . . I got seasick . . . and spent the next four days in bed! The only solace I had was that the ship was the fastest at the time!” Father James was bound for the English terminus of Southampton, and exciting adventures!

The Rev. Jim in England

Upon reporting to the Jesuit Provincial in London, Father Jim was temporarily assigned to a small church outside London. He spent five months there doing regular pastoral duties, i.e. saying mass, hearing confessions, teaching catechism, etc. He commuted by train to London where he was enrolled in the



Fr. Jim at the Tower of London

University of London, King’s College doctoral program in the history of Renaissance Diplomacy. The commute proved time-consuming, but Jim heard through the Jesuit grapevine that there was a room to let at a rectory in the heart of London. Never one to sit still when opportunity knocked, he jumped on the train to have a look see!

The church, Our Lady of the Assumption and St. Gregory, was located at 24 Golden Square in the heart of the Soho district and Carnaby Street, the center of the “Mod Revolution” associated with the Beatles, “The Fab Four” of the British music scene. The church itself was part of the historic building that had been the Bavarian Embassy since 1747, and remained so until Bavaria was absorbed into the German Republic after World War I. The church is the last of the Roman Catholic Chapels of the Penal Times (historically designated). “Penal Times” refers to the time from the Reformation until the Catholic Relief Act of 1829 when one could be imprisoned or heavily fined, and in some cases, put to death, for being a practicing Roman Catholic. With the Relief Act of 1829, Roman Catholics could own property and churches; they were also permitted to worship publicly. During the Penal Times, Roman Catholics were required to attend Anglican services at least once a year at Easter and sign the parish registry in order to comply with various loyalty laws passed during the Reformation. English Roman Catholics, especially the nobility, attended services in the embassies of the various Catholic nations represented in London. The Bavarian Embassy was one such haven for English Roman Catholics. James tells stories of rumors that King George VI’s mother, Queen Mary (d.1953), occasionally appeared in

the chapel for prayer, “to light a candle” as he puts it, and that she secretly had a Jesuit confessor from whom she received the sacraments. Members of the Royal Family in direct succession to the crown were and are still forbidden to be Roman Catholics under the Act of Settlement (1701) passed during the reign of William and Mary of Orange. Whether true or not, these stories made Assumption a center of curiosity for both English Catholics and for tourists. Young Fr. James enjoyed living at “the Square” and became fascinated by the social and musical revolutions taking place in the Mod scene.

Father James met the Reverend Francis Sayers, assistant pastor at Assumption, who showed him the grounds and the room. James moved in. Francis and he became very good friends, and later, when Father Francis became Monsignor Sayers, Dean of the Roman Catholic Westminster Cathedral, James always had a place to “hang out” when in London. Francis was, in James’ words, a genuine English character and very colorful! He was from an “old” Roman Catholic noble family in Cornwall which had survived the persecutions and civil wars of the Reformation and had been active in hiding Jesuit priests during the late Elizabethan era who were smuggled into England with the mission of returning it to the “true faith.” These “smugglings” continued until the 19th. Century, often involving great danger and martyrdom for the English families and for the priests. Lands were seized and some priests were martyred when discovered.

Msgr. Sayers was of dignified mien, and drove an aging Jaguar about London. It had a mind of its own and was very temperamental; it would often stall on the gentle inclines at stop signals—and there are only “gentle inclines” in London, a very flat city! Then, onlookers would be treated to the comical scene of a very dignified elderly man in full clericals getting out of the car, walking back to the “boot” and kicking the gas tank—the Jaguar, properly admonished, would start again. Quite a sight! Over the years, Francis Sayers proved to be indomitable and a true friend. . . traits reflected in James.

Teaching in England

While reading for his doctorate at the University of London, James taught and lectured in the academic year 1961 to 1962 at Heythrop College in Oxford in Reformation History and philosophy. Heythrop was a Jesuit institution founded by refugee English Jesuits and other Roman Catholics in Louvain, Belgium, in 1614. During the Napoleonic Wars of the late 18th and early 19th Centuries, the Jesuits were allowed to return to England establishing colleges for philosophy at Stonyhurst in Lancashire and theology at St. Bruno’s in North Wales. In 1926, the two colleges were centralized on a campus at Heythrop, Oxfordshire, under Jesuit aegis.

During his sojourn in London, James renewed his friendship with David McWhirter, a former Jesuit classmate who had left to become a doctor and to get married; David was stationed in England as an Army medical doctor. During academic breaks, James and David toured Europe feeding James' great curiosity about other cultures and peoples. Also, in 1962 and 1963, Fr. James served as a civilian chaplain to the United States Marine Corps stationed in London and to the U.S. Army base at Heidelberg/Wurzburg in Germany. He was peripatetic, to say the least, and this suited him just fine! He very much enjoyed the freedoms travelling about afforded him; the excitement and growth experiences provided windows on a world he was just experiencing. He became even more aware of the social movements and upheavals surrounding him, especially the pacifist movement as it was emerging in Europe.

With Europe so very available to him, James was able to access some of the great libraries and archives of the Continent. He practically lived in the hallowed halls of the Bodlian Library in Oxford and in the Institute of Historical Research, Public Records Office at the British Museum—two of the great centers for primary sources research in European History. He was able to dig into the records and resources of the Bibliotheque National and Archives des Affaires Etrangeres in Paris, the State und Hof Archive in Vienna, and the Vatican's Archivio Segreto in Rome. Jim Straukamp was in researchers' "hog heaven"! He also hopped over to Spain several times to avail himself of Madrid's Biblioteca National and Simanca's Arcivo de Simancas—two of the premier research centers for Spanish Reconquista and Renaissance history.

Back in the U.S.A.

In 1963, Jim returned to the University of San Francisco to teach graduate and undergraduate history and soon became a very popular faculty member with the students, involved in ministry, activities, and friendship. His arrival coincided with the Second Vatican Council, which, among other things, radically renewed theology across the board, a very exciting time for in-depth discussions and faith-renewal.

While teaching at the University of San Francisco (1963-1969), Jim's "rebellious nature" reared its comical head, when he received a note from his rector, Fr. Harrington, stating that James was found in the student "center or elsewhere on campus without any sign of clerical attire." The rector's chiding note goes on: "Relaxed clothing is excellent for picnics or relaxing about the house; but it would seem that our professional appearance among the students on campus should be a cassock or a clerical suit. This is common practice among all Jesuits on campus with the exception of yourself. . . your garb is considered 'sophomoric.'" Those were the good ol' days! James maintained this informality of attitude and appearance throughout his life and career; he was usually the square peg being pounded into a

round hole. James wrote of his formative years in the religious life: “For all the 15 years of living in seminary I never found it difficult, nor did I ever think of giving up.”

The Hippie Priest

In 1965, Fr. Jim was joined by Fr. Bob Brophy, lately from his own graduate studies, in organizing student Eucharistic liturgies. At first these took place in the Phelan Hall dormitory chapel, where they removed the customary pews and celebrated Mass with students standing around the altar. Already a pioneer in adapting audiovisual to classroom lectures, Jim would, for instance in homilies, use three slide projectors to fill walls and ceiling with photos such as those taken from the then-current book *The Family of Man*. When the chapel ran to overflowing during the week, they set up a portable altar for Mass in a large dormitory hall just before the student cafeteria meal.

In 1966, Frs. Jim and Bob inaugurated a Sunday liturgy in the University Student Lounge, a huge, thick-carpeted room, setting up the altar centrally facing the people, with students sitting around on the floor. Music came from a three piece guitar and bass group. Sermons were in dialogue, inspired from the Sunday’s readings, with the celebrant inviting those attending to give their own thoughts and exchange insights from their own world. These liturgies got many to Mass who might not otherwise attend and became so appealing that people from all around the Bay Area came to experience the youthful faith. That fall, Jim, Bob, and Mary Lou Burg from the USF Theology Department organized the university’s first liturgy workshop with the help of visiting musicians and liturgists.

Under Father General Pedro Arrupe in Rome, Jesuits around the world were encouraged to become involved in Christian ministries in new and untried ways. In the summer of 1968, Jim obtained permission of the Jesuit provincial to take a faculty position on the campus of Hayward State College. He also became one of the first California Jesuits to live outside the Jesuit community life. As he became progressively more politicized in his ministries, Fr. James became increasingly drawn to and involved in the peace movement against the Vietnam War sweeping the campuses of the United States. James let his “hair down” . . . at least on the sides . . . becoming a rally organizer and speaker. He became heavily involved in teaching students how to attain conscientious objector status. Fr. James was morphing into a Peace-nik . . . a “Hippie Priest”!

With three other Jesuits, he moved to an apartment on Dwight Way several blocks east of the University of California Berkeley campus. The apartment was only three streets north of the very popular Telegraph Avenue Hippie community and found itself

engulfed in tear gas from police canisters during one police assault. Jim commuted daily to his Hayward duties, paid the rent, and was by default the cook each night. As longtime friend, Dr. Andrew Berner says: “Jim lived in an apartment near Telegraph Avenue. . . non-conformist Jesuits came and went constantly in the apartment. He was a haven for post-Vatican Council reformer Jesuits. Father General Arrupe allowed all kinds of experiments, and Jim was a big part of the experimental Jesuits. . . and, somehow, I remember Jim as always being in some trouble with some superior over his views.” James sported the look of a “Hippie Priest,” and was known for exploring and supporting the growing field of “liberation theology” disparaged by some as too Marxist in its teachings.

In 1966, James’ hard work as an historian in the musty stacks of academe paid off with the award of his Ph.D. from London University, Kings College, with his thesis on Renaissance diplomacy: *Anglo-Spanish Relations 1558-1563*, which he had finished after taking up residence in Berkeley and teaching undergraduate history at the University of San Francisco.

In the late spring of 1969, Jim’s office partner at Hayward State told him of a position in history at California State College, Sacramento, which was still unfilled. The Sac State History Department was between the proverbial “rock and a hard place” with the autumn semester coming up fast. It seems that their final three candidates had all accepted positions at other colleges before Sac State could confirm any one of them. Jim thought, “Why not give it a try?” and he did; he applied and was promptly called for an interview in June. He writes: “I was met by three Catholics: Dr. Joe McGowan, the department chair, Dr. Henry Chambers (a former Jesuit), and Dr. Mary Jane Hamilton, the department medievalist” . . . this was the “interview committee.” It went well. They liked him and his credentials. He liked them, the school, the department, and the weather. It seemed a good fit and it was. He came on board as an Assistant Professor of History at Sacramento State College in September, 1969—beginning an illustrious, innovative, and sometimes controversial teaching career which was to last until his retirement in 1994.

Dr. James in Sacramento

That autumn marked another landmark for Jim, the Jesuit. He was totally on his own with no other Jesuits in residence. His “pad”, however, was always open to “refugees” of one sort or another, i.e. students, peace-niks, always to other Jesuits, and just plain ol’ friends. He proved to be a “host extraordinaire” whipping up great pots of spaghetti, salads, bread, and gallons of Gallo burgundy for impromptu dinner parties for friends and just maybe someone he had met that day! In Sacramento, Jim took up residence at a new high-end, but not snobbish, apartment complex, Woodside,

near the Sac State Campus. His big sis, Betty, and his mom, Jo, had helped him furnish the apartment and settle in. Furniture came from the antique auctioneering business run by Betty and her husband, Bob Clanton, and from the unique, selective shop of his Auntie Marge in Los Gatos. Over the years, Auntie Marge, who was important in Jim's life, would scour antique markets not only for her own wealthy clients but for "her Father Jim." He was the apple of her devoutly Catholic eye and was known to extend to him what became known as the "Marge-a-Charge" . . . a good card to hold!

Autumn, 1969, was a wonderfully challenging, heady time for Fr. Jim. He was in his first home which became a "Shangri-La," an exciting, tenure-track professorship at a secular university, and a vibrant, peace-oriented, politically busy Newman Center community which fit him to a tee. The Sac State Campus was alive and in turmoil with the "revolutionary spirit" of youths who were intending to change the world. Jim was not timid in the roiling atmosphere of the campus—he jumped in feet first, saying mass every Tuesday noon at Newman, actively ministering there with Dr. Margaret Harrison, a founding member of the Newman Center and a professor of English from Sacramento City College. He counselled students, especially those seeking conscientious objector status, and galvanized those around him to gentle actions of civil disobedience protesting the Vietnam debacle.

Dr. Straukamp quickly became a popular history professor at Sac State with his laid-back but intellectually demanding style: he had a sneaky little grin he always flashed when he was about to make a student think. Charles Shultz's "Joe Cool" Snoopy was his role model during this period. . . he had that same beagle smile! However, when graduation time came around, Dr. Jim would don his brilliant ruby doctoral robes from the University of London; many observers watching the academic processions were so struck by their majesty that some would ask, "Isn't that the Chancellor of the university system?" Now, the weather during June commencement is known to be a little warm, and Dr. Jim could sometimes be seen dozing behind the speaker's lectern—the beautiful robes were not meant for the Sacramento clime, and so James just nodded off.



A resplendent Dr. Straukamp in doctoral robes

His lectures were unusual from the start—he presented history as a living, breathing entity rather than as a “dead” thing, fossilized and static. His classes were most often discussions, and he took delight when students began to question his take on history. . . they were thinking! His students were empowered in their understanding of history through Jim’s making history relevant to modern events, especially the non-violent acts of civil disobedience then taking place on many campuses. Somewhere in his travels, James fell in love with the camera, and over the years had become a prolific and somewhat professional shutterbug with his own darkroom for developing photos. His lectures became more interesting to his students as he augmented his verbal dissertations and discussions with professionally attractive and relevant multi-slide presentations of people, places, and “things” he encountered on his European travels. He brought life to an otherwise “arid wasteland” which had been known by previous generations as “history.” As “the new kid on the block”, Dr. Straukamp taught mostly lower-division Western Civilization classes and several upper-division classes in Renaissance/Reformation History. In later years, as the history faculty changed, he branched out into teaching the Middle Ages and classes in Tudor/Stuart England, his great love. He also inspired several students to go on in their history studies when he taught graduate historiography seminars in bibliography, research, and writing. Dr. Jim really loved teaching, and it kept him young.

“Professor” or “Father”?

Very few of Jim’s students, with the exception of those active in the Newman Club, knew that he lived a double life—one as a meek, mild-mannered, very gifted teacher, and another as a meek, mild-mannered, and loving Catholic priest. Ever looking to liberalize the attitudes of his students, Fr. Jim decided to teach for a week dressed in “clericals.” His experiment brought rather varied and, at times, comical results. Appearing before his amazed, puzzled, surprised students was a “vision”—an unfamiliar Dr. Straukamp in front of the classroom dressed in somber, black attire with a touch of white at the neck. . . a Roman collar? Some students immediately began to address him as “Father”—those were the Catholics—others didn’t know whether to call him “Dr.,” “Mr.,” “Reverend” . . . or what? Those were the Protestants, undecideds, or students of other faiths. Of course, this being a Reformation History class, Jim’s aim was to make the students think about changing ideas, prejudices, and shifting religious values brought about by the Reformation. The experiment was judged by the ensuing exchanges of ideas to have been a success. The incident also resulted in some good-natured ribbing from his colleagues for the rest of Jim’s career at Sac State.

The Television Pioneer

In 1972, James' ongoing fascination with photography as a teaching aid led him in the direction of the utilization of television in the classroom. At times over the next few years he literally had one foot in the history department and one foot in the expanding audio-visual/television broadcasting department at Sac State. James writes: "... I developed and produced a 30 part series on Western Civilization. . . . Each had visuals; some had live demonstrations, e.g. early 20th Century dance, a Renaissance Musical Sampler, etc. . . . I was the creator, producer and host. This was the beginning of distance learning for California State University, Sacramento." About 300 students came to campus on Saturdays at 6:00 a.m. to watch the "classroom lectures" broadcast on local Channel 3 just as if they were attending regular lectures. Education by television was pretty much uncharted territory at that time in academia; James was a pioneer. From 1973 until 1975, Dr. Straukamp was pretty much on total loan to the audiovisual/TV department becoming the "Coordinator of Television Services and Production, CSUS"—a new position created pretty much for James. He established and supervised the Media Production Team with students working as interns in all aspects of educational and commercial television both on and off campus. James became totally enthralled with the opportunities presented by television in widening the educational expanse of colleges and making classes more accessible to those who might not otherwise fulfill their desires for a higher education. The work James did at CSUS laid the foundations for a state-of-the-art ever-growing multimedia and television production center very much thriving at CSUS today.



Jim, the photographer, at Sac State

Missioning by Telethon

Seeking to utilize his new found and perfected public media skills in Christ's service, James became the Volunteer Producer for the Sacramento March of Dimes Telethon in 1973 and 1974. This work was a springboard for his involvement as producer/director of the Sacramento Valley United Cerebral Palsy Telethon from 1975 until 1987. . . something he very much loved doing. He wrote, scripted, and produced mini-documentaries as well as performed the duties of the on-air producer for the telethons over the next twelve years. He found Joyce DeWitt, Florence Henderson, and

Dennis James to be delightful, warm, professional entertainers, and all four gave their all during each telethon production.

In 1984, James was assigned by the Dean of Instruction to develop a feasibility study on the use of Instructional Television Fixed Service (ITFS) for the CSUS campus with the thought of expanding such services for other California State University campuses. The system he helped to design was put in place system-wide, and, of course, with augmentation from computer services still is utilized by California's upper-educational system.

James and the Giant CD-ROM

“In all my travels I took pictures (slides) always with teaching in mind. . . [using] them extensively in my lectures, . . . and in helping others to incorporate images into their work”, James writes. And with over 50,000 slides taken all over the world in his private collection, and some fame spread by word of mouth, Dr. Straukamp was asked in 1991, by Instructional Resources Corporation of Maryland to aid in the development of history study course on CD ROM for classroom use. Over four years and with the assistance of four devoted former students, James and crew produced “The Western Civilization CD-ROM,” covering the history of the Western world from pre-Hellenistic to Modern times—with 95% of the visual aids coming from James' library. Many people over the years had become astounded by the size of Jim's slide collection taken all over the world (talk about a gadabout!). When moving to a new residence in 2004, it was decided to donate the collection to the Art Department at American River College. ARC was both amazed and pleasantly confounded by the gift, by its scope and size—what a boost to their resources! What a wonderful and thoughtful gift to the education of others, and an ongoing recognition of James' skills as an educator and as a photographer!

James, the Pilgrim & Tour Guide

California State University, Sacramento, granted Dr. Straukamp a year -long sabbatical from December, 1977 until August, 1978, and James had some great ideas about how to use the time. Originally, ever-mindful of his duty to Christ and to the Jesuit order, he intended to establish a television station at a Jesuit University in Bolivia; another Jesuit and he were to work together on the project. The objective was to establish “receiving stations” in outlying villages for educational purpose. Due to political upheavals there, the project had to be cancelled. What to do? Ever resourceful and creative, Fr. Jim had an epiphany. . . why not retrace the missionary footsteps of St. Paul with a camera? The powers that be at Sac State approved this alternative, and off he went, cameras and lots of film at the ready. For James it was a “milestone” in his

career and in his spiritual development; he writes: “The result was a marvelous religious, emotional, learning experience. Those experiences appear regularly in my conversations, my sermons, my teaching. The slides—together with some 20,000 others—have played well in class and other teaching experiences. . . . Sometime after I returned, I realized that the sabbatical had become a defining point in my life. It came to me that when figuring out some event in my life, instinctively I think of something as happening before or after the sabbatical.”

During this period, James had another great idea. . . why not travel and get paid for it? So, from 1979 until 2000, Tour Guide James, with Robert Hart’s assistance, designed, organized, and led educational, sight-seeing tours all over Europe, the Holy Land, Egypt/Northern Africa, the British Isles, Turkey, Greece, Russia, and, of course, to Rome, the Eternal City. . . the two became globe-trotters. And of course, James had that great photographer’s eye and cameras poised to record the travels eventually increasing his slide collection to well over 50,000. The tours were conducted in conjunction with California State University, Sacramento, Extension Department, individual community colleges, and through Episcopal Tours, a division of Professional Travel Systems of America, Inc. All in all, almost 30 different tours were conducted from theatre tours of London, to history tours of the Middle East, to the Passion Play at Oberammergau in Bavaria.

Seeking a New Path

During all the years of varied, worldly activities and adventures, James never forgot his first real calling—the preaching of Jesus’ message in the world. Although, reared and priested in the Roman Catholic Church, over many years of theological and historical studies, and as a result of personal growth and spiritual self-evaluation, the pilgrim James made a gradual and painful journey from one part of the Body of Christ to another part of that very catholic body. Several forces in Jim’s life were prompting him in a new direction. One was the reaction of the Jesuit Order to the “freedoms” taken by many of its members living outside the community. As has been said concerning the results of Vatican Council II, “It opened the windows to fresh air, but someone forgot to put on any screens.” Reacting to perceived excesses perhaps brought about by the innovations under Jesuit Father General Arrupe in the late 1960’s, the Order was beginning to push for an end to independent living on the part of some of its members, and, after many years of living on his own, Jim faced a quandary—whether to take up residence at Jesuit High School in Sacramento, as requested by his superiors, or perhaps to leave the order. This struggle continued for several years, and Fr. Jim carried on extensive dialogue with the Jesuit Provincial for the Western United States. In 1976, Fr. James reached the inevitable and spiritually

comfortable evolutionary conclusion; he left the Jesuit Order which had been so much an important part of his life. The separation was amicable, and Fr. James has many Jesuit friends; he remains active in Jesuits circles and activities to this day. “Once a Jesuit, always a Jesuit” . . . or so it may be said.

Fr. James & The School of the Americas Watch

As part of his worldly witness to Christ’s teachings using his considerable skills and knowledge, not to mention charisma, acquired while vehemently protesting the Vietnam War, Fr. Jim joined the SOA Watch, founded in 1990, by a Maryknoll priest, Fr. Roy Bourgeois. The Watch protests the activities at the School of the Americas located at Ft. Benning, Georgia, near Columbus, which it views as an evil involvement on the part of the United States in the governance of and interference in the affairs of other peoples and nations. Jim has joined the protests with the SOA Watch along with many fellow current and ex-Jesuits every year since the Watch began. The group believes that the U.S., through its military, has helped to train and install fascist governments in several South American countries, most notably El Salvador, Bolivia, Argentina, and that it encouraged the Contras who fought to overthrow the elected Marxist government in Nicaragua. The school is thought to train paramilitary groups in torture, methods of violent disruptions of societies, and further means of destroying freedoms in other lands. James has travelled to El Salvador to “put his presence where his mouth is”, so to speak. He proudly displays the notice from the Commanding Officer Maj. Gen. John LeMoyné (Nov. 19, 2001) arresting him for “criminal trespass on the Ft. Benning Military Reservation.” Fr. Jim the rabble-rouser!

The other force pulling on James was his attempt to come to terms with his God-given sexuality and the search for a fullness in his life. In 1974, Jim had met Robert Hart, a Passionist Brother stationed at Christ the King Retreat Center in Citrus Heights; they became good friends and were suffering through some of the same personal and spiritual crises. Robert was laicized in 1974, and after living elsewhere, found refuge in Jim’s wonderful, warm 5th Ave. Sacramento home—one of Jim’s several “hospitable zoos” for wayward friends, activists, and sometimes troubled people. (His door was always pretty much open.) The friendship between the two deepened; James and Robert became lifelong companions on Aug. 6, 1978, sharing a love of their calling to serve Christ and a real zest for life and travel. Robert would go on to be priested in the Western Rite Orthodox Church. In 1978, he was incardinated into the Independent Catholic Church of the West (ICCW) under the auspices of the Old Catholic Church-Utrecht which resulted from a schism after Vatican Council I (1870) over the infallibility of the Pope.

The New Path: The Episcopal Church

Fr. James had already ruffled the feathers of the local Roman Bishop, Alden Bell, when he performed a wedding between a laicized nun and—Jim thought—a laicized priest in the Spring of 1972. Although warned that performing the ceremony was probably not a good idea, Jim's loyalty to his friends won out. When Bishop Bell was informed of the ceremony, he was perturbed, to put it mildly. Jim was in trouble again. . . big time! Fr. Jim and the good bishop argued over priestly celibacy which Jim had come to view as unnecessary for the fulfillment of a priestly calling. This made Bishop Bell a little unhappy, and he forbade James to celebrate Holy Mass or to dispense the sacraments within the Diocese of Sacramento.

Both James and Robert felt "unchurched" as the 1980's approached; both had been attending house services or Episcopal churches off and on. After much prayer and study, and both being comfortable with its traditions, James and Robert were accepted as members of the Anglican Communion, Episcopal Church USA, on June 1, 1980. The ceremony took place at St. George's Episcopal Church, Carmichael, with Bishop John Thompson presiding. On May 15, 1983, James was ordained to the Episcopal Church Diaconate in accordance with canon law at St. Paul's Church, one of the oldest and most historic Episcopal churches in California founded in 1849. Later in the year, on October 22, 1983, Fr. James was formally translated into the priesthood also at St. Paul's with Bishop Thompson doing the honors again. Fr. Jim had stated to reporter Robin Witt in the Oct. 15, 1983, issue of *The Sacramento Bee* that his studies in England and his experiences of the church since then had led him to the realization that the evolution of the Church was as much political as it was spiritual and theological. He had often argued that the episcopacy, and consequently, the tradition of Apostolic Succession, survived in the Anglican Church due to the canonically valid consecrations of Church of England bishops at the time of the break with Rome under Henry VIII. He further said that he was comfortable in the Anglican Communion, spiritually, sacramentally, and liturgically, because it was so very like what he had experienced as a Roman Catholic. The only difference he could see was that the Anglicans did not view the Pope as infallible, but that they did accept him as the Shepherd of all Christians and First Among Equals, which had been a commonly accepted idea among Christians from time immemorial.

The Parish Priest

Since most of Fr. Jim's priestly career in the Roman Catholic Church had been spent as an academic teaching in Jesuit institutions, with the exceptions of the secular colleges at Hayward and Sacramento, he was pleasantly surprised by the chance to participate in the full vibrant parish life of the Episcopal Church. He became a very

“hands-on” priest in every parish to which he was called. James stated that after he left the Jesuits in 1976, “I ceased being . . . an active Roman Catholic priest. . . . I could . . . have celebrated Mass outside the Church [formal structure], but I wanted to come back. I like the formal structure.”

Embracing the “new life” he found in the Episcopal Church, he has served in several parishes from 1983 until the present, almost half his life as a priest. He was first called to be Assistant Vicar under Fr. David Myers at St. Paul’s, Downtown, from 1980-1987. Although it was a small parish, Fr. Jim was taken to their hearts by the parishioners, and, since they had no real parish hall, he often opened his lovely Curtis Park home for parish parties, meetings, etc. Next, from 1987 until 1999, he was assigned as Assistant Rector at All Saints, Sutterville Road; he was Interim Pastor for All Saints for five months in 1997. In 1995, Fr. James was a Supply Priest at St. Luke’s in Woodland; he so endeared himself to that parish, that they wanted to keep him as Rector. However, due to certain unique diocesan regulations and his singular standing as a priest, he could not do so. Compounding the situation, the fact that he had retired from teaching at CSUS in 1994, allowed the old wanderlust to be very active; he wanted to travel more widely than he had already done which would have made being a full- time rector difficult.

Always ever mindful of the welfare of others, Fr. Jim served with a wonderful sense of love and charity with Episcopal Community Services from 1999 until 2001 and on the Episcopal Commission on AIDS from 1993 until 2001. Responding to the needs of AIDS patients and to the needs of often neglected gay Christians, James gave unstintingly, in service and in kind, to the Sacramento AIDS Foundation, to The Hand-to-Hand Project, and as chaplain to AIDS patients at the University of California, Davis, Medical Center, Sacramento, where he was always on “compassionate call.”

Fr. James’ latest parish “gig” has been at St. Michael’s, Carmichael—a parish he dearly loves. Its parishioners have warmly welcome Jim as Assistant Priest since 1991. It has been and still is a truly two-way love affair. Several parishioners wrote in the Oct. 28, 2001, issue of *St. Michael’s Messenger* of the feelings which are mutual between Fr. Jim and St. Michael’s. Jane Vonasek wrote, “Fr. Straukamp. . . has given so much to our parish in the past year and a half. . . . He has done pastoral care, headed the Youth



Shepherd Jim (and flock), St. Michael’s, Christmas

Group . . . even [going] to Mexico with them last year . . . His great strength is Adult Education . . . he doesn't 'preach' to [parishioners], he listens . . . He is special in our lives and we don't want to lose him. God Bless Fr. Jim." Another, Emily Cole, wrote, "Fr. Jim Straukamp: A few words always come to mind: adventurous, unique, eager, Agape love, refreshing, youthful in all good ways, honest, sincere, welcoming and warm." . . . And so it goes . . . obviously a wonderful, rewarding, spiritually healthful relationship for all concerned! Fr. James truly loves St. Michael's, and it would seem the admiration is mutual. Fr. James may have mussed a few feathers along his road in the Church, but he has always done so with a spirit of Agape—complete and full love—with understanding and forgiveness a constant in his travels.

During his fifty years in the active priesthood, Father James Straukamp, in his love for the Lord and for his fellows, has been a good shepherd and a good human being. His desire to help others think new things and reach new goals through gentle nudges and by example has never flagged. Once when asked how he loved and forgave others so freely, he simply held out his open palm face-up and fingers spread—a perfect, non-verbal illustration of Agape, the Christian ideal. We have all been blessed by his love and by his service to Jesus Christ, and by his 50 years of ministry and of service as priest. ✕

*Booklet written by Larry Fanning, with remembrances from
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