

The Rev. James Kelly dies

By **DAVE BROCKMANN**
Sentinel staff writer

WATSONVILLE — The Rev. James Kelly — the Irish priest known from Watsonville to the San Lorezno Valley for his kindness and love for the game of golf — was fond of comparing a cleric's life to a marriage.

"I think a priest's life is like a good husband, a good wife. Any good that I have done, it is really the Lord that did it," he said in 1987 — his 40th year in the priesthood.

The Rev. Kelly, who last year celebrated half a century as a priest serving in Watsonville, Boulder Creek, Marina and Pacific Grove, died Saturday at Watsonville Community Hospital after a stroke. He was

76.

During his tenure at Boulder Creek's St. Michaels Church in the 1970s, the Rev. Kelly was a familiar sight in the community, pedaling his bicycle on errands of mercy for the parish. Named Scotts Valley's "Man of the Year" in 1981, he was praised for the way he brought comfort and compassion to those who were ill or in need.

"He was a charitable, willing man," said the Rev. Brendan McGinnis, of Carmel, a longtime friend who went through the seminary with the Rev. Kelly. "He was a very good friend ... and we played golf together for 50 years."

The Rev. Kelly described his job as "tak-

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Kelly

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ing care of people from the cradle to the grave." He advised young people to live a life of service — as a doctor or perhaps as a priest — so "you can give hope to others, and they can give you happiness."

His desire to help young people came through when he established the "Father Kelly Golf Tournament," held each year on St. Patrick's Day. Last year's tournament at the Pajaro Valley Golf Club was the 33rd annual event, benefiting a variety of youth organizations throughout the Central Coast.

The golf tournament was aptly named for Kelly, whose zeal for the game was well known among friends. Before his 50th Golden Jubilee, the celebration of the anniversary of his ordination, he wrote this poem about his favorite pastime:

*When life's days are over
St. Peter's words will be
Just as on earth you'll get some
strokes*

On Heaven's Golden Tee

The Rev. Kelly touched the lives of many in Santa Cruz County. Watsonville city clerk Lorraine Washington and her husband Jim were married by the Rev. Kelly at Valley Catholic Church in 1967, a year before he transferred to another parish. "He was really a nice man, and we were all sorry to see him leave that parish and move on," she said.

Monsignor Declan Murphy of Carmel Mission said the Rev. Kelly will be remembered "for his kindness, good humor and approachability. He didn't have any enemies. I know that sounds trite, but it's true."

The Rev. Kelly was born in Spancill, County Clare, Ireland. His preparation for the priesthood began at All Hallows Seminary in Dublin in 1947. The seminary was where young Irish priests were trained for service in English-speaking countries.

He was ordained June 22, 1947, and because he had attended All Hallows Seminary the bishop requested that he be assigned to the Monterey-Fresno Diocese.

His early years in the diocese were divided between the Carmel Mission as associate pastor and Sacred Heart parish in Hollister,

where he was the administrator. From 1953 to retirement in 1991, he served as pastor in parishes in Le-moore, Exeter and Tranquility in Fresno County before coming to the Central Coast. He was pastor of Valley Catholic Church in Watsonville (1960-1968), St. Michaels Church in Boulder Creek (1973-1987), St. Jude's Parish in Marina, and St. Angela's Catholic Church in Pacific Grove.

He also served on the diocesan school and personnel boards.

In retirement, Father Kelly made his home at the Valley Heights Senior Community in Watsonville, and was the community's chaplain.

Last June, the likeable priest celebrated 50 years in the priesthood with a party at the retirement community. "Father Kelly has touched the lives of hundreds of families in the Monterey-Fresno area," said Becky Monday of Valley Heights. "We wanted the community to celebrate and recognize all of his achievements."

One of his three sisters, Susan Kelly, a nun in Africa, came to be part of her brother's ordination Golden Jubilee celebration.

The Rev. Kelly is survived by a brother, Patrick Kelly, of County Clare, Ireland; three sisters, Sister Bonaventure Kelly, of County Clare, Ireland, Sister Margaret Kelly, of England, and Sister Susan Kelly, of Africa; and numerous nieces, nephews, grand nieces, grand nephews and cousins.

A vigil service will be Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. at Valley Catholic Church, 2401 E. Lake Ave., Watsonville. A Mass of Christian burial will be celebrated Thursday at 11 a.m. at Valley Roman Catholic Church. Burial will be at Valley Cemetery.

Friends may call Wednesday after 2 p.m. at Valley Roman Catholic Church.

Mehl's Colonial Chapel, 222 E. Lake Ave., Watsonville is in charge of arrangements.