

## **PRAYER LIFE IN THE EARLY CALIFORNIA MISSION COMMUNITY**

Please note: The following information is offered as historic background for your study of California Missions. It is in no way a reflection of California State policy or the beliefs of any particular State agency or employee.

The missions were an instrument of joint Spanish and Catholic policy. The padres were intent on bettering the life of the native Californians by teaching trades and Catholic Doctrine. Many modern California Native Americans believe the missions were an enslaving institution that robbed their ancestors of their culture and lands. Both perspectives have evidence to support these beliefs.

Religious life in the mission was centered on the mission church. At sunrise, the Friars and people would rise and gather in the church to chant the Roman Breviary. The prayers of the Roman Breviary are the official prayers of the Roman Catholic Church. These prayers are taken from the Book of Psalms and other books of the Bible. In the course of the year the entire Bible was thus read.

### **Mission San Francisco Solano**

The remarkable mission system which Father Junipero Serra had planted in the wilderness a half century was entering its twilight years when Mission San Francisco Solano was founded in 1823.

Mexico had gained its independence from Spain and the aging Spanish-born Padres in California would have been deported except for the fact that there was no one to take their place. Settlers were encroaching on mission and Indian lands. The soldiers had not been paid for years and openly talked of throwing their support behind any foreign power that would pay their back wages. Rival politicians struggled for supremacy, while in the crumbling Mission San Buenaventura, Father-Presidente Jose Senan lay dying.

In San Francisco, Father Jose Altimira noted in despair that there were only about 50 able-bodied Indian neophytes surviving; women were doing men's work "and the mission cannot subsist this way." Without consulting Senan, he proposed to Governor Luis Arguello that Mission Dolores and its sister mission, San Rafael, be closed and their functions combined in a new mission to be founded in the pleasant valley of Sonoma.

The Governor and the Legislature in Monterey agreed, seeing this as a way of interposing another settlement between the Russians at Fort Ross and the rest of California. So it was that on July 4, 1823, Father Altimira raised a cross at Sonoma and transferred the name of San Francisco to the new mission. Only upon his return to "old" San Francisco did he notify his superiors of what he had done.

Shocked by this breach of discipline and by the political interference in mission affairs Father Vicente Sarria, Senan's successor, nevertheless agreed to a compromise. Missions San Francisco de Asis (Mission Dolores) and San Rafael Archangel would remain, and father Altimira could proceed at Sonoma, but the mission would be called San Francisco Solano.

A crude wooden building covered inside and out with whitewashed mud, was built and dedicated on April 4, 1824. A long adobe wing was next completed for living quarters and this structure is still standing. Cattle and neophytes came from Mission Dolores, while the Russians at Fort Ross unexpectedly donated many useful articles, including bells.

A vineyard, orchard and garden were planted. Tiles and adobe brick were manufactured and soap making and hide tanning were started. But Father Altimira was plagued by trouble with hostile Indians and run-away neophytes. Dejected, he had himself transferred to San Buenaventura in 1826 and was succeeded by Father Buenaventura Fortuni, under whose guidance the mission soon reached a peak of prosperity.

A large adobe church was completed in 1833 to form most of the eastern side of the quadrangle of mission buildings. But by then the waves of change were beginning to erode this northernmost mission.

Concerned about the Russian settlement which had been on the California coast since 1812, Governor Jose Figueroa assigned Lt. Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo to colonize the area surrounding Bodega and Fort Ross. He founded the pueblo of Sonoma in 1835; a year after the mission had been secularized, with Vallejo as chief administrator.

The inevitable conflict began. Father Jose Quijas threatened to leave unless Antonio Ortega, his worst tormentor, was fired as an administrator. But Ortega was elevated to *mayordomo* and Father Quijas served the mission, by then a parish church, from San Rafael.

The mission decayed so rapidly that in 1840 Vallejo built the present chapel, probably using bricks and timber from the old church. He added a wooden cupola on top during alterations in 1858-60.

In 1841 the Russians withdrew from Fort Ross, partly because they had trapped out all the sea otter and partly because of Vallejo's colonizing activities. But Sonoma was destined to feel the march of another empire. Vallejo declared annexation of California to the United States, but the growing number of Americans in the area feared that Mexico planned to expel them. On June 14, 1846 a small band of led by Ezekiel Merritt and William B. Ide seized Sonoma, made Vallejo a prisoner and ran up a crude flag displaying a star and a grizzly bear.

For 23 days, California was an independent republic. Then on July 7 Commodore John Sloat seized Monterey and raised the American flag. Vallejo was released to play a major role in founding the state.

Mission Solano, however, fared badly. It was sold in 1881 and subsequently used as a barn, winery and blacksmith shop. The buildings were saved from disintegration when they were purchased by the Historical Landmarks League in 1903 and turned over to the state in 1906, just as the earthquake shattered the chapel.

Restoration work started in 1910 and has continued to this day. One of the first State Historical Monuments, the mission buildings are administered by the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

By Don J. Baxter

*Missions of California*

Pacific Gas & Electric Co.

## **Mission Bells**

“From the first peal of the early morning Angelus to the last sound of the Poor Souls’ bell at night, mission days were permeated with bells and music. There were bells announcing the morning mass; bells to mark the hour; bells for summoning the neophytes to work; bells to announce mealtimes; bells for siesta; bells to mark the time for recreation. Joyous bells rang out the time for important feast days of the church, and to welcome visitors. Anxious bells told of approaching danger. Solemn bells tolled ponderously for the dying and to commemorate the dead. In effect, every important event, each new activity was heralded by the pealing of the mission bells.

Ringling the mission bells was a matter that required both skill and reliability. The bell ringers had to be punctual, and they had to know what set or sequence of tones and rhythms were appropriate to the particular occasion.

Mission bells were of all sizes from large (two or three feet high and weighing about one ton) to small handbells (three inches in diameter and several ounces.) Handbells were often mounted in groups on portable wooden circular frames. Having bells of all different sizes and tones made it possible to convey many messages by bell, and today it is easy to imagine their various tones reaching out through the quiet countryside that then surrounded each of the missions.

Mission bells came from many sources including New England and Alaska, but most of them were made in Mexico, or in the “city of bells,” as Lima, Peru was known. Often the name of the bell-maker and the name of the mission for which the bell was intended were cast into the larger bronze bells. Several such mission bells have survived all the twists and turns of history and can be seen on display at various missions.”

From Gloria Dei, Ray and Englebeck

## **El Campanero (the Bellringer)**

The job of the bellringer brought with it status and respect in the Mission Solano community. It is the responsibility of the bellringer to call the neophytes to church, work assignments, and meals. The Padre relies on the bellringer to keep the Mission’s schedule for the day running smoothly.

“Today those few mission bells that still survive remind us that once the California missions were full of sound, full of music that gave liveliness and charm to the mission scene.

Music had always been important to the Indians of California. Their music and musical traditions came down to them from out of the deep and long forgotten past and has become an integral part of daily life. Carved and ornamented flutes, some of them as much as 2,000 years old, as well as other simpler musical instruments – drums, clappers, and whistles – have been discovered by archeologists in many parts of California. And almost every early account of Indian life includes some mention of Indian singing, chanting, or dancing to musical accompaniment. Music was used for light-hearted entertainment, and for the most solemn religious ceremonies.

With this natural inclination to use and enjoy music constantly and for many purposes – having, in effect, created a complex musical tradition of their own and assigned considerable importance to it – it is little wonder that the Indians of California were charmed and fascinated by the still more complex and lovely musical traditions of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century European Renaissance.”

From Gloria Dei by Ray and Engbeck

A simple willow or elderberry whistle can be made to play a three-note tune. Two helpful books give simple instructions and can usually be found in the children’s section in the library:

*Flutes, Whistles and Reeds*; Larry Kettelkamp. Morrow, 1962.

*Make your own Musical Instruments*; Mandell & Wood. Sterling, 1957.

Students or parents who play flute, violin, guitar, or other instruments might accompany the neophyte’s singing both in the chapel and during the fiesta if one is planned. Cassettes of Mission music and some simple fiesta dances will be available for loan to teachers.