

On May 3, 1974, James Vernon Matthews II was ordained as the first African-American Catholic priest in Northern California.

Born in 1948 in Berkeley, California, to James Vernon and Yvonne Marie Feast Matthews, Father Jay spent his early school years in Albany and Oakland, graduating from Skyline High in 1966. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Humanities and Philosophy from St. Patrick College, Mountain View, California in 1970, a Master of Divinity degree from St. Patrick Seminary, Menlo Park, in 1973, a candidate for the Doctorate of Ministry at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley from 1977 to 1979, and recently completed sabbatical studies in Church History at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome in 2000.

Father Jay's pastoral responsibilities have included: Pastor of St. Benedict Church, Oakland, since 1989, Administrator of St. Cornelius Church in Richmond, California, Administrator and Associate Pastor at St. Cyril Church in Oakland and All Saints Church in Hayward; Associate Pastor at St. Louis Bertrand Church, Oakland, Vicar for Black Catholics and In-Residence at St. Anthony Church in Oakland; Deacon at St. Columba, Oakland, Teacher at Bishop O'Dowd High School in Oakland and Serra High School in San Mateo, California, and Youth Minister of the Diocese of Oakland.

A partial listing of Father Jay's professional participation includes services on the boards and commissions and active memberships of Catholic Charities of the East Bay, Catechetical Ministries, Campaign for Human Development, Presbyteral Council, Vocations, and Ethnic and Cultural Services of the Diocese of Oakland; Alameda County Cancer Society, Bay Area Black United Fund, Knights of Peter Claver, Knights of Columbus, Catholic Daughters of the Americas, Bay Area Urban League, NAACP, New Oakland Committee, Casa Vincentia, Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Observance Committee, National Association of Black Catholic Administrators, National Catholic Conference on Interracial Justice, Coordinating Committee, City of Oakland Strategic Plan; Oakland Mayor's Advisory Council on Education; City of Oakland Cultural Arts Commission; Alameda County Revenue Sharing Commission; Chaplain to the Oakland Police and Fire departments, the New Oakland Committee and the United Negro College Fund of the East Bay.

Father Jay has been the recipient of numerous awards including the Martin Luther King, Jr. Award for Outstanding Community Service, the Marcus Foster Educational Institute's Distinguished Alumni award (1983), the Rose Casanave Service Award of the Black Catholic Vicariate, as well as community service awards from the Knights and Ladies of St. Peter Claver, the Bay Area Chapter of Xavier University, New Orleans, Alumni Association, the Alpha Nu Sigma Chapter of Phi Beta Sigma fraternity, the United States House of Representatives, the Senate and the Assembly of the State of California, Alameda County board of Supervisors, and the City Council of Oakland. Mayor Elihu Harris proclaimed September 27, 1991 and Mayor Jerry Brown proclaimed May 8, 1999 as "Father Jay Matthews Day" in the city of Oakland. And on May 4, 1999, Father Jay was entered into the United States Congressional Record by Congress member Barbara Lee on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood.

Father James V. Matthews presently is serving as pastor of St. Benedict Church, Board of regents of Bishop O'Dowd High School in Oakland since 2005, a member of the Oakland Think Tank, and chaplain to African-American Catholics.