

Bishop Robert Francis Christian, Jr., OP

18th Auxiliary Bishop of San Francisco

Bishop Robert Christian, 18th Auxiliary Bishop of San Francisco, and President-Rector of Saint Patrick's Seminary & University, passed away in his sleep on July 11, 2019, at his residence at the seminary in Menlo Park. He was 70 years of age.

A proud, fourth-generation native of San Francisco, Robert was born on December 2, 1948 at St. Mary's Hospital, the first of seven children of Robert Francis Christian and Gloria Peggs Christian, both of whom predeceased him. He attended St. Brendan and St. Vincent de Paul Grammar Schools, followed by St. Ignatius High School (Class of '66) and Santa Clara University (Class of '70). He enjoyed vacations with his family in Kentfield, Robinson Bar Ranch in Idaho, and Summer Home Park along the Russian River. He spent his junior year abroad at Gonzaga-in-Florence, where he found himself in a Dominican parish for the first time, and was attracted to the Dominican tradition of common prayer and community life.

Following his graduation from Santa Clara University, Bob entered the novitiate of the Western Dominican Province, and began his studies at St. Albert's Priory in Oakland. He wrote in his application, "to model oneself after Christ is a privilege which a priest may use to show his love to God, and, by example, use as a form of preaching." He made profession in 1971 and excelled in his studies at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology, Berkeley and at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum), Rome. He earned a B.A. (Philosophy, 1973), M.Div. (1977), and was ordained to the priesthood on June 4, 1976. After teaching at the Dominican College of San Rafael from 1977-1979, Fr. Robert began doctoral studies at the Angelicum,

where he earned an STL in 1981 and a doctorate in Sacred Theology in 1984. Upon completion of his doctorate, he ministered at Newman Centers at the University of California in Riverside and the University of Washington in Seattle. His life-long academic interests were ecclesiology and sacramental theology, which he taught as a member of the faculty at the Angelicum for 30 years, while also serving as Vice Dean of the Theology Faculty and, later, as Prior of the Dominican community. He was a beloved teacher and mentor to the many priests, religious and lay people from around the world who studied with him in Rome. After 33 years in Rome, he taught at St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary in Florida from 2014-2015. A valued member of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission since 2011, he also served as a Consultor of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity since 2012. Fr. Robert ministered to his brother Dominicans as Vicar Provincial from 1997-1999, and as the master of students responsible for the initial formation of the Western Dominican friars from 2015-2018.

On March 28, 2018, Archbishop Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, announced that Pope Francis had named Fr. Christian as Auxiliary Bishop of San Francisco. He was ordained as a bishop by Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone at St. Mary's Cathedral on June 5, 2018. At his ordination, Bishop Christian spoke with gratitude of his Dominican community, "with its rhythms of prayer, recreation, shared decision-making and shared commitment to preaching the truth." He added, "Being a bishop means giving up many dimensions of community life, though it also makes possible a deeper engagement in preaching and in being an agent of mercy.



This last point was made to me by the Dominican Master of the Order himself. "Bishop Christian spoke of a current focus of the Catholic Church on the common good and common dignity of the human person, expressing deep concern, however, over the erosion of Catholic identity in Catholic schools.

On January 14, 2019, he was appointed to serve as rector of St. Patrick's Seminary & University, where seminarians have been studying since 1898. In addition to his full seminary responsibilities, forming students from Western and Pacific Rim dioceses, he continued to preside and preach at liturgical events throughout the Archdiocese, and remained committed to his international council and commission work. He recently stated, "Ecumenical dialogue requires patience, candor, charity and a willingness to see one's own position through the eyes of others. Full unity is a long-term project. It is a privilege to try to nudge our communities a little closer to that goal, and it is spiritually rewarding to learn the timeless lesson that failures and dying to established ways of doing things are often God's way of bringing about his design."

Writing immediately to the seminary community after learning of Bishop Christian's death, Archbishop Cordileone expressed his deep sorrow at the unexpected loss of his brother bishop, adding, "The Archdiocese was greatly blessed to have his wisdom and leadership even if for so brief a time as auxiliary

bishop and even briefer time as rector of the Seminary. We join with the Dominican community in praying for the repose of his soul and for peace and comfort for his wonderful family in their time of mourning."

Bishop Robert is survived by his five brothers: Joseph, James (Mary), Michael (Mary), John (Mary), Thomas (Peggy) and his sister, Mary Gloria Christian. Also survived by dozens of cousins from the Waal, Sweeney, Carlsmith and Peggs families, and many nieces, nephews, grand nieces and grand nephews, all of whom he loved very much.

Friends may visit Monday, July 22nd, 2019 after 5:00pm at St. Dominic Church, 2390 Bush St (at Steiner St.), San Francisco where a Vigil Service will be held at 7:00pm. A Funeral Mass will be celebrated Tuesday, July 23rd at 10:00am at the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption, 1111 Gough St. (at Geary Blvd.) San Francisco. Committal Wednesday, July 24th, St. Dominic Cemetery, Benicia.

In lieu of flowers, donations in Bishop Christian's memory may be sent to the Western Dominican Province, 5877 Birch Court, Oakland, CA 94618, the Order of Malta Clinic of Northern California, 2121 Harrison St., Suite 120, Oakland, CA 94612, St. Patrick's Seminary, 320 Middlefield Road, Menlo Park, CA 94025 or your favorite charity.

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