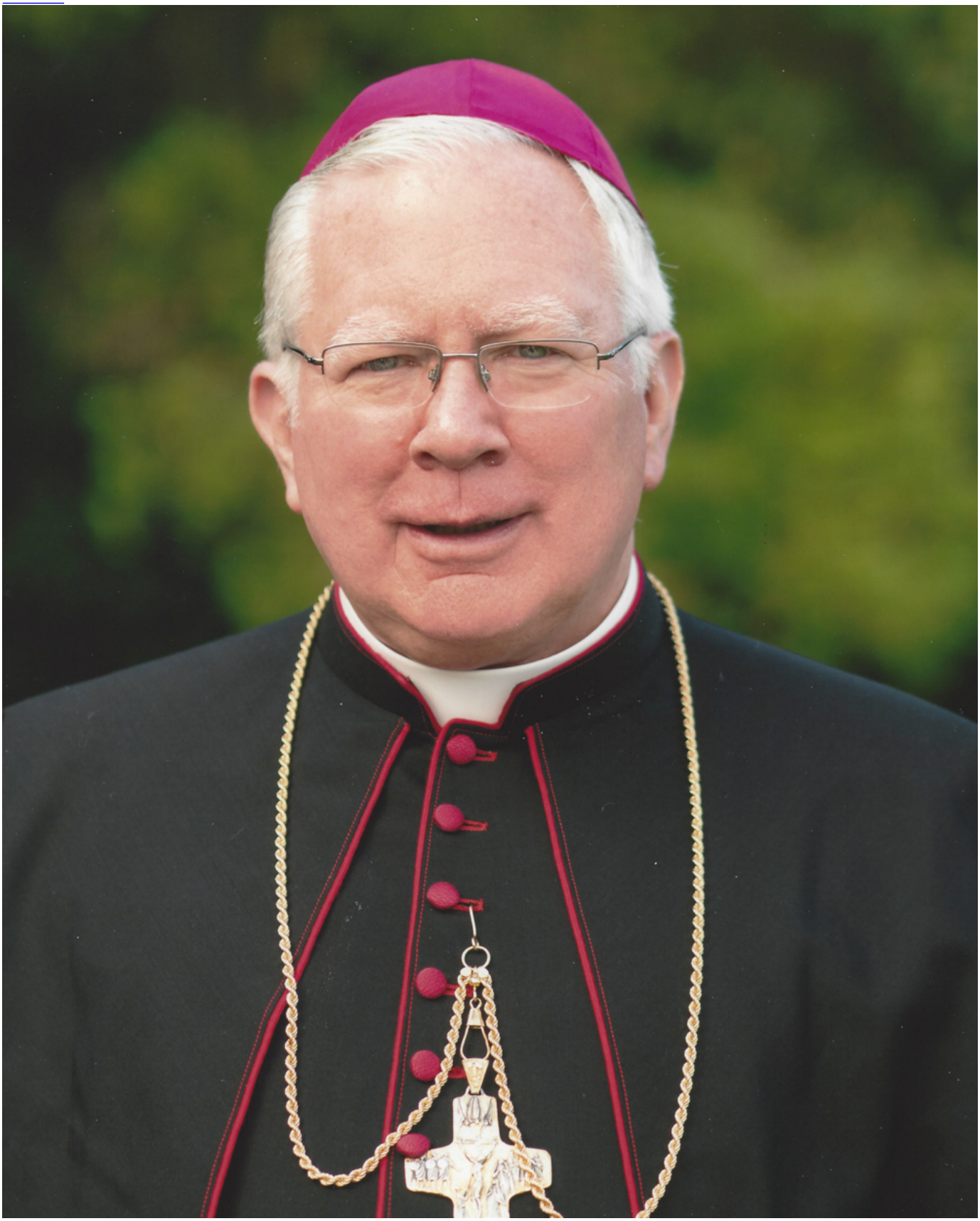
News



Auxiliary Bishop Robert Christian of San Francisco is pictured in this undated photo. He died in his sleep July 11 at his residence at St. Patrick Seminary and University in Menlo Park, Calif., where he was rector-president. He was 70. (CNS/Archdiocese of San Francisco)

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Oakland, Calif. — July 15, 2019
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San Francisco Auxiliary Bishop Robert Christian, rector-president of St. Patrick Seminary and University in Menlo Park, died in his sleep July 11. He was 70.

He was ordained a bishop June 5, 2018, and was appointed to lead the seminary in January.

Funeral arrangements will be announced at a later date.

"Please join me and remember in your prayers the repose of the soul of the Most Rev. Robert Christian. ... May he rest in peace!" Oakland Bishop Michael Barber wrote in an email the afternoon of July 11.

A native of San Francisco, Christian was a Dominican priest and belonged to the order's Western province, the Province of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, which has its headquarters in Oakland.

"I was deeply saddened to learn this morning of the passing of Bishop Christian," San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone said. "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," he added.

Jesuit Fr. John Piderit, who is moderator of the curia and vicar for administration of the San Francisco Archdiocese, said in announcing Christian's death July 11 that he "was discovered this morning in his bed at St. Patrick Seminary; he probably died during the night."

"This is a great loss for the Dominicans, the seminary, the archdiocese and for all who count Bishop Christian as a special friend. I request your prayers for Bishop Christian, that he be accepted with love and rejoicing in heaven," Piderit said. "He was a wonderful priest, bishop, teacher, administrator and spiritual guide."

Robert Francis Christian was born in San Francisco Dec. 2, 1948, attended St. Brendan and St. Vincent de Paul grammar schools and St. Ignatius High School.

In 1970, after graduating from Jesuit-run Santa Clara University, he entered the Dominican order at St. Albert Priory in Oakland and made his solemn profession as a Dominican in 1974. He was ordained a priest in Oakland June 4, 1976.

In 1977, he started his teaching career at Dominican College in San Rafael, California. He received a master of divinity degree from the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Oakland in 1977. He went to Rome in 1979 for studies at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, known as the Angelicum, where he earned a licentiate of sacred theology followed by a doctorate in sacred theology.

Upon completion of his doctorate, he ministered at the Newman centers at the University of California in Riverside and the University of Washington in Seattle.

In 1985, he was assigned to the faculty at the Angelicum. Except for the years 1997-1999, when he was vicar provincial of the Dominicans' Western province, Christian taught theology, ministered to the Dominican community in Rome, held administrative offices at the Angelicum, and offered occasional assistance to various Vatican bureaus, until 2014.

Prior to becoming bishop he was the student master at St. Albert Priory in Oakland.

Other appointments include "peritus," or expert, at the 1990 Synod of Bishops on priestly formation, prior of the 75-member resident community of friars at the Angelicum, member of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission and since 2013 had been a consultor to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

Christian chose as his episcopal motto "Sanctificetur nomen tuum" ("Hallowed be thy name").

"It lets people know that I'll continue to preach the name of Jesus, who teaches me to be grateful for all that I have, including a good family, many friends, an education, my Dominican life and travels all over the world," he said. "God is the giver of all good gifts and has given me the opportunity to be something of a gift to others."

The Dominicans' Western province said in a statement: "Bishop Christian has tirelessly served the church and faithful for nearly 50 years. We are deeply saddened to hear of his death and entrust his soul to the loving arms of our heavenly Father. We ask for your prayers for the repose of his soul, as well as for his grieving family, friends and Dominican brothers around the world."

St. Albert's Priory in Oakland offered an evening requiem Mass for the repose of his soul July 11.

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