

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

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Father John E Boll, Archivist

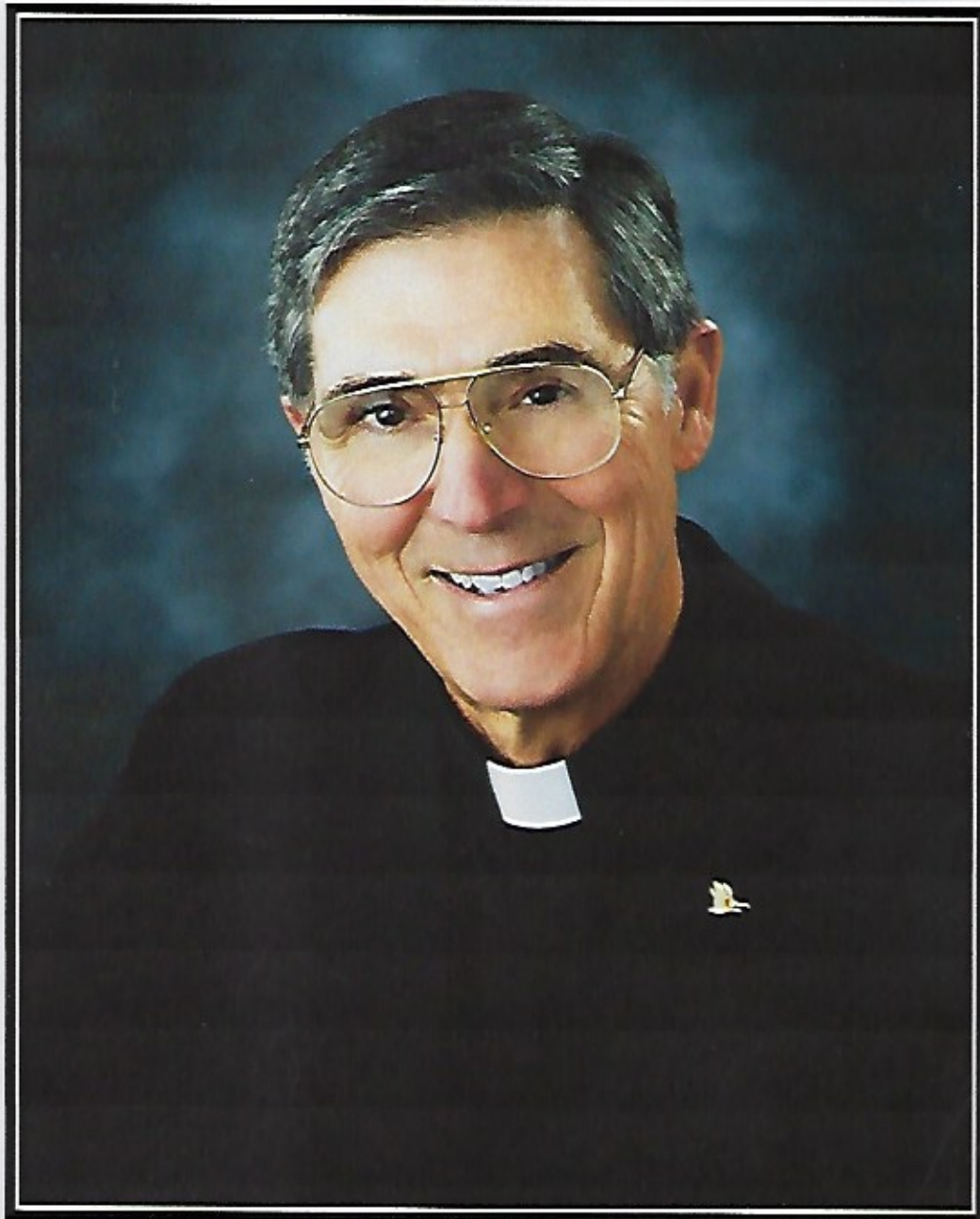
No 26

MONSIGNOR RUSSELL GEORGE TERRA

Native son of Sacramento

Pastor Emeritus of Saint Joseph Parish, Redding

June 2016



BIOGRAPHY OF

MONSIGNOR

RUSSELL GEORGE TERRA

Native of Sacramento
Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento
Pastor Emeritus of Saint Joseph Parish
Redding, California

Russell George Terra was born on Ash Wednesday, February 26, 1936, at Mercy Hospital in Sacramento. He was the firstborn son of George Terra and Sylvia Dinelli, followed by his two younger brothers, Donald and Leonard.



George and Sylvia Terra

In Russ' childhood, the Terra family lived in Sacred Heart Parish in East Sacramento but when Saint Mary Parish, established in 1906, moved to the 58th and M Street site in 1948, Sacred Heart parish was divided and the Terra family's residence was in the territorial boundaries of Saint Mary Parish which was staffed by the Oblates of Saint Joseph.



George and Sylvia with newborn Russell



Russell at 13 months of age

Russ' mother Sylvia was one of eleven children and her brother Bill Dinelli is the father of Father Bill Dinelli, Russ' cousin who is also a priest of the Diocese of Sacramento.



Photo by John E Boll 2014

Sacred Heart Church, Sacramento

Russ Begins School

Russ began school at El Dorado Elementary School in 1941 when he was 4 years old. In that era, a child could begin school either in the fall or the winter semester. Russ did well in school and was advanced a half year in first grade to second grade. He believes this was not a good idea because he was too young to be moved forward to the second grade at age 6.

Inheriting his father's genes for height, as Russ grew in age, he reached the impressive height of 6' 5", two inches taller than his father. Russ was one of the tallest students in his class.

Seminarian Roy Peters Makes a big Impression on Russ

Russ says he hated catechism as a child and did everything he could to skip class. In 1945 Sacred Heart Parish had a two week religious summer school for public school children. His neighborhood friends wanted him to attend the two-week summer school with them but Russ said "no way." The kids told him that there was a special man teacher who was different from the other teachers. Curious but reluctant, Russ said he would go one time to check out this teacher.

The special teacher was Roy Peters who was a seminarian about two years from ordination. Roy skillfully used modern catechetical methods and was absolutely charming and considerate. Even more impressive to Russ was Roy's ability to hit the soft ball over the school gymnasium. Russ thought to himself: "Why would someone like this who is so talented want to be a priest?" Russ began to wonder what priesthood was all about.

Roy Peters Invites Russ to his Ordination



Father Roy Peters

A couple years later, Roy Peters sent Russ an invitation to his ordination at the Cathedral. Russ attended the ordination but did not understand anything that was going on. When Roy gave his first blessings after his ordination, Russ went forward to receive Father Roy's blessing. Father Roy said to Russ – "It is good to see you Russ." Russ could not believe that Roy Peters remembered his name. From that day forward, Father Peters became a hero to Russ.

Russ Begins Sixth Grade at Sacred Heart School

Beginning his sixth grade year in 1945, Russ transferred to Sacred Heart Parish School on 39th and H Streets. He had trouble adjusting to the homework schedule because in public school he never had homework to do after school. Russ adjusted to his new schedule but was no longer the top of the class. He graduated from Sacred Heart School in 1948.



The Idea of Priesthood

Although Russ does not remember this incident himself, his mother reminded him of the time when he was about six years of age. Russ was out riding his bike one summer morning when he returned home sobbing in tears. Sylvia, Russ' mother, thought he had been injured in an accident but after calming down, Russ told his mother that God talked to him and said he had a lot of work for Russ to do. Russ did not want to do a lot of work, he just wanted to play and have fun! That was the reason for his sobbing when he arrived home.

A Day at the Beach in Santa Cruz



Russ remembers an important moment in his life in 1948 when the family went to Santa Cruz for a week. While there, he became deeply aware of how tired he was of all the rules and regulations in the church. He had enough of God and decided not to pay any more attention to God or to all those rules. But at the age of 12, there was not a lot for him to get into trouble about. After ten days, Russ was so miserable in his soul that he realized he could not live without God in his life. Deeply aware of

the emptiness in his life, he knew he had to let God be part of his life. This was his Saint Augustine moment of insight and conversion.

Monsignor Lyons is a Great Help

During his high school years, Russ talked with Monsignor Michael Lyons who was a very patient and kind confessor and guided Russ in terms of his vocation. Russ talked to a Redemptorist priest who gave a parish mission at Sacred Heart Church. This priest gave Russ the following advice: attend Mass every day, keep the faith and do not fall in love. So Russ went to Mass every day, kept the faith and fell in love. Having the experience of falling in love was very positive for Russ. It was the catalyst that changed his attitude about women and marriage.

Christian Brothers High School

Christian Brothers High School at that time was located on 21st and Broadway where the Diocesan Pastoral Center is now located.

Christian Brothers was a wonderful experience for Russ and it was refreshing for him to be taught by men for the first time. He joined CB's football team but ended up breaking four bones. The doctor told the Terra family that Russ was too young to be playing with older and stronger football players so Russ had to quit football.



Christian Brothers High School

After Russ quit contact sports, he became very interested in hunting and fishing which became his passion and love ever since. In 1953, Russ graduated from Christian Brothers High School.

Russ Wants to Become a Priest



Russ talked to **Bishop Robert Armstrong** about his interest in becoming a priest. Because of a large influx of vocations after the Korean War, there was no seminary available for Russ to attend. At Saint Joseph Seminary in Mountain View, there were 87 openings for 237 applicants. Because of the great number of applicants, the Archdiocese of San Francisco stopped accepting students from outside the archdiocese. The Diocese of Sacramento made inquiries around the nation. Jordan Seminary in Menominee, Michigan for delayed vocation was accepting students. Russ was sent there for one year to study Latin, Greek, French, English and religion. In addition, the seminarians became the workforce to install the roof on the new gymnasium so they could play basketball there.

Sacramento Begins a Relationship with the Salvatorians

The Salvatorian Fathers asked Russ why his diocese sent him to Jordan Seminary. Russ explained that Sacramento had no seminary of its own and the seminary in San Francisco was filled. This caused the Salvatorians to consider making an offer to Sacramento to come and begin a seminary. The provincial sent Father Timothy Lickteig, SDS to Sacramento to meet with Bishop Armstrong to discuss the possibility of starting a diocesan seminary. Father Tim and Bishop Armstrong had a strong resemblance and became friends. In 1955 the Salvatorians came to Rio Dell to establish and staff Saint Pius X Seminary.

Russ Transfers to Saint Nazianz Seminary in Wisconsin

Russ began his first year of college seminary at the Salvatorian Seminary in Saint Nazianz, WI. At Saint Nazianz Russ excelled in basketball and track. The seminary team played against the Catholic Champions of the State of Wisconsin. All the teams in the Wisconsin Catholic League were excellent basketball players and Saint Nazianz competed with all these teams.



Russ on the Court

Russ Wins the Saint Nazianz Seminary Oratorical Contest in 1956

In 1956 Russ competed in and won the seminary oratorical contest at Saint Nazianz. He spent two years at St Nazianz Seminary and then returned to California where he entered Saint Patrick Seminary in Menlo Park.

Saint Patrick Seminary, Menlo Park

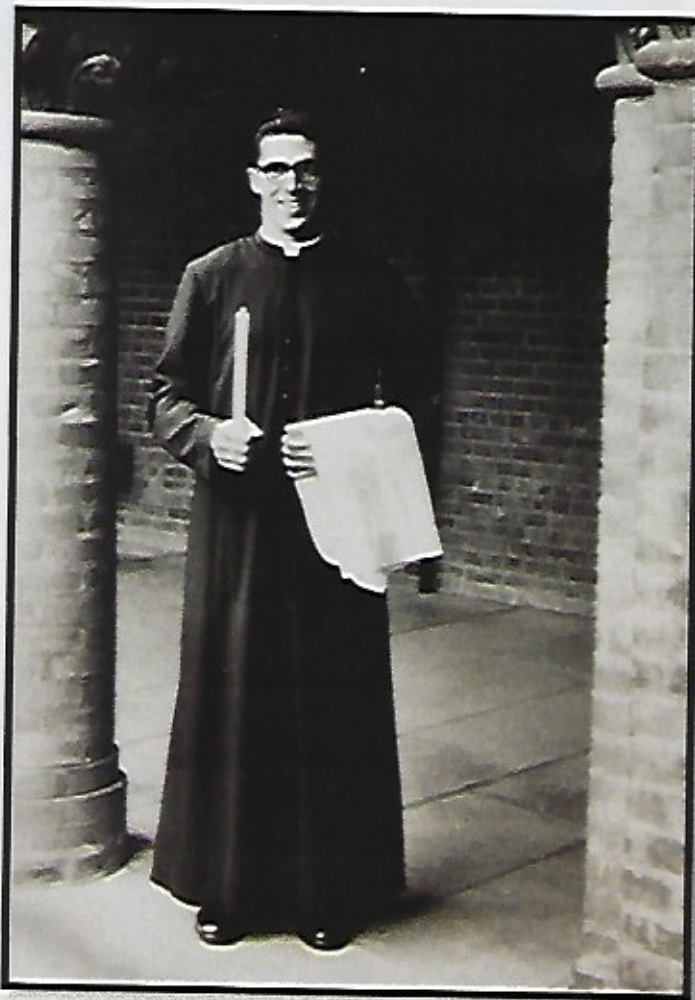
For Russ, Saint Patrick Seminary was very difficult because many of the textbooks were in Latin. Russ was just not a linguist. These were good years for him but he had to struggle because of the Latin barrier and the detail work needed in some courses. Father Frank Norris was one of his professors. Father Norris had just completed his doctorate in Systematic Theology and Russ did not understand the concepts Father Norris was teaching. With the help of his classmate David Pettingill who tutored Russ after class, he was able to pass Father Norris' course.

Making Contact with the Jesuits at Alma College

Around 1958, Russ and some other classmates from Saint Patrick Seminary decided to go on a bike ride one Thursday on their day off. They started riding toward the Santa Cruz Mountains. Their destination was Alma College, the Jesuit Theologate in the Santa Cruz Mountains. When they arrived, the Jesuits were very hospitable and welcomed the Saint Patrick seminarians. This chance visit began a relationship between Alma College and Saint Patrick Seminary that resulted in an annual gathering of the two seminaries for a number of years.



Saint Patrick Seminary, Menlo Park



Russ Receives Tonsure at Saint Patrick Seminary

Ordination to the Priesthood

Russ made it through his theology classes and was ordained a subdeacon by Bishop McGucken in 1961 in the Menlo Park seminary chapel. For diaconate, he was ordained by Bishop Donahue and on June 9, 1962, Bishop Alden J Bell ordained Russ a priest at the Cathedral in Sacramento.



Bishop Bell Ordains Father Russell Terra to the Order of Presbyter



The Anointing of Hands and Presentation of Patten and Chalice

First Priestly Appointment



Photo by John E Boll

Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament

Father Russ' first appointment was to the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament for two years. Learning from Monsignor Ray Renwald who was pastor of the Cathedral proved to be a great experience for Father Russ on many levels. Father Russ has a great love and admiration for Monsignor Renwald who was always a caring and compassionate pastor.

Assigned to Christian Brothers High School

In the summer of 1964 Monsignor James Poole, Superintendent of Catholic Schools, asked Father Russ if he would teach at Christian Brothers High School. Father Russ did not want to go into those classrooms without first being prepared. He attended six weeks of classes at the University of San Francisco and took eight units. For the first time in his life he had all A's in his classes.

Father Terra went to Christian Brothers High School as chaplain and religion teacher and served there for four years, 1964-68. He lived at Saint Charles Borromeo rectory with Monsignor Poole during his years of teaching. In the summer he attended Saint Mary's College in Moraga and earned a master degree in theology.

Father Terra Celebrates Mass for the Students at Christian Brothers High School

Appointed Director of the Diocesan Office of Religious Education

Bishop Bell asked Father Terra to become director of the Office of Religious Education. Father Terra began the religious education office with Sister Marie Vandenberg, a Cenacle Sister. He moved to the Cathedral presbytery where he lived in residence since his office was in the lower level of the Cathedral.



Father Terra was director of the Religious Education office for 13 years, 1968-1981 and was the longest serving director of religious education in the nation at that time. Most diocesan directors of religious education nationally remained in office for only four years because religious education became the focal point for all the controversies and conflicts in the Post Vatican II Church - liturgy, education, theology and sacraments.



During these years, the Diocesan Faith Formation Department developed the Aquinas Center to be a center for religious education material for the parishes of the diocese. During that time, Father Terra completed two master degrees, a master in Religious Education from the University of San Francisco and a master in administration also from USF. Father Patrick McGrath became part of the Office of Religious Education and through his efforts working with USF was able to create the Master of Arts in Teaching program for the priests and sisters of the diocese.

While Father Terra was in the Office of Faith Development, he gave retreats to religious women, spoke at regional and parish conferences and workshops throughout the western US and in Minnesota and Connecticut.

He also authored three publications: *On the Way, Thoughts for Pilgrims*, a book of poetry and photographs; *The Coming God*, a book of commentaries and reflections on the daily readings for Advent; *To See His Face*, a book of longer homilies for special days of celebration throughout the liturgical year.

Father Terra Named a Chaplain to His Holiness

As Bishop Alden Bell was preparing to retire as Bishop of Sacramento, he asked the Holy Father to name some priests of the diocese as monsignors. Of the twelve so named, Father Terra was one of them named as a Chaplain of His Holiness. The newly named monsignors were installed on October 23, 1977 in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament by Bishop Bell.

Pastor of Saint Joseph Parish, Redding

After the retirement of Monsignor John O'Connor as pastor of Saint Joseph Parish in Redding and the short pastorate of Father James Walsh, the Saint Joseph pastorate was opened once again for application. Monsignor Terra and Father John Boll who were friends from their Cathedral days together, began talking about applying for Saint Joseph Parish as a team of two priests. They applied for the parish as a team with the understanding that if the bishop and Personnel Board decided not to move forward with the team approach, then Monsignor Russell would apply for the parish on his own. Bishop Francis Quinn appointed Monsignor Terra pastor of Saint Joseph Parish in November 1981.



Saint Joseph Church, Redding

Monsignor Terra served as pastor of Saint Joseph Parish in Redding for 23 years. During that time, his focus was building the parish community through liturgy. His approach was collaborative

ministry with all departments of the parish working together, regular staff meetings, regular meetings with department heads, fostering the deaconate, establishing a preschool, a middle school and high school as well as establishing a food locker to feed the hungry and needy of the Redding area. The middle school was named Saint Francis Middle School and the high school was named Bishop Quinn High School. Unfortunately, those two schools were forced to close because of a lack of students.

Monsignor Terra started a hospital ministry to the Redding Medical Center involving lay people which included daily visits and a night time emergency response.

Establishment of the Saint Joseph School Education Foundation

Saint Joseph Parish was the first parish in the diocese to establish an education foundation to fund tuition for needy students at Saint Joseph School, Saint Francis Middle School and Bishop Quinn High School. Over the years this fund has grown and provides financial assistance to students that need a helping hand.



Saint Joseph Parish School Library Named for Monsignor Terra

Russ the Hunter and Fisherman

Russ remembers watching his grandfather barbecue a wild bird and two days later he killed a woodpecker on a telephone pole with his BB gun, confident the woodpecker was a good bird to eat. He hunted more birds and killed seven other sparrows or linnets and prepared the birds for cooking. He brought the birds to his mother for cooking and his mother said, "Not in my house!" She gave him a frying pan, sage, garlic, salt and pepper and olive oil and said, "Cook those birds yourself in the back yard." Russ built a fire pit, cooked the birds, licked his fingers after eating and

said, "I've got to do this for the rest of my life." Thus began Russ' hunting adventures for the rest of his life! He went from upland birds to waterfowl, to deer, antelope, elk and wild pigs and at 80 years of age is still hunting, although his body is now somewhat impaired.

Fishing started with a bent pin, a string, a stick and a worm. It progressed to plug casting, fly fishing, bait fishing and finally evolved to catch and release fly fishing only.



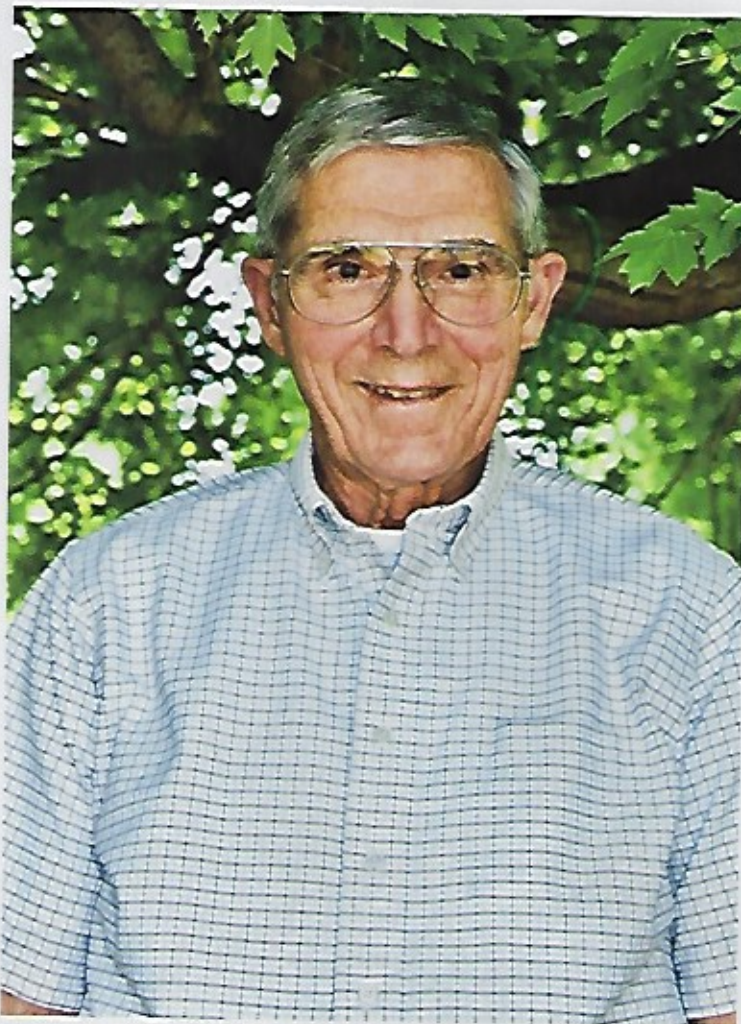
Taking to the Sky as a Pilot

Shortly after arriving in Redding, Russ met Mr. Frank Rusch who was an instructor and air ambulance emergency pilot. With the use of an airplane owned by Jack Schraeder, Russ took flying lessons and has since taken to the air and has flown all over the north state for the sheer pleasure of it all. Benton Airpark in Redding is just across the street from Saint Joseph Church. Russ flew airplanes for about 10 years until he began to have arrhythmia in his heart. In addition, renting a plane just became too expensive for him to continue.

Grateful to Bishops Bell and Quinn

Monsignor Terra is grateful to both Bishop Alden Bell and Bishop Francis Quinn who understood Russ's approach to ministry and were always supportive of him. He sincerely thanks them for their support and confidence in him.

For Everything There is a Season



When Monsignor Terra reached the age of 67, because of the stress of many conflicts regarding parish and diocese, it became clear to him that it was time for him to retire from parish ministry and serve in a different way. His ministry now involves helping with various liturgical ministries at Saint Joseph Parish and the writing and publishing homilies in the style of Alfonso Nebreda, SJ, and Father John Puliz, OSJ: short, concise and to the point.



Russ the Hunter



Father Russ retired as pastor of Saint Joseph Parish in 2003 and resides in his own home in the Redding area. He enjoys a slower pace of life which gives him time to be with God in prayer and to compose his Sunday homilies.

As Monsignor Terra looks back on his life, he says: "I would not change anything about my life except my sins and shortcomings. I apologize to those I have offended or hurt in any way and I hope for their forgiveness. I am especially grateful to those who have blessed me with their love, patience and forgiveness. Without their presence in my life, I would not be the person I am now and still in the process of becoming."

Through his life journey, Monsignor Terra has come to these insights about life: "Learn to listen to God; beware of the seductions of culture; and be a pilgrim each moment of every day. If I had a motto, it would be "*Peregrinus - pilgrim.*"

Knight of the International Order of Saint Hubertus

On September 8, 2001, Monsignor Terra was knighted in the International Order of Saint Hubertus and functions as chaplain to the US Brotherhood. This is an international order of hunters dedicated to conservation, preservation of wild game and limited harvest. The world leader of the Order is a monsignor from Austria.

Grateful to Monsignor Terra for his Ministry in the Diocese of Sacramento

It is nearly 75 years since that six-year old boy rode his bike on a sidewalk of East Sacramento on a warm sunny California morning when he experienced God say to him, "I have a lot of work for you to do." Seventy-four years have passed since that day and fifty-four years of ordained ministerial service have been given. The Lord indeed had a lot of work for Russ Terra to do and he has done it. Russ can identify with Saint Paul who said: "I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith and now I await the crown of glory that the Lord has prepared for all who love him."

Thank you, Father Russ, for your attentiveness to the Lord and dedication to his people over these five decades of priestly ministry. The Church of Sacramento is grateful that you said yes to the Lord's invitation to follow Jesus in a life of ministry. We wish you good health, happy fishing and successful hunting as you continue your pilgrim journey to God who awaits you in love. Russ, we wish you -

Ad Multos Annos!