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FATHER TERRY ALLEN FULTON

Native of Waukegan, ILL

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor of Saint Maria Goretti Parish, Elk Grove

1944 - 2013

The first part of this article by Patrick Joyce was an interview of Terry Fulton before his ordination and published in the June 24, 1994 issue of the *Catholic Herald*. The second section was written by the Diocesan Archivist



“I wanted to be a priest since I was 14,” Terry Fulton says. “It made no sense. The girl I was dating lived next to the Jesuit novitiate in Applegate. I saw the novices in their cassocks, and I just knew that was what I wanted to be.”

From his Youth, Terry was a Pentecostal

His desire for the priesthood “made no sense” not because of his age but because of his religion. At 14, Terry Fulton was a member of the Pentecostal Church of God. “I was always a church member,” Terry says, “Somehow God was always in my life.” But it was not until 1962, when he was 18, that he became a Catholic. And it was only two weeks ago, that he was ordained a priest.

In the 32 years from conversion to ordination, Terry Fulton kept busy earning a handful of degrees, running a hospital department, serving as a permanent deacon and, most of all, raising four adopted daughters.

Terry’s Family Roots

Terry Allen Fulton was born in Waukegan, Ill., May 31, 1944. He came to Sacramento with his family in 1951. He graduated from Highlands High School in North Highlands and worked on a chicken ranch until he entered the U.S. Air Force for four years, becoming a trained corpsman for battle.

His father Ed died in 1989. His mother Lorraine still lives in Sacramento. He has three brothers, Ed, Richard and Raymond, four daughters and eight granddaughters.

God’s Call

In 1962, while Terry was serving in the Air Force, his best friend, a Catholic, took him to a retreat at Holy Ghost Trappist Monastery in Conyers, Ga. “It was six days of total silence, a self-directed retreat,” Terry says. “The fourth day it came to me in prayer: ‘I am ordaining you to serve those who have no one to serve them.’ I can never forget those words.”

He became a Catholic and prepared to act on those words, to follow his teenage dream of becoming a priest – as a member of the White Fathers, a missionary order. “My spiritual director was a White Father,” Terry says, “but he advised me to wait, to get a degree, to mature.”

Terry took the advice, not realizing how long the wait would be or how many degrees he would earn: an associate of arts degree in respiratory therapy, a master of science degree in health care administration, a bachelor’s degree in English and French from Sacramento State, and a teaching credential.

Respiratory Therapist

From 1966, when he left the Air Force, to 1983 he worked in the respiratory therapy department at Sutter Hospital, the last 12 years as head of the department. It was not his education or career that extended his wait for ordination. It was family obligation. In 1973, his sister’s husband died. Two years later his sister died, leaving four daughters, ages 2, 4, 7 and 8.

Terry Adopts his Four Nieces

At the time of his sister's final illness, Terry was building a house on six and a half acres in Plymouth. It became home for Terry and the girls. "My sister died in August," he says. "We moved into the new house in October."

Terry adopted the girls and raised them on the ranch in Plymouth while working at the hospital in Sacramento. "I was getting paid quite well at Sutter," he says, "and I could afford to have a housekeeper, from 6 am to 6 pm, until the girls got older and could look after the younger ones."

He left Sutter in 1983. "I was in a truck accident," he says. "I should have died but didn't. I took three years off to rediscover the direction in my life."

Ordained a Permanent Deacon

The first direction was to the diaconate. He was ordained a permanent deacon on June 11, 1988, and for the next two years served at Immaculate Conception Parish, Sutter Creek and Saint Mary of the Mountains in Plymouth, while working as office manager for Foster Farms in Sutter Creek.

By then his boyhood dream of priesthood seemed like just that – a dream. "I thought I'd never be a priest," he says. "Then the permanent diaconate came along and I thought I'd settle for that. Then my last daughter moved out. I always went to daily Mass. I was a daily communicant. I went up to my pastor and asked if there was any reason I couldn't be a priest." The pastor, Father Ronan Brennan, told him to go talk with Father Thomas Bland, then the diocesan vocations director. He talked to Father Bland and then to Bishop Quinn. "The bishop knew me well and he was pleased to recommend me for the program," Terry says.

Terry Enters the Seminary



Photo from Sacred Heart Seminary Website

Sacred Heart Seminary Chapel, Hales Corner, Wisconsin

In 1990, he entered the seminary at Hales Corners, Wis., to prepare for the priesthood and earn one more degree: a master of divinity. "I hope they don't see all of my degrees and put me into an office," he says. "I really love parish work. I like to preach. I love the Eucharist."

Terry's Hope for the Future



Celebrating the liturgy well means proclaiming the prayers with feeling, not simply reciting the words, he says. "The spoken word is more profound than the written word – if it's done well. Karl Marx said, 'If you priests really believed what you're saying at Mass, you'd die.' I really believe that the priesthood is servanthood, serving the people of God, not a job but a way of life," the new priest says. "One of my strengths is that I'm just totally honest. That means you're real with people, and the Gospel calls us to be real with people."

As the father of four and grandfather of eight, he says, "I know the joys and sorrows of family life, raising babies to teenagers. How can you do that and not learn the lessons of life?" He hopes this will enable him to preach homilies that reach "people where they are in their lives."

"A few weeks ago," Terry says, "Bishop Weigand asked me why I wanted to be a priest. I said, 'Because God will not get off my back.' I'm just fulfilling something that started 35 years ago. Things finally fitted into place."

Bishop Weigand Ordained Terry Fulton a Priest on June 11, 1994

Father Terry's Appointments

Father Terry began his priestly ministry as parochial vicar at Saint Philomene Parish, Sacramento, from 1994 to 1998. He was then transferred to Saint John the Baptist Parish in Chico where he served as parochial vicar from 1998 to 2003 and then on June 11, 2003, was appointed pastor of Saint John the Baptist Parish where he served as pastor for 3 years.



Photo by John E Boll 2011

Saint John the Baptist Church, Chico

With the transfer of Father John Boll from Holy Rosary Parish in Woodland to Saint Anthony Parish in Sacramento, Bishop Weigand appointed Father Fulton pastor of Woodland. Although he was content to remain in Chico, he agreed to move to Woodland to take up the role of pastor for the next four years.



Photo by John E Boll 2011

Holy Rosary Church, Woodland



Photo courtesy of Holy Rosary School 2009

Father Terry Celebrates Mass with the Students of Holy Rosary School

Father Terry brought to his assignment in Woodland his unique personality and talents. His vision and ministerial style were different from that of the previous pastors. His dog accompanied him as he traveled the parish in his Hummer. As he said in his 1994 interview with the *Catholic Herald*, he spoke his mind and was not concerned about being “politically correct.” This approach endeared him to some. In 2010, Bishop Jaime Soto asked Father Terry to be the second pastor of Saint Maria Goretti Parish in East Elk Grove, a new challenge Father Terry accepted.

Appointment to Elk Grove

Saint Maria Goretti Parish was established in 2007 by Bishop Weigand and Father Soane Kaniseli was appointed the founding pastor of the parish. With the transfer of Father Soane to the pastorate of Divine Mercy Parish in Natomas in 2010, Bishop Jaime Soto appointed Father Terry to Saint Maria Goretti Parish in Elk Grove. Father Terry seemed to be a good fit for this new parish community. There was a lot of resistance by some local home owners near the parish site who were against the building of the new church there. Father Terry, with the help and guidance of the diocese and support of the parish community, was able to convince the Elk Grove City Council to grant a building permit to the parish to proceed with plans to build the first phase of the new parish plant on Bradshaw Road in East Elk Grove.

Father Terry led a capital campaign to build a parish center which would serve as the first church. The new complex was blessed by Bishop Soto on August 18, 2012. The parish continued to grow and thrive under Father Terry’s pastoral leadership.



Photo by John E Boll 2014

Saint Maria Goretti Parish, Elk Grove

Father Terry Takes Ill

In 2013, Father Terry took ill, suffering from the effects of advanced lung cancer. The disease had advanced to the point where the doctors at Mercy Hospital in Sacramento could do nothing. Father Terry was released from the hospital on November 5 and returned to his home at Saint Maria Goretti parish. He died there the next day, November 6, 2013, at the age of 69.

The Vigil and Funeral Mass of Father Fulton

Father Terry's body was brought to Maria Goretti Church where the vigil was held on Thursday, November 14. The next day, Father Terry's Funeral Mass was celebrated in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament where he had been ordained a priest by Bishop Weigand on June 11, 1994 when he was 50 years of age.

The Cathedral that morning was filled to capacity with priests, family members, parishioners and friends of Father Terry. Bishop Soto presided at the Mass and Monsignor Albert O'Connor was the homilist.

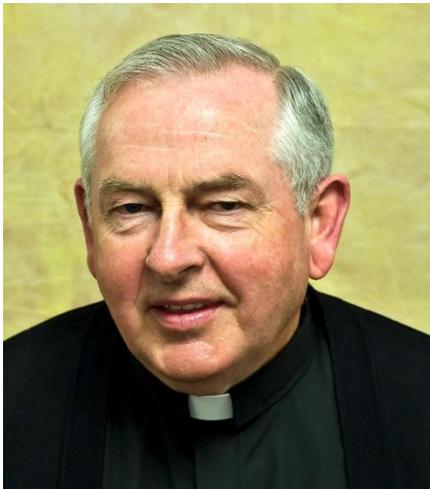
Father Terry's body was buried in the Priests' Circle of Saint Mary Cemetery where he joined his deceased brother priests who had served the people of the Diocese of Sacramento in past decades.



Father Terry's Headstone, Saint Mary Cemetery, Sacramento

The Homily at Father Terry A. Fulton's Funeral Mass

By Monsignor Albert G. O'Connor



Monsignor Al O'Connor, Homilist

We gather this morning to remember and pay tribute to Fr. Terry Fulton, who served God and God's people as a faithful priest for 19 years here in the diocese of Sacramento.

Nineteen years ago, on June 11, 1994, Terry was ordained a priest in this Cathedral by Bishop Weigand. On that occasion, Terry gave his word freely to serve God and the Church.

The commitment, which he freely made on that day, he has faithfully kept. Like the Good Shepherd, he laid down his life for his flock, and now the Good Shepherd has called him home to receive his reward.

To remember is to give thanks, and in remembering Fr. Terry, we give thanks to God for the great gift he was to the church.

Aristeides, who was Greek and lived about the year 125 AD wrote to one of his friends about something that seemed strange to him about Christians. This is what he said: "If any religious person among the Christians passes away from this world, they rejoice and offer thanks to their God, and they escort the body with songs and thanksgiving, as if he dead person was only setting out from one place to another place nearby."

In the same way, while we are sad, in Christian Faith our celebration here today is a celebration of joy and thanksgiving, because we are overjoyed to see Fr. Terry's life rewarded with the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who follow him faithfully in this life.

It is a time for us to be happy and joyful because we have great assurance that this life, so faithfully lived, has now seen fulfillment.

Fr. Terry began his priestly ministry at St. Philomene, then at St. John's Chico, Holy Rosary Woodland, and finally at St. Maria Goretti. While Fr. Terry conducted successful ministry in all his assignments, Maria Goretti was his greatest accomplishment, the jewel in the crown of his priesthood.

It was not easy facing a major building project which was opposed by so many local residents. This situation provoked some choice thoughts in Terry's mind but he kept his cool and handled the situation very well.

Today St. Maria Goretti is a Church very much alive with active parishioners. The campus is beautiful. The Church even though temporary is very up to date, while retaining a traditional flair. I was amazed to see approximately 1600 people at Mass this past weekend all mourning Fr. Terry deeply. A great tribute to Fr. Terry. He was a great favorite. The liturgy was conducted very reverently. And I can say to the priests of the Diocese, anyone of you should be grateful to hear the call from Bishop Soto inviting you to become the pastor.

In St. Paul's Cathedral in London, which was designed by Sir Christopher Wren there is a plaque which reads "If you are looking for a monument to the architect look around you." St. Maria Goretti Parish stands as a monument to Fr. Terry.

The readings used in today's Liturgy were chosen by Fr. Terry. The reading from Ecclesiastes "There is a time for every season under heaven" reminds me of the significant times in Fr. Terry's own life.

1. The time he spent in the Air Force where he became a great patriot. The flag flew each day in front of the Rectory. Did you ever see the Hummer pass without seeing the stars and stripes flying proudly?

2. Then there was the time when Fr. Terry attended a retreat at the Trappist Monastery in Conyers, GA in 1962 at the invitation of a Catholic friend. Following the experience Terry converted to Catholicism. He was never shy to witness to his Catholic Faith --- again remember the Hummer.

3. There was the time in Fr. Terry's life where he had to assume the responsibility of being a Father. In 1975, when his sister and her husband passed away leaving behind children, ages 8-2, all girls, Fr. Terry bravely and heroically took on the responsibility of being their dad and adopted them. He fulfilled the responsibility for 16 years, when according to him they had the nerve to leave him for another man. In marriage of course.

I got to know Fr. Terry in the spring of 1978 when I was at St. Mary of the Mountains in Plymouth. At my invitation Terry became the organist while Tamara and Tina his adopted children were altar servers.

According to his blog, Terry had always wanted to be a priest since he was 14. And now he thought, "Why can't I be a priest." And there was the time when he heard the call and responded positively. Well you know the rest of the story. He finally became a permanent deacon and two (2) years later he asked to be a priest. On his ordination in 1994 the time came for Terry to become Father Terry.

He studied at a Seminary for older candidates in Wisconsin. I presume that was where that he became a Packers fan. Fr. Terry always wore a big Benedictine Cross where a bishop wears a Pectoral Cross. I sometimes kidded Terry that he looked like a Bishop. No, I never said he acted like one. When he wore the cross over the Packers jersey I thought he was the Bishop of Green Bay.

The Gospel passage from St. John is not one you would typically hear at a funeral. Again I got the clue here from Fr. Terry's blog. Fr. Terry saw his life as a priest, as a way of the cross.

His first assignment was at St. Philomene with Msgr. James Church. He was now 50 years old and still a bit brash. He made his rookie mistakes, which according to his blog he hoped never to repeat. He thanks Msgr. Church who saved his rear, more than once, from being crucified in the parking lot by upset parishioners.

On being transferred from Chico to Woodland Terry had a hard time coping with the move. He was happy and successful in Chico and ended up being depressed. He coped with the situation and ended up writing an article to help other priests. The article was published in the 'Priest' Magazine.

More recently over the past few weeks he experienced his agony in garden and his crown of thorns. Yes, Terry bore his crosses in imitation of Jesus his Savior. Then there came the time for death.

Fr. Terry died, as he had lived, full of resignation, strengthened in faith, and joyful in hope. Now the journey begun at baptism has ended.

Fr. Terry has now gone home to see God face to face.

Life's race well run,

Life's work well done,

Now come rest,

May he rest in peace! Amen.

Rest in Peace

Father Terry served the Diocese of Sacramento as a priest for 19 years after a long and circuitous journey that led to his ordination in 1994. After the death of his sister, he raised her four daughters to adulthood, became a permanent deacon for two years and then petitioned the bishop to enter the seminary to prepare for ministerial priesthood. He had a unique character and in his own way touched the lives of many people through his priestly ministry.

We commend Father Terry to the gentle and loving embrace of God whose love knows no limits. May Father Terry be fully alive in the glorious presence of the Lord!

*Eternal rest grant unto Father Terry,
O Lord, and let perpetual light
Shine upon him.
May his soul and the souls of all the faithful
Departed through the mercy of God
Rest in peace.*

Rest in God's Peace, Father Terry!