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The Life and Ministry of US Army Chaplain Father Thomas Delahunty



Lieutenant Colonel Father Thomas P Delahunty

Thomas Delahunty was born on May 4, 1930 in Newtown, County Laois, the seventh child of eleven born to Thomas Delahunty and Katie Kennedy. His brothers and sisters are Jim, Richard, John, Daniel, Noel, Nan, Bride, Julia, Catherine and Nora. Nora became a religious sister.

Thomas and Katie Delahunty



Tom's Early School Years

Tom began school at the National School at Cullohill, County Laois until he was 14 years of age and then entered Saint Kieran College in Kilkenny. He remained in Saint Kieran College for 11 years, five years on the lay side of the college and six years on the ecclesiastical side. Tom was accepted for ministry by the Diocese of Sacramento during his first year of philosophy.

On the fifth of June, 1955, Thomas Delahunty was ordained a priest in Saint Mary Cathedral, Kilkenny, Ireland for the Diocese of Sacramento by Bishop Collier from the Diocese of Ossory. Also ordained that year for service to the Diocese of Sacramento were Fathers Charles Brady, Cornelius O'Donnell, John Hannan, Declan O'Sullivan and Eugene Lucas.



Father Tom's Ordination Class in 1955

Beginning of Ministry in the Diocese of Sacramento

Father Tom arrived in Sacramento just after Christmas in 1955. His first assignment was to Sacred Heart Parish in Maxwell, Colusa County, where he worked with Father Thomas Morgan, pastor of the parish. Because Father Morgan was legally blind and limited in what he could do, Father Tom assisted Father Morgan in overseeing the pastoral needs of the parish.

Father Delahunty says his first assignment was a great beginning and Father Morgan was an inspiration: he was approachable, humble, prayerful, brilliant, and had a great sense of humor. Father Tom says he will always treasure what he learned from Father Morgan during his five years at Sacred Heart Parish.

Planning and Construction of Holy Cross Church, Arbuckle

Because of Father Morgan's sight impairment, Father Tom's first assignment was a unique challenge. He had the pleasure of being involved in the planning and building of a new church in Arbuckle. Bishop Joseph McGucken dedicated the new Holy Cross Church on November 30, 1958 and Father Tom says it was a joyous and memorable day for all since it was a great achievement for the Catholic community.



Photo by John E Boll 2012

Holy Cross Church, Arbuckle

Father Tom says that the community was so generous that the new church was paid in full before the dedication. A social and catechetical center was added a few years later, mainly through the generosity of George and Mary Lodi of Arbuckle. Father Tom was proud to be part of the history of the Maxwell, Williams, Arbuckle and Stonyford Catholic communities.

The Next Two Assignments

In 1960, Father Tom was given a new assignment to Holy Family Parish in Citrus Heights to work with Father Vito Mistretta. Then in 1962 he was assigned to Our Lady of the Assumption Parish in Carmichael. Shortly after arriving at Assumption Parish, Bishop McGucken asked Father Tom if he would consider part time duty with the US Army Reserve headquartered in Sacramento. This involved weekly drill training and on occasion weekend training plus two weeks of training once a year at Camp Roberts in Southern California.

The Beginning of His Military Career

This was Tom's first introduction to the military. He was given the opportunity to go to the US Army Chaplain School in Fort Hamilton, New York during his time with the US Army Reserve. He completed the basic and advanced chaplain courses and during this time was promoted to the rank of captain.

Bishop Bell Gives Father Tom Permission for Active Duty in the US Army

With this military training, the current Vietnam War in Southeast Asia and the shortage of Catholic chaplains, Father Tom asked Bishop Alden Bell if he would consider allowing Tom to go on active duty. Because Bishop Bell had served as chaplain in the military in his younger days, he was supportive of Father Tom's desire to serve in the military and gave his permission and blessing to Tom in October 1967. Tom received his first military assignment to Fort Irwin in Southern California.

Father Tom's Military Assignments



In 1969, Father Tom was assigned to ASCOM in Yongsong, South Korea. This was a large Army depot, plus the 121st Medical Evacuation Hospital. Following the Pueblo incident, it was to this hospital that the US Pueblo forces were sent for medical care. Father Tom was part of the Army team at the hospital.

Captain Delahunty was promoted to the rank of Major during this tour at ASCOM, South Korea. In 1970 he was assigned to New Ulm, Germany and following this assignment he was sent to Fort Ord Basic Training Center in Monterey, California.

His next assignment was to the US Army Chaplain School in Fort Hamilton, New York and to Long Island University for a full year of study.

Promotion to the Rank of Lieutenant Colonel

His next assignment was to the 2nd Infantry Division, South Korea followed by an assignment to Tripler Army Medical Center, Honolulu, Hawaii. It was at Tripler that Father Tom was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. The following is a letter addressed to Father Tom on this occasion:

Dear Chaplain Delahunty:

Your selection for promotion to Lieutenant Colonel means that you have talents and intentions that clearly indicate the potential to serve at a higher grade than you now hold. I congratulate you and wish you God's blessing as you assume the greater responsibilities that will accrue to you as a result of the promotion.

I am greatly concerned that we expand and vitalize our ministry for those who look to us for spiritual leadership. This promotion will permit you to assist me in making the Chaplaincy everything it ought to be. We must provide activities for our people that will be adventures in religion and which make the Word of God meaningful to their lives. We must provide spiritual leadership to assist our people facing the uncertainties and challenges of the future.

This promotion is not a reward for what you have done, although you have achieved an enviable record in your faithful ministry. You were selected because we believe you have just begun. My prayer for you is that God will give you the extra measure of grace and wisdom that you need to serve the spiritual needs of those entrusted to your pastoral care.

Sincerely,

*Orris E Kelly
Chaplain (Major General), USA
Chief of Chaplains*



Father Delahunty's next assignment was to the Presidio in San Francisco, California. Following this assignment, he was assigned to Karlsruhe, East Germany, followed by two years with the Berlin Brigade in Berlin.

Father Tom was next assigned for thirteen months to Sinop, Turkey which is located by the Black Sea. He was the only Army Catholic Chaplain in the country.

This assignment require a lot of travel visiting the different installations in Turkey where American troops were stationed.

His next assignment was back to Tripler Army Medical Center in Hawaii. From Hawaii, Father Tom began his last assignment with the 18th Medical Command and Army Hospital in Seoul, South

Korea. It was during this assignment that he was awarded the Legion of Merit. The commanding General of the US Force in South Korea said on that occasion the following:

“Lieutenant Colonel Thomas P Delahunty, United States Army, has given exceptional performance as an Army Chaplain during twenty-six years of distinguished service. His untiring efforts and devotion to duty in ministry to the military community have contributed immeasurably to the morale and spiritual well-being of our soldiers and their families. His strong leadership skills and compassion for fellow soldiers was evident throughout his career, in particular, during the repatriation of United States Armed Forces Personnel after the Pueblo incident. His contribution during both peace and war are commendable and in keeping with the finest traditions of military service. His outstanding performance of duty reflects distinct credit upon him, the 18th Medical Command, and the United States Army.”

Father Delahunty retired from the US Army in August 1993, having served a total of 28 years of active military service. This total includes time served with the Army Reserve in Sacramento 1962-67. This was a peaceful period in the US Military history and Father Tom was not exposed to any hostile action during his long tour of duty. He says it was a great privilege to serve all these years as an Army chaplain. It was a great experience.

Chaplain Major General Matthew A Zimmerman wrote the following letter to Father Delahunty on his retirement from the US Army:

Dear Chaplain Delahunty:

Your retirement this year brings to a close your long and distinguished career as an active duty Army chaplain. We who remain on active duty lose from our ranks a servant of God whose dedication greatly enhanced the role of the Chaplaincy.

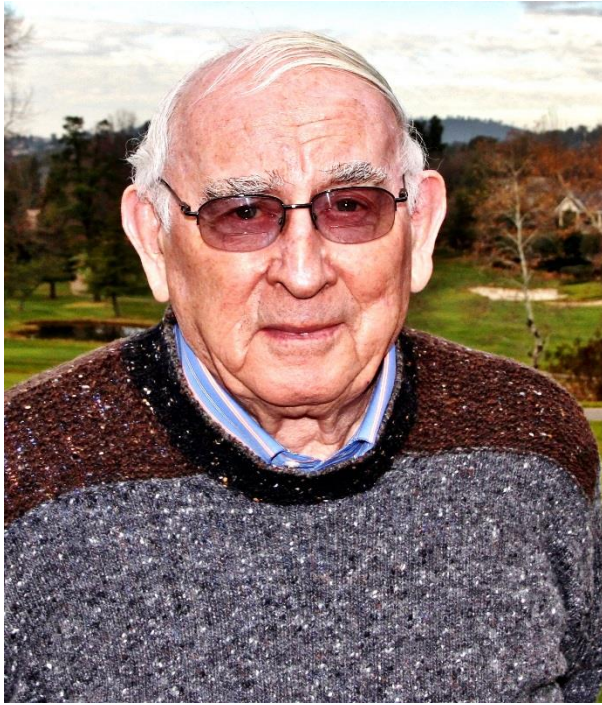
The many honors, awards and service medals you have received are the tangible proof of your devoted service to God and the men and women who defend our country. Through your sacred ministry, you have eased pain, enhanced the quality of life and facilitated the spiritual growth of innumerable service members and their families.

It is a privilege to present to you this Chaplain Seal Lapel Pin and Certificate of Retirement as an expression of our appreciation and gratitude for your years of selfless service.

I am confident that in the years that lie ahead you will continue to be of great service as a strong supporter of the Chaplaincy. I look forward to our continued collegiality and professional associations. May God bless you and yours as you leave us to enter a new phase of your ministry.

Sincerely,

*Matthew A Zimmerman
Chaplain (Major General), U.S. Army
Chief of Chaplains*



Father Thomas Delahunty has been retired now for 22 years. During those years he has assisted in parishes that need help with Sunday liturgies. He has his own home in Cameron Park. He turned his two car garage into a guest quarters where he can host family and friends when they come to visit him. He also has a chapel in his home where he celebrates Eucharist regularly.

What started out as a parish ministry in the Diocese of Sacramento has turned out to be a world-wide ministry as a chaplain in the United States Army. The world is a better place because of the faithful life of ministry of Father Tom.

Father Tom in Retirement



Photo by John E Boll 2014

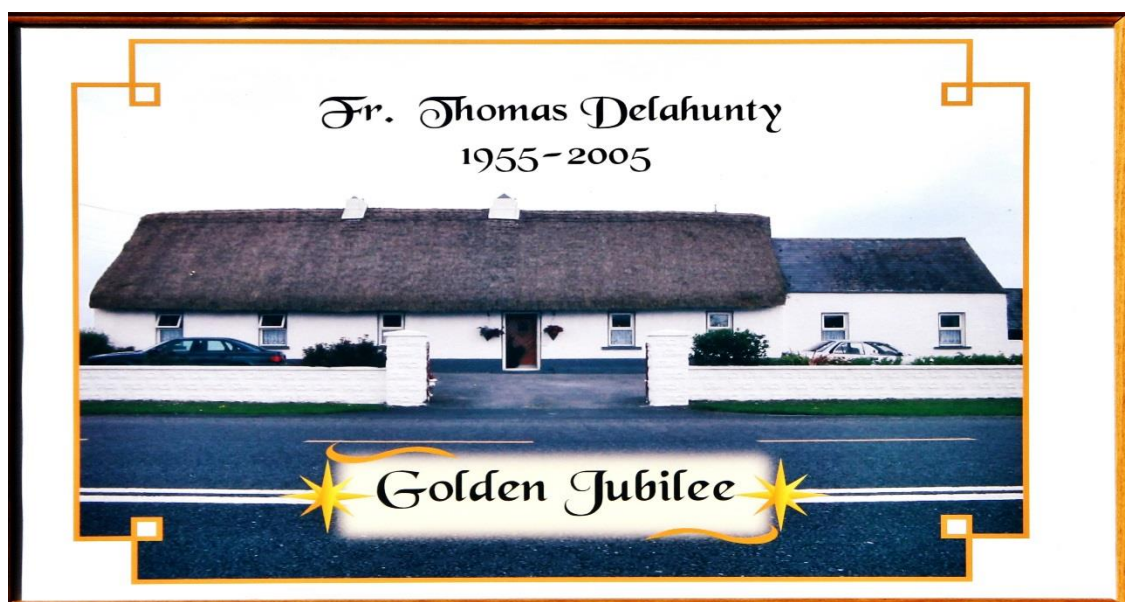
Father Tom's Home in Cameron Park

Thank you, Father Tom, for the many years of service you have given to the People of God as a parish priest and a military chaplain. We wish you continued good health and many years of happy retirement in the Sierra foothills.

Ad Multos Annos!



Cameron Park Golf Course and Country Club



Published with the permission of Father Delahunty