

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

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Father John E Boll

No 45

Monsignor Raymond Charles Rolf

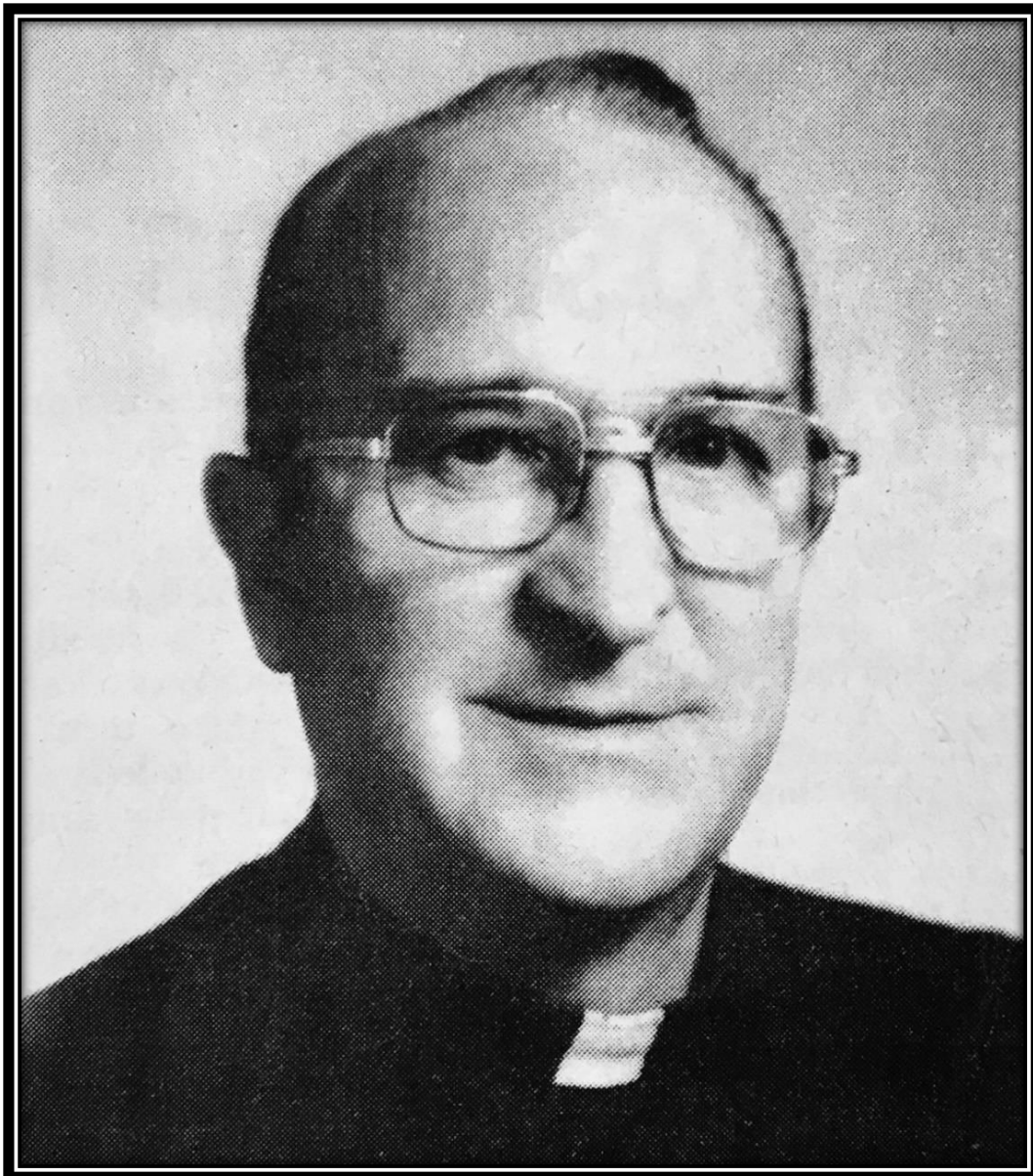
Native of Mount Sterling, Illinois

Priest of the Archdiocese of San Francisco

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor of Saint Anthony Parish, Walnut Grove, California

July 16, 1919 – November 21, 1983



Raymond Charles Rolf, son of Bernard Rolf and Catherine McCoy, was born on July 16, 1919 in Mount Sterling, Illinois. Ray had two brothers, Bernard and Vincent. The Rolf family moved to California and settled in the East Bay City of San Leandro.

BEGINNING OF EDUCATION

Ray began his primary education in 1926 in the Hayward public school system. He spent his second-grade academic year at Saint Mary parish school in San Leandro and after that year, he returned to the public-school system until he graduated from the eighth grade in 1934.

He attended Hayward High School for two years and in 1936 entered Saint Joseph Seminary High School in Mountain View where he completed his last two years of high school. He then spent his first two years of college at Saint Joseph College and moved on to Saint Patrick Seminary in Menlo Park where he completed college and received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1943.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Patrick Seminary, Menlo Park

Ray began his theological studies at Saint Patrick Seminary in Menlo Park during World War II. In order for seminary students to be deferred from military service during these war years, seminarians attended classes throughout the year. Consequently, Ray completed his theological studies in three years instead of four.

ORDAINED A PRIEST FOR SAN FRANCISCO

Raymond was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of San Francisco on June 15, 1946 by Archbishop John J Mitty at Saint Mary Cathedral in San Francisco.

FIRST APPOINTMENT, SAINT MARY PARISH, STOCKTON

At this time, the city of Stockton was part of the Archdiocese of San Francisco and Father Rolf's first appointment was to Saint Mary parish in Stockton where he served for seven years, 1946 to 1953. In 1947, he joined the National Guard and served as chaplain to the 49th Artillery Division of the California National Guard, a post he held for ten years.



Photo by Gene Wright

Saint Mary of the Assumption Church, Stockton, California

SECOND APPOINTMENT – ALAMEDA

Father Rolf's next appointment was to Saint Joseph Parish in Alameda where he served for two years, 1953-55. He excelled during these two years and by his involvement in the life of the community, he was honored by being named *Man of the Year* in Alameda County.



Photo by Neil Hallare from the web

Basilica of Saint Joseph, Alameda, California

APPOINTED CHAPLAIN TO THE CALIFORNIA MEDICAL FACILITY, VACAVILLE

On July 1, 1955, Archbishop Mitty appoint Father Rolf chaplain to the new California Medical Facility in Vacaville. He took up residence at Saint Mary Parish in Vacaville where Father Lawrence Ryan was pastor of the parish. Father Ray served as Catholic chaplain to the medical facility for the next seven years until 1962.

CREATION OF THREE NEW DIOCESES IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

On February 21, 1962, Pope John XXIII appointed Sacramento Bishop Joseph T McGucken archbishop of San Francisco to succeed Archbishop John J Mitty who died on October 15, 1961. At the same time, Pope John created three new dioceses in Northern California, the dioceses of Oakland, Stockton and Santa Rosa. Bishop Alden J Bell, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, was appointed bishop of Sacramento on March 30, 1962.

As a result of the creation of three new dioceses, the Archdiocese of San Francisco and Diocese of Sacramento had boundary changes. In Sacramento's case, Solano County was transferred from San Francisco to Sacramento. This meant that the parishes of Solano County became part of the Diocese of Sacramento including the California Medical Facility in Vacaville. By that action, Father Raymond Rolf automatically became a priest of the Diocese of Sacramento.

PASTOR OF SAINT PATRICK PARISH, JACKSON

Bishop Bell was installed as bishop of Sacramento on May 15, 1962 and in that same year, he appointed Father Rolf pastor of Saint Patrick Parish in Jackson. Although Father Rolf's time in Jackson was only two years, he oversaw the renovation of the Jackson church. He thoroughly enjoyed his ministry with the Jackson community nestled in the Sierra foothill of Amador County.

I was a college student at Saint Pius X Seminary in Galt at this time and the Salvatorian Fathers who staffed the seminary invited Father Rolf to give a day of recollection to the students of the seminary. We students were impressed by this tall and well-spoken priest who used concrete imagery and stories that helped us remember what was said.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Patrick Church and Rectory, Jackson, California

APPOINTED PASTOR OF CHICO

On September 24, 1964, Bishop Bell appointed Father Rolf pastor of Saint John the Baptist Church in Chico. One of Father Rolf's first tasks was to renovate the parish church. He was a hands-on kind of leader and focused his attention on this project which turned out well. But Father Ray's time in Chico would be short.

NAMED RECTOR OF THE CATHEDRAL

No doubt, Bishop Bell took note of Father Rolf's ability to oversee renovation work because the bishop was planning to do a major renovation of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Sacramento within the next five years. So it is no surprise that four years later, on September 4, 1968, Bishop Bell appointed Father Rolf rector of the Cathedral in Sacramento.

In the fall of 1969, I was assigned to the Cathedral for my pastoral year. In that era, transitional deacons spent the year in a parish of the diocese. I remembered meeting Father Rolf at the Galt seminary in 1963 and looked forward to spending my pastoral year with him at the Cathedral.

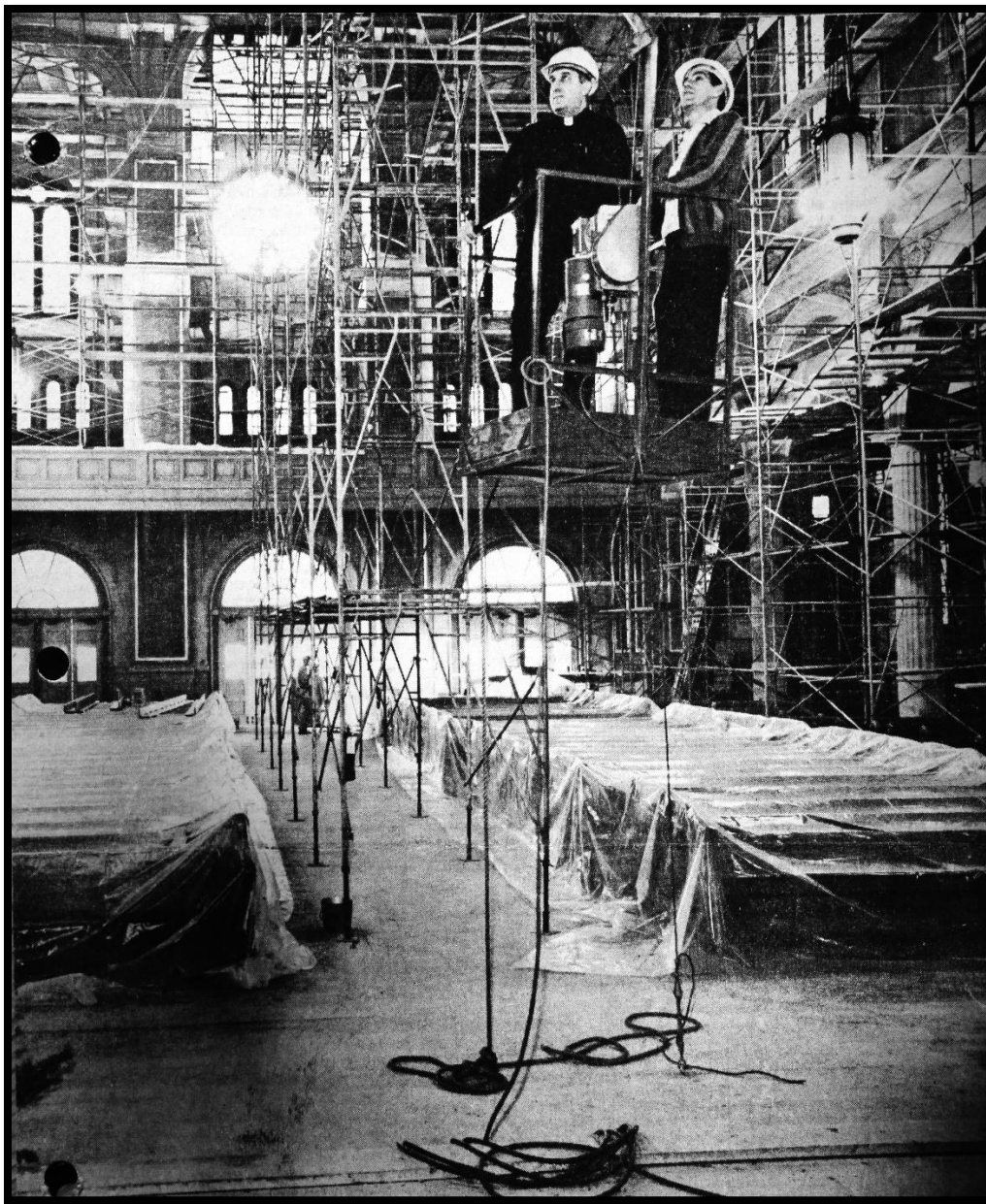


Photo by the Sacramento Bee

Father Rolf oversees the Cathedral Renovation in 1970

The renovation planning of the Sacramento Cathedral was already in process in 1969. There was a committee that Father Rolf had to work with on this project. Much to my surprise, he invited me to sit in on the planning meetings. These meetings ended up being very frustrating for Father Rolf because there were some committee members who held strong opinions about the renovation. Making decisions was sometimes contentious and often tedious which frustrated him.

The Cathedral renovation took about a year to complete and as frustrating as the process was at times, the renovation turned out well and most people thought the project was a great success.



Photo by John E Boll

The Renovated Cathedral in 1971

FATHER ROLF WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN ESTABLISHING THE PRIESTS' RETIREMENT FUND

Perhaps it was because of his experience working for the State of California at the Vacaville Medical Facility which had a retirement policy for its employees, but Father Rolf was the one who raised the idea to create a priests' retirement plan. He spoke to Bishop Bell about the idea and to the then Senate of Priests. He worked with Bishop Bell and a committee to establish a Priests' Retirement Fund as the main driving force to write a policy for the plan.

One of the issues Father Ray felt strongly about was providing priests with an opportunity to retire from active ministry at age 65. Bishop Bell accepted the bi-laws of the retirement policy, including the age of 65 when a priest may retire.

Many priests of the diocese have retired at age 65 thanks to Monsignor Rolf who was the leading proponent for establishing a retirement fund and writing the policy guidelines.

NAMED A MONSIGNOR

As Bishop Bell approached the age of 75 and planned to retire, he wanted to thank certain priests who were very helpful to him during his tenure as bishop of Sacramento. On January 21, 1977, Father Raymond Rolf was named a monsignor by Pope Paul VI.

Monsignor Rolf served as the rector of the Sacramento Cathedral for twelve years and wanted to begin slowing down until age 65 when he planned to retire. An ideal parish that would meet his plan to prepare for retirement became available and he applied for it.

FINAL PARISH ASSIGNMENT

On August 1, 1980, Bishop Francis Quinn, the newly appointed bishop of the Diocese of Sacramento, appointed Monsignor Rolf pastor of Saint Anthony Parish in Walnut Grove. He enjoyed this small family-oriented parish along the Sacramento River. During his three years in Walnut Grove, he chose to cook his own meals and clean his house. He also made time to catch up on his fishing in the Sacramento River which flowed through the center of Walnut Grove. This rural community was the perfect setting for him.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Anthony Church, Walnut Grove

RETIREMENT AND DEATH COME TO MONSIGNOR ROLF

As Monsignor Rolf was preparing to retire, he was diagnosed with cancer. He officially retired on October 31, 1983 and died three weeks later on Monday, November 21, 1983, at Mercy General Hospital in Sacramento at the age of 64.

MASS OF CHRISTIAN BURIAL

A Vigil was celebrated for Monsignor Rolf on Tuesday evening, November 22, 1983, at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. The next day, Bishop Quinn was the main celebrant of the Mass of Christian Burial for Monsignor Rolf.

At his request, Monsignor Rolf's body was laid to rest at Holy Sepulcher Cemetery in Hayward where his parents are buried. He was survived by his sister-in-law Jean Rolf and his nieces and nephews Susan, Michael, Vincent, Janet and Tom Rolf.

IN MEMORIAM

My experience of Father Rolf comes from working with him at the Cathedral for four years during my diaconate pastoral year and three years as a priest at the Cathedral. He was a hands-on kind of leader and was not afraid of work. In fact, he enjoyed doing physical work.

During his early years as a priest, Father Ray was a popular young priest. It was refreshing to hear that as a young assistant in Alameda County, he was honored as citizen of the year. He was close to his widowed mother Catherine and regularly drove to Hayward to visit her at the family home.

The renovation process of the Cathedral in 1970-71 took a lot out of Ray because he had to deal with some strong-minded and vocal members on the committee. He was used to being in charge and making decisions on his own. These conflicts added pressure and caused frustration to him and affected his health. His last assignment in Walnut Grove away from the pressures at the Cathedral was probably the happiest years in his life of ministry.

The priests of the diocese today can thank Monsignor Rolf and the other priests who served on the Priests' Retirement Committee who were instrumental in establishing the retirement fund and policy we enjoy today. Because his life was cut short by cancer at the age of 64, Monsignor Rolf never shared in the fruits of his work that made it possible for priests of our diocese to retire at age 65.

The young Father Rolf never imagined that he would become a priest of the Diocese of Sacramento as he was ministering in Solano County. But the change in diocesan boundaries changed all that in an instant. He was a faithful and dedicated priest and the Diocese of Sacramento is grateful that he journeyed with us as a priest of the Diocese of Sacramento for 21 years.

*Eternal rest grant to
Monsignor Ray, O Lord.
May he now enjoy his rest.*

*May his soul and the souls
Of all the faithful departed
Abide now in peace.*

Amen



Hope Valley, California