

The Anglican Province of Christ the King

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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Archbishop Dies at 91

Robert Sherwood Morse, the retired Archbishop of the Anglican Province of Christ The King, died peacefully, at age 91, on Thursday, May 28, at 2:25 a.m. in his house in Berkeley. His wife, Nancy Morse, and their daughter, Nina Gladish, were at his bedside. The cause of death was pancreatic cancer.

“All I ever wanted to be was a college chaplain,” he once said, but God had greater plans for him. On Jan. 28, 1978, in Denver he was consecrated Bishop of the newly formed Diocese of Christ The King, an orthodox Anglo-Catholic church body formed in 1977 to ensure the continuation of historic Anglican Christianity in America. This traditional Diocese arose in response to radical changes made in the fundamental faith and practices of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America (ECUSA).

As more traditional priests and churches joined this movement, the Diocese

became a nation-wide Province and he was elected Archbishop. He retired as Archbishop of the Province on January 25, 2008.

In his 64 years as a priest and bishop, Archbishop Morse created college ministries at Stanford University and the University of California at Berkeley, founded the York School in Monterey, and established many churches in the Bay Area, including St. Stephen's in Yountville, St. Thomas's Church in San Francisco, and St. Ann Chapel in Palo Alto. At the time of his death he was acting provost of the traditional St. Joseph of Arimathea Anglican Theological Seminary in Berkeley, which he founded in 1979.

The Most Reverend Robert Sherwood Morse was born April 10, 1924, in San Francisco, California, to Carl Lambert Morse and Estelle Scott Morse. He grew up in nearby Burlingame, graduating from Burlingame High School.

As a young boy, he often accompanied his father to Lick Observatory on Mt. Hamilton to converse with his father's mentors. The visits inspired the future Archbishop with a wonder-filled curiosity at the infinite space of the universe. He later said that he "backed into theology" through history while trying to understand "why mankind was so mixed up".

In 1942 he enlisted in the U.S. Army and served in the Infantry Signal Corps in Alaska until his discharge in 1945. He received his B.A. from Pacific College (now University of the Pacific), Stockton, California, in 1948, where he excelled in

intercollegiate forensics. He graduated from Seabury-Western Theological Seminary in Illinois in 1950.

Archbishop Morse was ordained an Episcopal deacon on July 8, 1950, and a priest on February 22, 1951. From 1950 to 1952 he served as an assistant at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Burlingame, California. In 1951 he established St. Elizabeth's Church in South San Francisco and was its Vicar until 1957. He also established the Episcopal Chaplaincy at Stanford University in 1952. And in 1954, he established St. Edmund's Episcopal Church in Pacifica, California. In 1957 he moved to Berkeley and established the Episcopal Chaplaincy at the University of California at Berkeley, working there from 1957 to 1961.

In 1962 he co-founded York School in Monterey, California, originally as an Episcopal college preparatory school for boys, and was Assistant Headmaster from 1961 to 1965. In 1966 he was called to be Rector of St. Peter's Church in Oakland, California, where he served until 1984.

In 1977 the Rev. Morse and other concerned Episcopal clergy and laity gathered in St. Louis, Missouri. They set forth a statement of faith called the 'Affirmation of Saint Louis', which expressed their commitment as Episcopalians to orthodox Christian doctrine and discipline. In separating from ECUSA, they created the Diocese of Christ the King, which included six western parishes. In 1978, Father Morse was consecrated Bishop by The Rt. Rev. Albert A. Chambers,

retired Episcopal Bishop of Springfield, Illinois, acting as chief consecrator with two co-consecrators to ensure the transmission of the Apostolic Succession.

As new congregations were established across the country they petitioned to affiliate with the emerging Diocese. Soon Bishop Morse was responsible for a nation-wide Anglo-Catholic diocese. In 1991, the Diocese of Christ the King voted to divide into three geographical dioceses, and later added a fourth diocese, under a provincial structure creating the Anglican Province of Christ the King. The bishops of the dioceses then elected Bishop Morse as the first Archbishop of the Province.

Bishop Morse was a charismatic figure. Standing six feet three inches tall, he was crowned with a shock of white hair and his deep voice was resonant. He was an avid reader of T.S. Eliot, Boris Pasternak, and C.S. Lewis and often quoted them in his sermons. His favorite lines from Pasternak's poem "The Wedding" were: "For life, too, is only an instant,/ Only the dissolving of ourselves/ In the selves of all others/ As if bestowing a gift."

The former Episcopal priest and Zen philosopher Alan Watts discerned a passionate spirit in the young Father Morse and wrote in his memoir *In My Own Way* that "His subsequent success as a priest derives from the fact that he is one of the few people who genuinely feels that God is exuberant love."

In 1957, Archbishop Morse married Nancy Burkett Nickel, a beautiful widow with two children, at St. Mary the Virgin Church in San Francisco with

Bishop Karl Morgan Block officiating. Years later, a young student once asked Archbishop Morse, “How do you separate out the love for your wife and your love for Jesus?” His response: “I don’t.”

The Archbishop’s love for God would be translated into a medley of friendship with non-believers, seekers, the lonely, and the unloved. His parting words with a friend were nearly always, “All is Grace.” In 2010 the 91-year old architect John Carl Warnecke, a former agnostic who had been diagnosed with cancer, asked his old friend to baptize him. During the ceremony, the Archbishop poured a jug of ice-cold water over his head “To wake him up!”

In his later years the Archbishop developed a ministry to the oarsmen of the University of California Crew Team, who lived in a dormitory behind St. Joseph’s of Arimathea in Berkeley. Aside from their rent, the oarsmen were required to serve at chapel services. Here they were likely to hear the Archbishop say, “Life is a journey with God, into God.” Just before his death, the crew team named one of their boats *Archbishop Robert S. Morse* in his honor.

Archbishop Morse was also the executive director of the American Church Union, editor of *American Church News*, founder and editor of the *New Oxford Review*, and a director of St. Dorothy's Rest, a retreat complex near Sebastopol, California.

He is survived by his wife Nancy, a daughter, Mrs. John (Nina) Gladish, a

son Mr. John Nickel, nine grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

A funeral mass will be held on Saturday, June 6 at 10:00 a.m. at St. Peter's Church, 6013 Lawton Avenue, Oakland, CA. Memorial contributions can be sent to the Anglican Province of Christ the King, 2725 Sacramento Street, San Francisco, CA 94115, or to St. Joseph of Arimathea Anglican Theological College, 2316 Bowditch, P.O. Box 40020, Berkeley, CA 94704.

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