

The Diocese of St. Petersburg



After a serious outbreak of yellow fever in Tampa in 1888 that killed three of the four priests stationed there, Bishop John Moore of St. Augustine turned to the Jesuits from New Orleans for help. Not only did the Jesuit Fathers take over St. Louis Church, built in 1859, but they were responsible for founding many of the early parishes and schools in the area. In 1905, a new church was constructed in Romanesque style to replace St. Louis and the parish was renamed Sacred Heart. It is the oldest parish and church within the diocese.

In the 1880s, the Catholic colony of San Antonio was established in east Pasco County. Within a short time, a church, St. Anthony of Padua, and school were up and running. Benedictine monks and nuns came and Florida's first two monastic communities, Saint Leo Abbey and Holy Name Monastery, were born. These monks and nuns worked tirelessly throughout the area, often against the backdrop of anti-Catholic bigotry. Other early pioneer religious included the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, who founded the oldest Catholic school in Tampa in 1881; the Sisters of St. Joseph, who came to educate African-American children; the Allegany Franciscan Sisters who established two Catholic hospitals (St. Joseph, Tampa and St. Anthony, St. Petersburg); and the Redemptorists and Salesians, both of whom worked in the immigrant Latin community of Tampa. The Salesian priests and brothers founded Mary Help of Christians School in 1928.

The population and economic boom following World War II brought major changes to the area, much of it under the administration of the Sixth Bishop of St. Augustine, Joseph P. Hurley, who presided over the largest institutional development in the history of the Florida Church. Not only did the archbishop purchase property for future development, he also established many new parishes and schools and recruited many priests from Ireland and the northern United States to staff them.

More than 40% of the parishes within the diocese today were founded during the Hurley years (1940-1967). The Catholic Church continued to grow on Florida's west coast as more and more people migrated to the area, many of them Catholic. They continued the practice of their faith even in the midst of great cultural change.

On June 17, 1968, the Diocese of St. Petersburg was formally established with Bishop Charles B. McLaughlin as its founding bishop. The newly created diocese stretched along the Gulf Coast from Crystal River to Ft. Myers. Bishop McLaughlin's first tasks were to establish a new diocesan structure for unifying priests, lay staff, policy, and people; to deal with the challenges of a rapidly increasing population; and to implement the vision and reforms of Vatican Council II. He inherited many fine priests and relied on their assistance in the years to come. A pilot, he often flew from event to event to try to keep pace with the pastoral demands of a flock strewn



Crest of the Diocese of St. Petersburg.



Bishop Robert N. Lynch.

over two hundred miles from end to end, a characteristic that earned him the affectionate nickname "Hurricane Charlie." The bishop had a profound influence on the diocese he founded. Clergy and laity were saddened by his sudden death, on December 14, 1978.

Monsignor W. Thomas Larkin, of Clearwater, was appointed Second Bishop of St. Petersburg on April 17, 1979 by his former classmate in Rome, Pope John Paul II. Tremendous growth continued during Bishop Larkin's tenure. His ambitious pastoral plan resulted in the establishment of fifteen new parishes and three new schools as well as in the creation of a new diocese out of the lower portion of the Diocese of St. Petersburg. Bishop Larkin expanded the outreach of the social ministries of the diocese, established a radio station (WBVM 90.5 FM), and further sought to keep pace with the population growth and economic expansion of the 1980s. He retired due to ill health in 1988.

In 1989 John Clement Favalora, formerly bishop of Alexandria, became Third Bishop of St. Petersburg. He took a number of steps to consolidate the various administrative functions of the diocese through reorganization of the Church's many social outreach programs. A second radio station (WLMS 88.3 FM) was established. He made Catholic education his top priority and supported the Catholic Education Foundation to ensure the continued existence of local Catholic schools. In November 1994, Bishop Favalora was named Third Archbishop of Miami.

Monsignor Robert N. Lynch, of the Archdiocese of Miami, became Fourth Bishop of St. Petersburg in 1996. He commissioned the building of a new Pastoral Center to bring together under one roof all the various ministries, and made Catholic education a top priority with the establishment of several new schools including a new Catholic High School and the expansion of others. He fostered the development of small Christian faith-sharing communities and supported an institute to educate future lay leaders within the Church. Bishop Lynch also started plans for the building of a retreat center for the spiritual growth of the people and to provide for the spiritual needs of young and old alike.

Hundreds of lay men and women exercise ministries in local parishes, schools, hospitals, and religious centers. The laity are involved in the apostolic work of each parish. They are also engaged in assisting the clergy in the administration of the temporalities of parishes by serving as parish financial administrators and as members of parish finance councils.

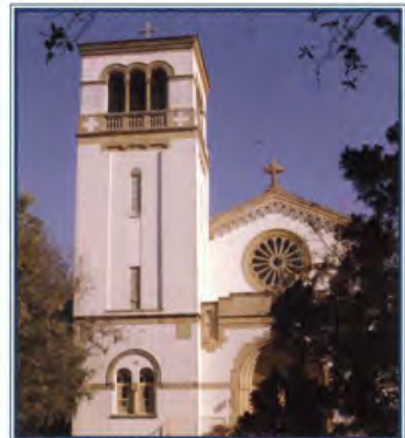
For more information visit www.dioceseofstpete.org



Cathedral of St. Jude the Apostle.



Interior of Sacred Heart Church, Tampa.



Saint Leo Abbey Church, St. Leo.