

## The Diocese of pensacola-tallahassee



he Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee was established on November 6, 1975. Throughout Northwest Florida's long recorded history, portions of this territory have belonged to the dioceses of Havana, Mobile, Savannah, and St. Augustine. Currently, the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee includes the counties of Bay, Calhoun, Escambia, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Madison, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, Taylor, Wakulla, Walton, and Washington. The diocese covers 14,044 square miles and is home to over 67,000 Catholics dispersed throughout 65 parishes, missions, and military bases. The principal patron of the diocese is St. Michael the Archangel, after the diocese's oldest church, located in downtown Pensacola, which has faithfully served the community since 1781.

The Catholic population is most numerous in the western section of the diocese (Pensacola) where 40% of the total population live. The remaining 60% are mostly divided among Fort Walton Beach, Panama City, and Tallahassee. There are seven rural counties along the 200-mile stretch of highway from the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Pensacola to the Co-Cathedral of St. Thomas More in Tallahassee.

Northwest Florida is not highly populated or industrialized. It is made up mostly of rural farming communities which have dedicated vast acreage to growing trees for major paper product companies. Economic well-being is greatly due to the large military presence in the diocese, which boasts three Air Force bases, three Naval bases, and one Coast Guard base.



Bishop John H. Ricard, S.S.J., D.D., Ph.D.



Crest of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee.

First bishop of Pensacola-Tallahassee was Rene H. Gracida. He led this diocese from its infancy in 1975 until 1983. Before he was ordained to the priesthood for the new Diocese of Miami in 1959, Bishop Gracida was a combat flight engineer during World War II. He also worked in an architecture firm in Texas, and taught the subject at the University of Houston, where he earned his architecture degree. Bishop Gracida's education also includes a master's degree in divinity from St. Vincent Seminary in Pennsylvania. With the Miami Archdiocese, he served as education superintendent and vicar general. He also served as assistant pastor, administrator, pastor and rector of Florida parishes, not only in Miami, but also in Pompano Beach, Hallandale, Deerfield Beach, and Naples. He was ordained Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Miami in 1971, and four years later he assumed the bishopric of Pensacola-Tallahassee.

After Bishop Gracida was moved to the Diocese of Corpus Christi, Texas, J. Keith Symons served Pensacola-Tallahassee, from 1983 – 1990. Symons was auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of St. Petersburg in 1981. Before that, he was vicar general of that diocese. He moved to Florida with his family in 1945 where he graduated from Sts. Peter and Paul High School, Miami, in 1949. He attended St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield, Connecticut, and St. Mary Seminary in Baltimore. He was ordained a priest in 1958 and served in parishes in Largo and Pinellas Park. Pope John Paul II named him titular bishop of Siguritanus and first auxiliary bishop of St. Petersburg on January 22, 1981. On October 4, 1983, Pope John Paul II transferred him to Pensacola-Tallahassee to become its second bishop, where he was installed on November 8, 1983. Then on June 2, 1990, Pope John Paul II transferred him to Palm Beach where he served as that diocese's second bishop until 1998.

Bishop John M. Smith was Pensacola-Tallahassee's third bishop. He served the diocese from 1991 to 1995. Bishop Smith was ordained to the priesthood in 1961 before earning a canon law degree from The Catholic University of America, in Washington. He was a parish priest at St. Joseph Parish in Oradell, NJ, from 1973 to 1982. He then went to Rome, where he directed the continuing education theology program for U.S. priests at the Pontifical North American College. After that, he was pastor of St. Mary Parish in Dumont, NJ, before becoming auxiliary bishop of Newark in 1988. Bishop Smith currently serves as Bishop of the Diocese of Trenton, since his transfer there in 1995.

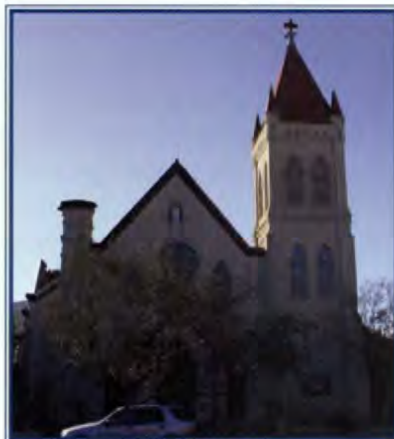
Following a year of vacancy during which the late Monsignor James Amos served as Diocesan Administrator, Bishop John H. Ricard, S.S.J., was installed as Pensacola-Tallahassee's fourth bishop on March 13, 1997. Bishop Ricard moved from the Archdiocese of Baltimore where he had served as auxiliary bishop since his episcopal ordination on July 2, 1984. He is past chair of Catholic Relief which provides worldwide humanitarian aid in over 80 countries around the world. He currently serves as chairman of the bishop's Social Development and World Peace, International Policy Committee.

Bishop Ricard was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and upon completion of high school entered the Josephite College Seminary in Newburgh, New York. He completed his theological training at St. Joseph Seminary in Washington, D.C., and was ordained to the priesthood on May 25, 1968. He received a Masters degree from Tulane University in New Orleans in 1970 and a Doctoral degree from The Catholic University, in Washington, D.C., in 1984.

**For more information visit [www.ptdiocese.org](http://www.ptdiocese.org)**



*Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Pensacola.*



*St. Michael Church, Pensacola.*



*Co-Cathedral of St. Thomas More, Tallahassee.*