



Diocese of St. Petersburg History Timeline (1513-2017)

1513 – Spanish Explorer Juan Ponce de León “discovers” Florida and names it.

1528 – Fr. Juan Suárez, OFM celebrates the first Easter Mass ever in Florida in the Jungle Prada area of St. Petersburg. As part of the Narváez expedition, Suárez arrives with 12 other priests. Suárez had been appointed Bishop of Florida, but will perish several months later off the Texas coast.

1539 – The explorer Hernando de Soto arrives in Tampa Bay and names it *Bahía Espiritu Santo* (Holy Spirit Bay). His expedition includes a dozen priests, but they quickly march north.

1549 – Martyrdom of the Servants of God, Fr. Luis Cáncer, Fr. Diego de Tolosa, and Br. Tomás Fuentes. Fr. Luis was a famed Dominican missionary who spent about a month in the Tampa Bay area among the Tocobaga Indians before he was martyred by them on June 26th in the Safety Harbor area.

1567-68 – Following the establishment of St. Augustine in 1565, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés establishes a short-lived Jesuit mission (including a chapel) in the Safety Harbor area.

1704 – Samuel and Elesio, two Tocobaga Indians from the Tampa Bay area living in the land of the Apalachee, are martyred by Creek Indians for refusing to denounce the Catholic faith and remove their crosses.

1793 – Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction for Florida and the Tampa Bay area is transferred from Cuba to a new diocese encompassing Louisiana and Florida.

1857 – Florida receives its first resident bishop in the person of Augustine Verot who is appointed Vicar Apostolic on December 11th and thirteen years later will officially become the First Bishop of St. Augustine.

1859 – The first Catholic church is built in Tampa and named St. Louis. Named in honor of the martyred 16th Century Dominican missionary, it formally becomes a parish the following year with the appointment of its first pastor, Fr. C.S. Mailley.

1874 – St. Louis Catholic Cemetery is established in downtown Tampa.

1877 – Following the death of Bishop Verot, Bishop John Moore is appointed the Second Bishop of St. Augustine.

1881 – Two Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary arrive in Tampa to start a school, the Academy of the Holy Names. The school opens with 35 students and no textbooks. It would move several times before finally settling on Bayshore Blvd.

1882 – The Catholic Colony of San Antonio is founded in east Pasco County by the former chief judge of the Arizona Territories, Judge Edmund F. Dunne.

1883 – St. Anthony of Padua Church opens in San Antonio for the Catholic settlers.

1884 – Mrs. Cecelia Morse, a widow with six children, opens the first parochial school, St. Anthony of Padua School in San Antonio. It is the oldest school of any kind in Pasco County.

1886 – Fr. Gerald Piltz, OSB, a Benedictine monk from St. Vincent's Abbey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania is recruited by Bishop Moore to come to San Antonio as pastor to minister to the area's ever-growing German speaking population.

1887 – An outbreak of Yellow Fever takes the lives of three diocesan priests in Tampa.

1888- The Jesuits return to Florida after nearly 150 years to take over the administration of St. Louis Church in Tampa. They are given pastoral care of all of south Florida by Bishop Moore and from their base in Tampa, the Jesuits will minister to a wide variety of Catholic communities in the Tampa Bay area and throughout Florida.

1888- A second Catholic parish, Sacred Heart, is established in Pasco County, just north of San Antonio for German settlers from Minnesota. The settlers name their community St. Joseph.

1889 – A small church is built in Tarpon Springs, which is initially administered by visiting Jesuits. This would later become St. Ignatius of Antioch parish.

1889 – Benedictine Monks and Nuns arrive in Pasco County to establish St. Leo Abbey and Holy Name Monastery. Bishop Moore gives the Benedictine Monks not just St. Anthony of Padua parish, but pastoral care for all of Pasco, Hernando, and Citrus counties. The Benedictine Sisters take over St. Anthony School and go on to help establish and administer many other Florida schools.

1890 – The influx of cigar workers from Cuba and Spain necessitates the establishment of a parish in Ybor City to reach out to the immigrant Latin community. Initially named, Our Lady of Mercy, the parish would be renamed Our Lady of Perpetual Help in 1937 with the construction of the current church.

1890 – St. Leo College opens in Pasco County with thirty-two students. After a number of iterations, including as a military academy and a college prep school, it becomes a four-year college in the 1960's and a university in 1999.

1892 – The first parish in Hernando County, St. Anthony the Abbot, is built and administered by the Benedictines.

1894 – The Sisters of the Holy Name of Jesus and Mary establish a school for Black children, St. Peter Claver, however it is the victim of racially motivated arson just ten days after opening. The school was relocated and reopened that same year. It officially becomes a parish in 1926.

1896 – St. Joseph in West Tampa is established as another parish and school to reach out to Tampa's Latin population. Their first church would be built six years later.

1899 – Jesuit High School is founded in downtown Tampa. It is relocated to its present Himes Avenue location in 1956.

1902- The first three Knights of Columbus councils in Florida are established including Council #667 in Tampa.

1903- St. Benedict the Moor, for black children of Cuban descent, is built by the Sisters of St. Joseph in Ybor City. It operates until 1952.

1904 – St. Katherine Drexel visits St. Peter Claver and St. Benedict the Moor schools in Tampa, both of which she was supporting. To date, she is the only canonized saint to have ever visited the area.

1905– After eight years of construction and a cost of \$250,000, the Jesuits replace St. Louis Church with a stunning Romanesque jewel, Sacred Heart. It is consecrated by the new bishop of St. Augustine, William Kenny, in the presence of the Apostolic Delegate.

1908 – St. Mary, Our Lady of Grace becomes the first Catholic church in the City of St. Petersburg. The current grand octagonal structure would not be built until 1929.

1912 – The Benedictines found St. Joseph in Zephyrhills and the following year: Our Lady Queen of Peace in New Port Richey and St. Rita in Dade City.

1914 - Michael Joseph Curley becomes the Fourth Bishop of St. Augustine; in 1921 he succeeds Cardinal Gibbons as the 10th Archbishop of Baltimore.

1917 – Florida governor, Sidney Catts, stirs up anti-Catholic prejudices statewide with, among other things, claims that the German monks of St. Leo Abbey were in league with Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany against the United States, and that the pope planned to move the Vatican to San Antonio.

1922 – The new bishop of St. Augustine, Bishop Patrick Barry, purchases land for a second parish in St. Petersburg, St. Paul.

1922 – The Jesuits build Most Holy Name for the growing Italian immigrant community in Ybor City. The following year the Salesians are given care of the parish for a decade; the parish would close in 1975 with its stained glass windows being given to Most Holy Name of Jesus Church in Gulfport.

1924 – The Catholic Women’s Club is established in Tampa.

1924 – St. Cecelia Church opens in Clearwater.

1928 – The Salesians open an orphanage for boys, Mary Help of Christians, on East Lake in Tampa. It later transitions to a school and later a parish and a Cristo Rey high school.

1930 – The Allegany Franciscans Sisters accept the invitation to start a school at St. Paul’s in St. Petersburg, the first Catholic school in Pinellas County.

1931 – The first Catholic hospital in the area, St. Anthony’s, is opened in St. Petersburg by the Allegany Franciscans. Three years later they open a second Catholic hospital, St. Joseph’s in Tampa.

1934 – The Redemptorists arrive in Tampa to staff the Ybor City parishes; they would found Most Holy Redeemer three years later and then Epiphany in 1961.

1936 – After arriving in Tampa six years earlier to take over St. Joseph’s School, the Salesian Sisters establish Villa Madonna to care and educate girls, and later boys, from the immigrant Latin community of West Tampa.

1940 - Joseph P. Hurley is appointed the Sixth Bishop of St. Augustine. Nine years later he is given the personal title of Archbishop.

1941 – Christ the King is established as the first diocesan parish in Tampa in over half a century.

1943 – Msgr. George Cummings builds a diocesan summer camp, Our Lady of Good Counsel Camp, in Floral City.

1951 – Archbishop Hurley embarks on an unprecedented 15 year expansion, which locally results in the establishment of 31 new parishes, 23 new schools and the purchase of property for future Church needs.

1953 – St. Benedict in Crystal River becomes the first parish in Citrus County.

1958 – Miami becomes the second Florida diocese to be erected; the Tampa Bay area remains in the Diocese of St. Augustine.

1960 – Calvary Catholic Cemetery opens in Pinellas County.

1962 – Clearwater Central Catholic High School opens.

1963 – Tampa Catholic High School is established.

1965 – The Second Vatican Council concludes after three years. Its vision would have a widespread impact on the soon to be established Diocese of St. Petersburg.

1968 - The Diocese of St. Petersburg is created out of eleven counties on the west coast of Florida. Bishop Charles B. McLaughlin, an auxiliary bishop of Raleigh, North Carolina is installed as the founding bishop.

1969 – The Diocesan Council of Catholic Women is established in the Diocese of St. Petersburg.

1969 – Bishop McLaughlin establishes St. Vincent de Paul parish in Holiday, the first of six new parishes in the northern five counties of the diocese created during his tenure.

1972 – After renting office space for several years, Bishop McLaughlin constructs the diocesan chancery building on diocesan land between Bishop Barry High School and Notre Dame Academy on 9th Avenue North in St. Petersburg.

1973 – Bishop Barry and Notre Dame High Schools are merged to form St. Petersburg Catholic High School.

1978 – Bishop McLaughlin dies suddenly of a heart attack in his home while praying his morning prayers.

1979 – The diocesan administrator, W. Thomas Larkin is appointed and consecrated Second Bishop of St. Petersburg by his friend and former classmate, St. John Paul II.

1980 – Bishop Larkin establishes St. Thomas Aquinas in New Port Richey, the first of fifteen parishes established during his tenure.

1981 - The Catholic Education foundation is set up to support Catholic schools and provide tuition assistance to families.

1984 - The Diocese of Venice is created out of six counties from the lower portion of the Diocese of St. Petersburg as well as territory from the Archdiocese of Miami and the Diocese of Orlando.

1985 – Bishop Larkin announces an ambitious plan to build four new parishes a year for the next ten years. Ultimately, ten new parishes would be established before the plan was suspended due to mounting debt and available clergy personnel.

1986 – A diocesan radio station, 90.5 WBVM Spirit FM, is established in Tampa to provide a broader outreach.

1988 – Bishop Larkin announces his early retirement for health reasons.

1989 – Bishop John C. Favalora from Louisiana is installed as the Third Bishop of St. Petersburg.

1991 - Bishop Favalora incorporates the previous diocesan social outreach ministries into the newly established Catholic Charities of St. Petersburg.

1993 – The Diocese of St. Petersburg celebrates its 25th Anniversary with *A Year of Favor from the Lord*.

1995 – Bishop Favalora is transferred to Miami by St. John Paul II as the Third Archbishop of Miami; Msgr. Brendan Muldoon administers the diocese during the interim.

1996 – Bishop Robert Lynch is consecrated and installed as the Fourth Bishop of St. Petersburg by his predecessor Archbishop John C. Favalora at the Cathedral of St. Jude the Apostle.

1998 – The *Fr. Luis de Cáncer Distinguished Priestly Service Award* is established to honor annually a priest of the Diocese of St. Petersburg for outstanding and selfless service.

1999 – Bishop Lynch establishes the *St. Jude the Apostle Award* to recognize active members of the laity in parishes for their service to the Church.

2000 – The Bishop W. Thomas Larkin Pastoral Center is completed and opened.

2001 – Bishop Lynch launches the first ever diocesan-wide capital campaign, *Journey in Faith*, which will fund a new high school, improvements to the existing high schools as well as other diocesan needs. It will raise 66 million dollars when completed in 2005.

2003 – Bishop McLaughlin Catholic High School opens in Pasco County.

2007 – The Bethany Center, a diocesan retreat and conference center, opens on two beautiful lakes in northern Hillsborough County. The chapel will be dedicated the following year.

2007 – Bishop Lynch launches *Living Eucharist*, a three-year diocesan effort to bring greater understanding of the Eucharist.

2007 – Responding to a need for housing for the homeless, Bishop Lynch starts Pinellas Hope on 10 acres of diocesan land adjacent to Calvary Catholic Cemetery.

2012 – Extensive renovations begin on the Cathedral of St. Jude the Apostle; it will be formally consecrated as a cathedral in September of the following year.

2013 – Bishop Lynch launches a second diocesan-wide capital campaign, *Forward in Faith*, to fund improvements at St. Vincent de Paul Seminary, the construction of Mother Teresa of Calcutta Catholic School, and an addition to St. Anthony Catholic School, among other projects.

2017 – Bishop Gregory L. Parkes is installed as the Fifth Bishop of St. Petersburg.