

SOWING FAITH IN A CATHOLIC FRONTIER: A CONDENSED HISTORY OF THE DIOCESE OF RICHMOND

Editor's note: Throughout the Catholic Diocese of Richmond's bicentennial year, The Catholic Virginian will publish the history of the diocese in the Shine Like Stars in the World section that will appear in the last issue of each month. The content of this section is provided by the Bicentennial Task Force.

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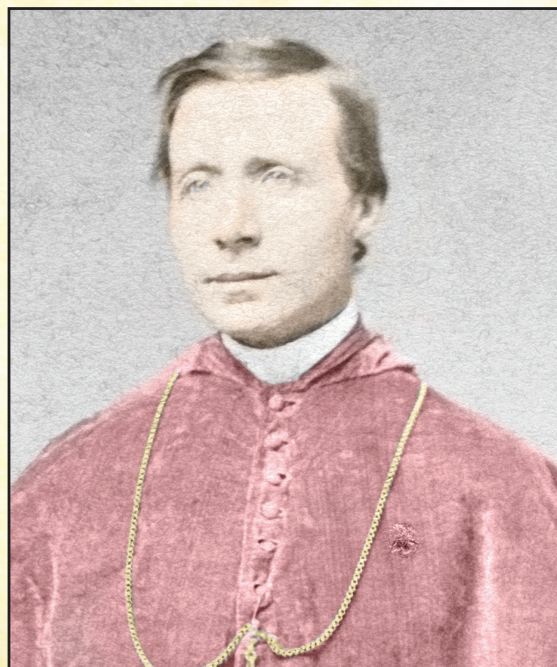
Wheat Among Weeds: Challenges and Changes (1841–1888)

Pope Gregory XVI restored the Richmond Diocese to independent status in 1841.

This decision inaugurated a new era for the Church in Virginia, which included territorial changes and the ravages of the nation's bloodiest war.

*Bishop James Gibbons:
Reconstruction and a Rise to Prominence (1872–1877)*

James Gibbons (1834–1921) succeeded John McGill as the fourth bishop of Richmond in 1872. He was from Baltimore, ordained a priest of that archdiocese, and was then appointed the first vicar apostolic (missionary bishop) of North Carolina (1868) at age 33, earning him the nickname “The Boy Bishop.” During his time in Richmond, Gibbons retained pastoral responsibility for North Carolina — an arrangement that continued until 1882.



Bishop James Gibbons

Gibbons' transfer to Richmond took place during the era of Reconstruction (1865–1877) when the Catholic Church in the South began to evangelize freed slaves. American bishops gath-

ered at the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore (1866) had urged this course of action. (This assembly manifested a spirit of collegiality that characterized the American hierarchy from its inception until the early 1900s, a period during which the Vatican considered the United States to be a missionary territory. The periodic gatherings of American bishops were the forerunners of what became the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.)

In regard to evangelizing African Americans, the few Catholic slave owners in Virginia always had their slaves baptized. Later, during his episcopate in Richmond, Gibbons took tentative steps in the direction proposed by the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore. Yet the results were meager, statistically speaking: for example, there were only 100 black Catholics out of a total black population of 25,000 in the city of Richmond at that time.

Gibbons was far more successful in the realm of apologetics. There he earned national renown during his tenure in Richmond by writing an influential treatise on Catholicism: “Faith of Our Fathers” (1876). A priest of the diocese and poet, Father John Banister Tabb (1845–1909), made stylistic contributions to the book.

“Faith of Our Fathers” presented the Catholic faith positively, a unique approach for the time that reflected a historical reality in the Diocese of Richmond and Gibbons' own experience: Virginia's Catholics were a religious minority striving for acceptance. Parish missions, which spread throughout the diocese, used Gibbons approach. Often led by religious orders, these missions prompted many people to return to the sacraments.

Gibbons left Richmond after five years to become the archbishop of Baltimore (1877). (He was appointed coadjutor, meaning that he would automatically succeed the sitting archbishop, who died before Gibbons even departed Richmond.) Gibbons became America's second cardinal in 1886.

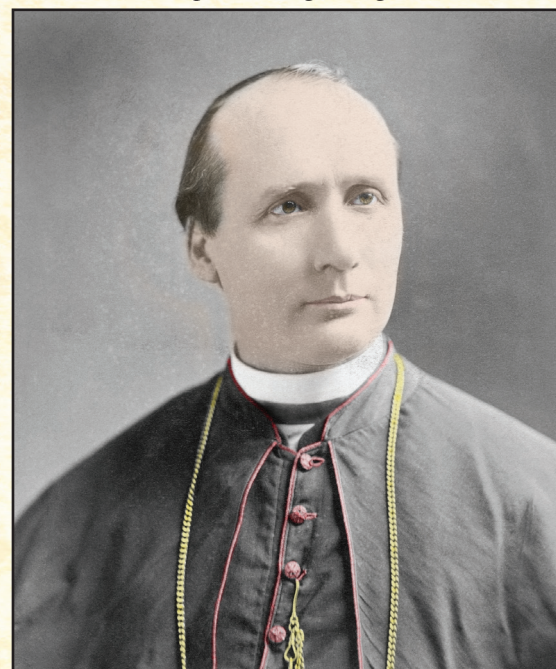
*Bishop John J. Keane:
Evangelization of African Americans, Development of Schools and Lay Spirituality (1878–1888)*

The Diocese of Richmond, which expanded in northern Virginia during Gibbons' episcopate, began to grow in the western region (Roanoke Valley) during the tenure of its next bishop, John J. Keane (1839–1918). Born in Ireland and a priest of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Keane was serving as a pastor in Washington, DC when he was appointed to Richmond in 1878.

Like his predecessor, Keane was simultaneously bishop of Richmond and vicar apostolic of North Carolina (until 1882). The Richmond Diocese realized three pastoral gains during Keane's tenure: the evangelization of African Americans, the development of parochial schools and the promotion of lay spirituality.

Bishop Keane himself initiated the evangelization campaign by conducting prayer services for African Americans and instructing them in the basement of St. Peter's Cathedral (1879). After stressing the importance of this ministry to his priests, Keane raised funds for additional missionary outreach to African Americans. This effort led to the founding of the diocese's first black church (St. Joseph in Richmond, 1885), along with missions and schools.

Priests of the Society of St. Joseph for Foreign Missions, or Josephites (beginning in 1883), and



Bishop John J. Keane

the Franciscan Sisters of St. Mary (beginning in 1885), were largely responsible for these accomplishments. Both orders had been founded at St. Joseph's Missionary College in Mill Hill (London), England.

The first Josephite priest in Richmond and the founder of St. Joseph Church, Father John R. Slattery of New York, became the superior of the Josephites when the American mission separated from Mill Hill (1893). Slattery later aroused controversy when he accused the Church of condoning racism. He then left the priesthood and renounced the Catholic faith (1906).

Several parochial schools for white children, also operated by religious orders, were founded during this period. Notably, Bishop Keane improved the quality of Catholic education by creating a board to evaluate student learning and the academic qualifications of lay teachers (1887). He also bolstered the spiritual life of lay people by promoting regular parish missions and devotion to the Holy Spirit.

Keane resigned as bishop of Richmond in 1888 to focus exclusively on his position as the first rector of the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC (1886–1897). He was appointed the archbishop of Dubuque, Iowa (1900).

A SYNCHRONIZED AND ONLINE ASSEMBLY: THE BICENTENNIAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS

FATHER ANTHONY E. MARQUES

The first of three churches in the Diocese of Richmond named in honor of the Blessed Sacrament is in Harrisonburg (1907). While the community there was still a mission, Father Joseph De Gryse, who had charge of the Harrisonburg mission, urged the seventh bishop of Richmond, Denis J. O'Connell (1912–1926), to have the Eucharist reserved in the church, even though there was no resident priest. This was a major decision which, at that time, would have also required Vatican approval.

In 1916, Father De Gryse wrote to Bishop O'Connell: "Those people, as long as they will not have the presence of the Blessed Sacrament[,] will always be more like Protestants than like Catholics. Their church, to them, is not the House of God, but a mere place of meeting. They are good enough people but they have not imbibed the whole spirit of Faith and I believe that it is mostly due to the absence of the Blessed Sacrament from their midst."

Although Bishop O'Connell's response is unknown, Father De Gryse's letter highlights a key aspect of Catholic identity that was being reinvigorated during that era.

A renewed emphasis on the Eucharist had begun to spread in the Church in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

As part of this movement, Pope St. Pius X (reigned 1903–1914) made two monumental changes to Eucharistic piety: he encouraged frequent and even daily reception of Holy Communion ("Sacrosancta Tridentina Synodus," 1905); and he lowered the age of first holy Communion from adolescence (usually between 10 and 14 years) to age 7 ("Quam singulari," 1910).

Earlier, the first International Eucharistic Congress (IEC) was held in Lille, France (1881). This large-scale gathering sought to promote devotion to the Eucharist and give witness to the Catholic faith.

The mastermind behind the event was Émilie-Marie Tamisier (1834–1910), a French laywoman. She had been guided, among others, by St. Peter Julian Eymard (1811–1868), founder of two religious orders dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament and known as the "Apostle of the Eucharist."

Since the inaugural event, 50 IECs have taken place, about every four years, throughout world; two have been held in the United States (Chicago, 1926; Philadelphia, 1976). Popes lent their support to IECs

from the outset, establishing an office in the Vatican to help coordinate them (1881), and in some cases personally attending the gatherings (St. Paul VI: Bombay, 1964; Bogotá, 1968; John Paul II: Nairobi, 1985; Seoul, 1989; Seville, 1993; Wrocław, 1997; Rome, 2000).

International Eucharistic Congresses have promoted significant theological and pastoral developments through the decades: frequent Communion and the first holy Communion of children (beginning in Lille, 1881); the "re-evangelization" of historically Catholic areas (Manila, 1937); emphasis on the Mass as the source and culmination of the Church's activity (Munich, 1960); and the Eucharist as an impetus for social change (for example, Bombay, 1964; Bogotá, 1968; Philadelphia, 1976).

The growth and development of IECs gave rise to nine national Eucharistic Congresses in the United States (1895–1941). These gatherings, in turn, led to local, diocesan Eucharistic Congresses. Those closest to the Diocese of Richmond are the annual Eucharistic Congresses sponsored by the Archdiocese of Atlanta (since 1996) and the Diocese of Charlotte (since 2005).

The first Eucharistic Congress in the Diocese of Richmond will take place in extraordinary circumstances, as the diocesan bicentennial jubilee has collided with the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Significantly, however, the history of IECs provides individual precedents for the Richmond event.

The 41st IEC (Philadelphia, 1976) took place during the United States bicentennial. The 47th IEC (Rome, 2000) marked a jubilee: two millennia of Christianity. The 48th IEC (Guadalajara, 2004) featured a synchronized event: the celebration of simultaneous Masses in the host city and in Rome because John Paul II was too infirm to travel. The 52nd IEC (Budapest, 2020) has been disrupted by the current pandemic and postponed until next year.

The Eucharistic Congress in the Diocese of Richmond scheduled for Saturday, Nov. 7, has been adapted to fit the changed conditions brought about by COVID-19. Its synchronized and online elements will enable people throughout the diocese to participate at their parish or at home.

The event is scheduled to begin with a morning Mass celebrated by Bishop Knestout at St. Peter's Church (dedicated 1834), the first cathedral of the Diocese of Richmond (1841–1906). A eucharistic

procession will then take place from St. Peter's to the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, and a holy hour of eucharistic adoration will follow. These rites will be livestreamed, and simultaneous processions and holy hours will take place in parishes.

In the afternoon, keynote speeches and breakout sessions will be transmitted online in various languages (English, Spanish and Vietnamese). There will also be tracks for children, youth, young adults and persons with disabilities. The day will conclude with remarks by Bishop Knestout, and, in parishes, the opportunity to participate in the sacrament of penance and the Saturday vigil Mass.

The first-ever Eucharistic Congress in the Diocese of Richmond will be the culmination of the bicentennial jubilee. This is because the celebration of the Eucharist is, according to Vatican Council II, the "source and summit" of the Church's activity ("Lumen gentium," 1964, no. 11).

The various rites, instructions and prayers of the Eucharistic Congress seek to strengthen the communion of the Church (bonds of fellowship) and renew its saving mission along the lines of the bicentennial motto: "Shine like stars in the world, as you hold fast to the word of life" (Phil 2:15–16).

Editor's note: More information about the diocesan Eucharistic Congress is available on the bicentennial website (<https://2020.richmonddiocese.org>).



CHRONOLOGY OF THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF RICHMOND

COMPILED BY FATHER ANTHONY E. MARQUES

1872 January 1 Bishop John McGill dies while in office.

1872 October 20 James Gibbons of Baltimore, vicar apostolic of North Carolina, is installed as the fourth bishop of Richmond.

1876 December Bishop James Gibbons publishes "Faith of Our Fathers," an influential treatise and bestselling book about the Catholic faith.

1877 May 29 Bishop James Gibbons is named coadjutor of Baltimore, and becomes archbishop soon after he is notified of his appointment (October 3).

1878 August 25 John J. Keane, a priest of Baltimore, is ordained the fifth bishop of Richmond.

1885 November 22 Bishop John J. Keane dedicates St. Joseph Parish, Richmond, the first black church in the diocese.

1888 August 28 John J. Keane resigns as bishop of Richmond to focus exclusively on his role as the first rector of The Catholic University of America.