

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.

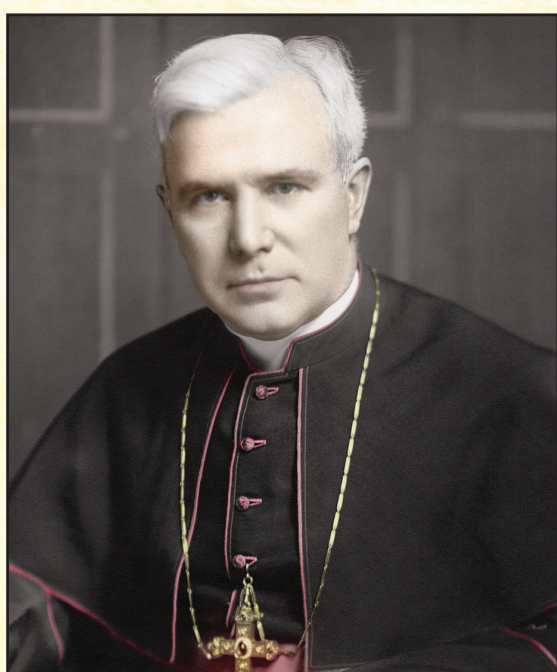
FATHER ANTHONY E. MARQUES
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Yielding Fruit:

A Centennial Diocese (1888–1934)

There were signs of growth and maturity as the diocese reached its centenary (1920): immigrants arrived from Europe and Lebanon (Maronites), expanding the Catholic population in Virginia; evangelization of African Americans continued; a diocesan seminarian, Frank Parater (1897–1920), bequeathed a legacy of holiness; and the entry of the United States into World War I (1917), coupled with advances in transportation, brought development to some regions of the commonwealth.

Bishop Andrew J. Brennan:
Social Ministry, the Great Depression and
Personal Misfortune (1926–1934)



Bishop Andrew J. Brennan

Andrew J. Brennan (1877–1956) of Towanda, Pa., a priest and auxiliary bishop of Scranton, followed Denis J. O'Connell as the eighth bishop of Richmond in 1926. Under Brennan's leadership, the diocese launched The Catholic Virginian newspaper (1931).

The presidential campaign of 1928 was the impetus behind the diocesan newspaper, when

Gov. Alfred E. Smith of New York became the first Catholic nominee for president. Some opposition to Smith was based on his stance against Prohibition (1920–1933). Smith also became a target of anti-Catholic bigotry, facing charges that, as a Catholic, he was not a Christian, and that, as president, he would allow the pope to interfere in public policy.

In order to dispel such prejudice, Bishop Brennan decided that the diocese should have its own periodical to espouse its views. So the Richmond Diocese purchased the Virginia Knight, which the Knights of Columbus had published since 1925, and renamed it The Catholic Virginian.

The opening of two schools for children in need were additional accomplishments of Brennan's tenure. The first was St. Joseph's Villa in Richmond (1931), which replaced St. Joseph's Orphan Asylum and Free School (1834).

As they had at the previous location, the Daughters of Charity provided housing and education for girls. The second institution was the Barry-Robinson School for Boys in Norfolk (1934), run by Benedictines from Latrobe, Pa.

James Dooley (1841–1922), a Confederate veteran who became a prominent member of Richmond society while serving in the Virginia General Assembly, and then as a lawyer and businessman, donated the funds for St. Joseph's Villa. Dooley came from a family of distinguished Catholics. He inherited the title of "Major" from his father, John Dooley, an Irish immigrant who ran a successful hat and fur business in Richmond.

During the Civil War, John Dooley had helped command a Confederate regiment that was composed of Irish Catholics from Richmond, including two of his sons. He was also an influential figure at St. Peter's Church. Another of John Dooley's sons, John Jr., was also a Confederate veteran and a Jesuit novice, who died before being ordained a priest.

Not long after the dedication of St. Joseph's Villa, the Great Depression (1929–1939) struck Virginia (1932) and left many people destitute. Parishes struggled to meet expenses; building and expansion within the diocese were curtailed.

When President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Civilian Conservation Corps (1933–1942) to employ young men for infrastructure projects, priests in the diocese ministered to the estimated 1,400 Catholics who were distributed among 61 camps in Virginia.

Brennan experienced his own calamity in the form of a stroke in 1934. The resulting limitations prevented him from carrying out his duties, although he officially remained the bishop of Richmond until 1945.

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<p>April</p> <p>5. EASTER SUNDAY, FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.</p> <p>12. LOW SUNDAY.</p> <p>13. St. Hermenegild, Martyr.</p> <p>14. St. Justin, Martyr.</p> <p>17. St. Anicetus, Pope and Martyr.</p> <p>19. SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.</p> <p>21. St. Anselm, Bishop, Confessor and Doctor of the Church.</p> <p>22. Solemnity of St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church.</p>	<p>Table of Contents:</p> <p>Christ Appears to Mary Magdalen. 2 The Bishop's Letter. 3 Therese Neumann—A Present Day Cross Bearer. 4 Will Durant, Ph. D. 8 Nonna Maria Sees Papa Pio. 9 Important News Flashes. 10 The Catholic Boy Scout Troop. 12 Here and There and Anywhere. 13 News of the Laymen's Retreat Association. 14 Notes by the Way. 15 Catholic Students' Mission Crusade. 16 News of the Diocese. 17 Knights of Columbus News. 18 Eleven Young Men Become Xaverian Brothers. 20 The Miracle of Spring. Why? 21 Ask Us Why. 22 Old Clothes. 23 Speaking Personally. 23 Holy Name News. 33</p>	<p>April—Continued</p> <p>23. St. George, Martyr.</p> <p>24. St. Fidelis of Sigmaringa, Martyr.</p> <p>25. St. Mark, Evangelist. Feast of the Major Litanies.</p> <p>26. THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.</p> <p>27. St. Peter Canisius, Confessor and Doctor of the Church.</p> <p>28. St. Paul of the Cross, Confessor, Founder of the Passionists.</p> <p>29. Octave of the Solemnity of St. Joseph.</p> <p>30. St. Catherine of Siena, Virgin.</p>
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The Bishop's Appointments

<p>April 2—Holy Thursday—9:00 A. M.: Solemn Pontifical High Mass and blessing of Holy Oils at Cathedral. 8:00 P. M.: Assist at Tenebrae, Cathedral.</p> <p>April 3—Good Friday—8: A. M.: Solemn Pontifical High Mass of the Pre-sanctified at Cathedral. 8:00 P. M.: Assist at Tenebrae, Cathedral.</p> <p>April 5—Easter Sunday—11 A. M.: Solemn Pontifical High Mass at Cathedral.</p> <p>April 15—Laymen's Retreat League Banquet, Richmond.</p> <p>April 19—Confirmation at St. Paul's, Portsmouth.</p> <p>April 26—Confirmation at Holy Cross, Lynchburg.</p> <p>May 3—Confirmation at St. Joseph's (Colored), Richmond.</p>	<p>May 17—Confirmation at St. Mary's, Norfolk.</p> <p>May 24—Pentecost Sunday—11:00 A. M.: Solemn Pontifical High Mass at Cathedral. P. M.: Confirmation at Cathedral.</p> <p>May 26—Meeting Diocesan Consultors, Richmond.</p> <p>May 31—Trinity Sunday—Confirmation at St. Andrew's, Roanoke.</p> <p>June 7—3:00 P. M.: Confirmation at Sacred Heart, South Richmond. 5:00 P. M.: Commencement, St. Gertrude's High School, Richmond.</p> <p>June 21—Confirmation at Quantico Marine Barracks.</p> <p>June 28—Confirmation at St. Mary's, Fredericksburg.</p>
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First edition of The Catholic Virginian

CHRONOLOGY OF THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF RICHMOND — 1926-1934

1926 April 3 Denis J. O'Connell, having resigned as bishop of Richmond due to illness (January 26) and served as diocesan administrator, is relieved of his duties.

1926 December 16 Andrew J. Brennan, the auxiliary bishop of Scranton, is installed as the eighth bishop of Richmond.

1928 June 26–29 Alfred E. Smith is the first Catholic nominated for president. He faces opposition because of his stance against Prohibition (1920–1933) and is a target of anti-Catholic bigotry.

1931 April In response to anti-Catholic prejudice in the 1928 presidential campaign, the Diocese of Richmond launches its own newspaper, The Catholic Virginian.

1932 The Great Depression (1929–1935) strikes Virginia.

1934 February 26 Bishop Andrew J. Brennan is incapacitated as the result of a stroke.



Prior to Mass at the 2020 Diocesan Youth Conference, Catholic Campus Ministry staff members introduce themselves to the high school students in attendance. From left, Ricardo Givens, Norfolk State University; Marissa O'Neil, Old Dominion University; Austin Farinholt, James Madison University; and Father Peter Nassetta, James Madison University. (Photo/Vy Barto)

THE VANGUARD OF EVANGELIZATION: CAMPUS MINISTRY IN THE DIOCESE OF RICHMOND

FATHER ANTHONY E. MARQUES

In 1931, Marie Giffendal Keister telephoned Bishop John J. Swint of Wheeling, West Virginia. Catholic students at Virginia Tech (then known as Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute) often gathered in her Blacksburg home.

The bishop's diocese included Blacksburg (1850–1974), but since the permanent residences of most Virginia Tech students were within the boundaries of the neighboring Richmond Diocese, Swint was able to enlist Richmond priests to minister on that campus.

Keister told Bishop Swint not to come for a scheduled confirmation because “many of the students and some of the people were going to a football game.” Bishop Swint went anyway and later reported that “we had a very nice confirmation.”

At the time of that phone call, the number of Catholics had been increasing for about a decade at three major state universities in Virginia: the College of William & Mary, the University of Virginia and Virginia Tech. As a result of such growth, Catholic student organizations were formed, Sunday Mass was celebrated regularly for students and faculty, chapels and parish churches were built and resident pastors were assigned on or near these campuses (ca. 1923–1939).

Investment by parishes, diocese

This rise of campus ministry was a significant historical development in the Diocese of Richmond that has given it a distinctive characteristic. There are 68 colleges and universities in its territory — probably the most in any diocese in the United States. These institutions include five historically black colleges.

Many students come from northern Virginia and northeastern states where the Catholic population is relatively large, and so Catholics typically constitute the single biggest religious body on Virginia campuses. Consequently, there is a greater proportion of Catholics on most of these campuses (25–30%) than in rest of the Richmond Diocese (5%).

Recognizing the large number of Catholic college

students in their diocese, the bishops of Richmond have invested heavily in campus ministry over the last four decades (ca. 1974–present). As one indication of that investment, the people of the Richmond Diocese, through support of their local parishes and the annual diocesan appeal, pay for approximately 75% of the operating expenses of campus ministry, including personnel.

The size of a campus ministry staff varies according to the size and circumstances of its college or university. Generally speaking, on larger campuses there is a chaplain (priest), a full-time lay person and an intern; on smaller campuses, the local parish priest and a part-time lay person organize the ministry. In both cases, students play an active role in the ministry and receive leadership training in ministering to their peers.

Place for Evangelization

The diocesan Office for Evangelization has supervised campus ministry, along with youth and young adult ministry, since 2011. The office's comprehensive structure is designed to assist young people in developing a personal, informed and committed faith amid an increasingly secular society. Campus ministry encourages college students to take ownership of their faith by building on the foundation laid by their parents.

The evangelization of college students is pivotal since their decisions regarding faith will shape the rest of their lives as Catholics. As one indication of this principle, it is noteworthy that many priests, religious and married persons credit campus ministry with having helped them to discern their state in life. Owing to its formative influence, campus ministry can be considered the vanguard of evangelization.

To assist college students, the Office for Evangelization provides support to local campus ministries and sponsors two diocesan-wide events: Encounter with Christ retreats and the College Summit. These gatherings bring together college students from across Virginia to deepen their sense of community and to invigorate their practice of the Catholic faith.

On local campuses, the pastoral care of col-

lege students has multiple dimensions — spiritual, communal, catechetical and charitable — and takes into account broader social trends that affect young people.

In addition to providing the sacraments, campus ministries seek to foster a sense of community amid the proliferation of technology, especially through small groups in which students can discuss and give witness to their faith. Instruction in the Catholic faith helps students to understand their religion and, despite the advance of moral relativism, to seek objective truth and to grasp the compatibility of faith and reason, i.e., science, art and other fields of study.

Finally, campus ministries help students to overcome individualism by serving their communities through charitable works such as Alternative Spring Break trips and other initiatives.

Shaping diocese's identity

One of the largest parishes in the Diocese of Richmond, St. Bede, Williamsburg, originated as a ministry to students and faculty at the College of William & Mary. In 1923, Carlos Eduardo Castañeda, a Spanish instructor at the college, began the Gibbons Club, a Catholic student organization he named after James Gibbons, the fourth bishop of Richmond (1872–1877) and later the cardinal archbishop of Baltimore (1877–1921). Soon, Mass was regularly celebrated on campus and other activities for Catholic students were organized (1923–1939).

In 1932, Andrew J. Brennan, the eighth bishop of Richmond (1926–1945), dedicated a chapel in Williamsburg named St. Bede. The patron saint of the chapel was an English Benedictine monk and scholar (ca. 673–725 AD) who represented the vast Catholic intellectual tradition that was even older than the College of William & Mary (1693).

Bishop Brennan later appointed Father Thomas J. Walsh, who held a doctorate in theology, as the first resident pastor of Williamsburg (1939). This history of St. Bede Parish attests to the importance of campus ministry, which has shaped the identity of the Diocese of Richmond.