

The Diocese of Venice

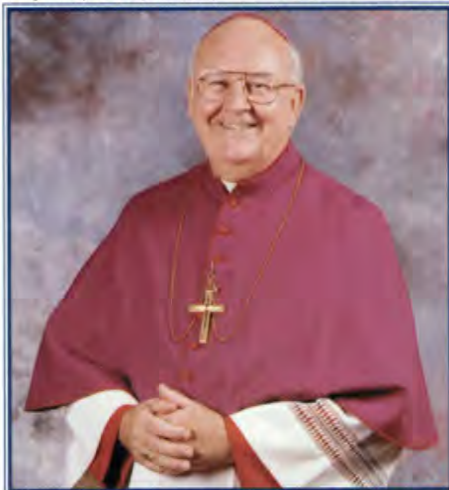


In the 1980's, the Florida Church was expanding in population about as fast as the State of Florida, which at that time was the fastest growing state in the nation. Spurred by the growth of the Catholic population in south Florida, and in order better to meet its spiritual needs, Pope John Paul II announced on July 17, 1984 the creation of two new Florida dioceses of Palm Beach and Venice. To create the new jurisdictions, the Holy Father took sections of the Archdiocese of Miami and of the dioceses of Orlando and St. Petersburg.

When the Venice diocese was created, Epiphany Church was elevated to cathedral status and the Most Reverend John J. Nevins, D.D., a 51-year-old auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Miami, was appointed as its first bishop. On October 25, 1984 Bishop Nevins was installed and Epiphany Church in Venice was consecrated as the cathedral.

The Venice diocese includes southwest Florida's 10 counties: Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte, Lee, Collier, Hardee, DeSoto, Highlands, Glades, and Hendry. It is a 9,035 square mile area, approximately 140 miles long (north to south) and an average 70 miles wide (east to west).

The early history of the area includes a ship-borne exploration of the coast by Hernando de Soto in 1539. In 1567, Jesuit Father Juan Rogel began a mission to the Calusa Indians in the Charlotte Harbor/Fort Myers area. In the 19th century, missionaries from Savannah, St. Augustine, and Tampa visited the area where a Catholic church was built in 1888, in Manatee County. In 1889, the care of the area fell under the jurisdiction of Jesuit priests from Tampa who made regular visits to Bradenton, Fort Myers, and, later, to Arcadia and adjacent missions.



Bishop John J. Nevins, D.D.



Crest of the Diocese of Venice.

The first parishes to receive a resident pastor were St. Francis Xavier, Fort Myers, in 1920; St. Martha, Sarasota, and St. Joseph, Bradenton, in 1927; and St. Paul, Arcadia, in 1929.

In 1984, when the Venice diocese was erected, there were 39 parishes, three missions, eight elementary schools, one Catholic hospital, and 116,495 Catholics. As of December 2004, there were 54 parishes, seven missions, six chapels of ease, nine elementary schools, two special needs schools, one school for pastoral ministry, and more than 218,000 registered Catholics.

There are two Eastern Rite parishes in the Venice Diocese, one Ukrainian and the other Byzantine: St. Mary's in North Port and All Saints in North Fort Myers.

The oldest parish in the Diocese is St. Francis Xavier which was founded as a mission in 1882 and elevated to parish



Epiphany Cathedral.

status in 1910. The first parish established by Bishop Nevins was Our Lady of Lourdes, Venice, in 1986, and the latest were Our Lady of the Angels, Bradenton, and Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Osprey, both on March 1, 2002.

In December 1994, the diocese established the Blessed Edmund Rice School of Pastoral Ministry to offer a professional theological, pastoral, spiritual and personal formation program preparing laity, including a significant Latino population, for leadership roles in parish, school, diocesan, and non-ecclesial structures.

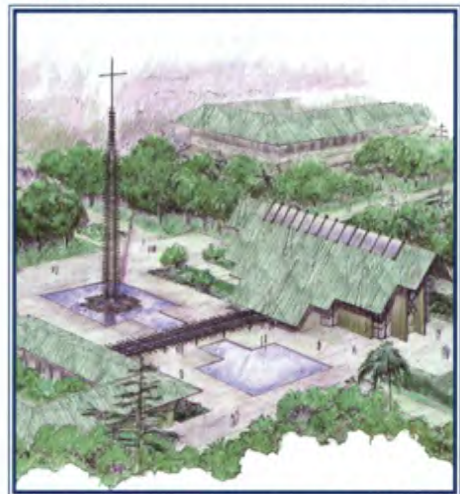
In 2002, Ave Maria University, an independent Catholic institution of higher learning, was founded in Naples, one of the fastest-growing areas in the country. The university with its accompanying town, Ave Maria, is a joint venture between the school and the Barron Collier Companies, a major southwest Florida real estate and agricultural company that currently

owns the property. Completion is expected in 2006.

The diocesan clergy has always been comprised of men who come from a variety of cultures and nations. In addition to those born in the United States, a significant number of priests have traditionally come from Spain and Ireland. In recent years, priests from Poland, Haiti and Latin America have joined the diocesan presbyterate to minister to a diverse Catholic population, including the thousands of Hispanic migrant workers who annually harvest crops in the diocese, and European immigrants.

Since the founding of the diocese in 1984 fifteen parishes have been erected, two diocesan schools have been established, and thirty-nine priests have been ordained.

For more information visit www.dioceseofvenice.org



Architectural rendering of structures to be built at Ave Maria University.