



Most Rev. Joseph P. Hurley

Born: January 21, 1894, Cleveland, Ohio

Educated: John Carroll University, Cleveland; St. Bernard Seminary, Rochester, N.Y.; and St. Mary Seminary, Cleveland

Ordained: May 29, 1919, Cleveland, Ohio

Named Bishop of St. Augustine: August 16, 1940

Episcopal Ordination: October 6, 1940, Rome

Named archbishop (personal title): August 18, 1949

Died: October 30, 1967, Orlando



The Vatican turned to a member of its diplomatic corps to help the 70-year-old diocese mature during a critical time in the middle of the 20th century.

Joseph P. Hurley's life had already taken several abrupt turns when he was named to head the Diocese of St. Augustine in 1940.

Hurley grew up in poverty in Cleveland, Ohio, one of ten children of Irish immigrants. He considered a career in the Army or law before answering the call to the priesthood. After his ordination in 1919, he served the Diocese of Cleveland for seven years as a parish priest.

But then in 1926 a former seminary professor Father Edward Mooney (later a cardinal) was named apostolic delegate to India and asked Hurley to join his staff. In 1931, Mooney was sent to Japan and Hurley followed, serving as charges de affaires.

In 1934 Hurley joined the Secretariat of State, and over the next six years served as the liaison between the Vatican and the United States, a predominantly Protestant country. He developed a close relationship with Pope Pius XI and strong ties with the U.S. State Department.

Hurley applauded the strong stance Pius XI was taking against the Nazis and Fascists. But his successor, Pius XII, favored neutrality. Hurley, however, continued to speak against the Nazis. Apparently tired of the friction, the pope appointed Hurley to the Diocese of St. Augustine.



Archbishop Joseph P. Hurley leads a procession near the historic chapel of the Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche at Mission Nombre de Dios.

“As one of the first modern Sunbelt bishops, he moved his diocese into the new religious landscape with prescience, aplomb, and vigor”

Father Charles Gallagher in “Vatican Secret Diplomacy: Joseph P. Hurley and Pius XII”

Now as a member of the American hierarchy, Hurley urged the United States to join the war effort, calling the Nazis Enemy No. 1 on national radio. He was the most vocal American bishop to speak out against the extermination of Jews in concentration camps.

The war effort was felt in his diocese with the establishment of Mayport Naval Station, Cecil Field and Jacksonville naval air stations and Camp Blanding. The new bases brought thousands of servicemen to the diocese, as well as 2,000 German POWs.

The war brought people to their knees, straining parish resources. At some parishes, it was standing room only at Sunday Mass.



Archbishop Joseph Hurley at Mission Nombre de Dios.

“With his eye on the future, Archbishop Hurley took advantage of the economic prosperity of the 1950s.”



Archbishop Hurley welcomes President Lyndon B. Johnson to Mission Nombre de Dios in 1965, as part of the 400th anniversary of St. Augustine and the establishment of the first parish.

After the war, Bishop Hurley was given additional responsibilities as Regent ad interim in Yugoslavia, where church relations were quickly deteriorating under the new communist government of Josip Tito. Bishop Hurley served in Yugoslavia for five years, representing Pius XII during the trial of Archbishop Aloysius Stepinac for “crimes against the people.”

While Bishop Hurley was in Yugoslavia, Father Thomas J. McDonough was named administrator and in 1947 auxiliary bishop of the diocese. He later became archbishop of Louisville, Ky.

In 1950, Bishop Hurley returned to St. Augustine with the personal title of archbishop and launched a huge building campaign.



Archbishop Hurley presided at a Eucharistic Congress held at the Jacksonville Baseball Park on October 31, 1967.

Archbishop Hurley was a witness to history at the four sessions of the Second Vatican Council, 1962-65, and began to implement the far-reaching changes it would bring to the church.

In 1965, Archbishop Hurley led the celebration of the church’s 400th anniversary in Florida with a major renovation of the cathedral and the erection of a 208 foot-tall Great Cross at Mission Nombre de Dios.

In 1967, Hurley became ill while visiting Rome and returned to Florida for treatment but died at the age of 73. In recognition of his service to the Vatican, the Apostolic Delegate officiated at his funeral.

Florida had been growing rapidly since the turn of the century, but nothing like the growth that would occur after the war. The introduction of air conditioning and the interstate highway system brought people to the state by the thousands.

With his eye on the future, Archbishop Hurley took advantage of the economic prosperity of the 1950s and began buying real estate all over the state, especially along the interstates and around larger cities.

Like his predecessors, to staff new parishes, he reached out to Ireland for missionary priests, bringing men to the diocese who would serve into the 21st century.

Education was a priority as well. Archbishop Hurley helped the Sisters of St. Joseph build a parochial school system, including ten high schools around the state. Also, he opened Morning Star Schools around the state to educate children with disabilities. He also built nursing homes, four hospitals, and established the Catholic Charities Bureau.

By 1958, 4.6 million people lived in Florida – 2.7 million more than when Hurley took over in 1940. To accommodate the growth, the Vatican separated the 16 southern counties, which had 200,000 Catholics, into the Diocese of Miami. Miami became an archdiocese in 1968.



Archbishop Edward Mooney, center, and Father Hurley, right, at the Apostolic Delegation in Bangalore, India in 1929.