



Most Rev. Michael J. Curley

Birth: October 12, 1879, Athlone, Westmeath, Ireland

Educated: Mungret College, Limerick; Royal University of Ireland; and Urban College of the Propaganda, Rome

Ordained: March 19, 1904, Rome

Named Bishop of St. Augustine: April 3, 1914

Episcopal Ordination: June 30, 1914, St. Augustine

Named Archbishop of Baltimore: August 10, 1921

Named Archbishop of Washington: July 22, 1939

Death: May 16, 1947, Baltimore, Md.



His dream was to become a missionary in Fiji, but the mission field that beckoned was Florida. Michael J. Curley was one of the Irish seminarians recruited by Bishop John Moore to serve the growing diocese that stretched from the Georgia state line to the Florida Keys. And Bishop Moore had just the place to test the newly ordained priest. He named Curley the first resident priest of St. Peter Parish in DeLand, which covered 7,200 square miles.

Curley's star rose quickly. Within a decade of ordination, he was named the fourth bishop of the diocese. At 34 he was the youngest bishop in the country, and he would have the shortest tenure in the diocese, seven years, which makes his accomplishments more amazing.

Florida was experiencing tremendous growth, thanks, in part, to Henry Flagler and the railroad he built along the East Coast. Though Catholics made up only three percent of the state's population, their numbers were growing, too.

Bishop Curley took over a diocese with 35,000 Catholics. Seven years later they numbered almost 42,000. To meet the need, Bishop Curley established 40 churches all over the state.

But it was a politically tumultuous time as well in Florida and the world. Extremist views prevailed.

“Catholic education never had a better friend than Michael Curley. He made a rule that a pastor was first to build a school and only then a church.”

Father Michael Roach of the Archdiocese of Baltimore

Gubernatorial candidate Sidney J. Catts stirred up Ku Klux Klan sympathies and anti-Catholic sentiment in his successful campaign for office.

In 1916, the state Legislature made it illegal for white teachers to teach black children, something the Sisters of St. Joseph had been doing since 1866. The sisters carried on until three of their number were arrested.

Bishop Curley was furious and vowed to fight it all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. He went to Tallahassee and spoke directly to legislators, to judges and the governor. The law was declared unconstitutional, and the charges against the sisters were dropped.

Catholics were given the opportunity to demonstrate their patriotism during the First World War. Bishop Curley established a Diocesan Catholic War Council to coordinate pastoral efforts in the parishes. Thousands of dollars were raised for the war effort through Liberty Bond drives.

The Vatican needed Bishop Curley's leadership elsewhere. In 1921, the nation's youngest bishop was put in charge of its oldest archdiocese – Baltimore. Archbishop Curley would have to fill the huge shoes of one of the American church's most beloved leaders, Cardinal James Gibbons.



The Archdiocese of Baltimore and the Diocese of St. Augustine couldn't have been more different. Baltimore was Catholic country, home of a major seminary, St. Mary's, where St. Augustine's first bishop, Augustin Verot, once taught. Archbishop Curley led a major building campaign for the seminary.

Politically he was an outspoken critic of the foreign policy of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the anticlerical governments of Mexico and Spain and called on his fellow



American bishops to root out communism. In 1939, Pope Pius XII separated Washington D.C. from the Archdiocese of Baltimore into its own archdiocese, and Archbishop Curley assumed authority over both jurisdictions.

He died from a stroke at age 66. During his long tenure, the Catholic population of the archdiocese grew from 276,000 to 430,000, with the addition of 50 parishes and 70 schools.



Farewell Reception for Archbishop-elect, Michael Joseph Curley, by the clergy of the Diocese of St. Augustine in Jacksonville, November 16, 1921. Top row, from left, Fathers Sullivan, SJ, Comber, Mullally, William Barry, Lyons, Meehan, Monahan, Clasby, Brennan, and O'Keefe. Middle row, from left, Fathers Albert, OSB, Francis, OSB, Bresnahan, Conoley, Nevin, Farley, Fennell, Roche, Callahau, and Linton, SSJ. Bottom row, from left, Fathers Nolan, Nunan, Golden, Tyrrell, SJ, Patrick Barry, Bishop Curley, Fathers Maher, Gabriel, OSB, Plunkett, SSJ, and Gumbleton, SSJ.



Father Michael Curley is photographed with families of St. Mary Parish in Rockledge, Fla. Seated in the front on the right is Father Curley's good friend and a St. Mary benefactor, Dr. A.H. McKewon.