



Most Rev. William J. Kenny

Born: January 12, 1853, Delhi, N.Y.

Educated: St. Bonaventure College, Olean, N.Y.

Ordained: January 15, 1879, St. Augustine

Named Bishop of St. Augustine: March 25, 1902

Episcopal Ordination: May 18, 1902, St. Augustine

Died: October 24, 1913, Baltimore, Md.

William J. Kenny was the first American named bishop of St. Augustine, as well as the first diocesan priest to be elevated to that role, so he was well acquainted with the people he would serve.

Though born and educated in the Northeast, Bishop Kenny was ordained to the priesthood by his predecessor, John Moore, and served with him during some of the diocese's most difficult days – the Yellow Fever Epidemic in 1888 and the Great Fire of 1901.

He was a resourceful man. He put himself through seminary with his earnings as a newspaper pressman. He was a brilliant student at the Franciscan seminary where he studied, earning perfect scores. He could have joined the Franciscans and served his home diocese, but instead, he answered the call of Bishop Moore who was in desperate need of priests in Florida.

After his ordination at the Cathedral of St. Augustine, Bishop Moore assigned him to St. Monica Parish in Palatka.

Three years later Moore sent Kenny to Jacksonville's church, Immaculate Conception. As its pastor, his resourcefulness was put to the test. The parish was struggling financially, and Kenny was able to put the parish on a stable footing. Bishop Moore rewarded him by naming him vicar general of the diocese, the second-highest position in the diocese.

In 1888, a yellow fever epidemic effectively shut down the city during the summer, as people either took to their beds or fled



Immaculate Conception Church after The Great Fire of May 3, 1901, which destroyed almost all of Jacksonville. The statue of the Virgin Mary above the entrance, however, survived.

“His calm, clear judgment and excellent advice were accepted by the leading businessmen all through the trying days that followed, and through his efforts, the merciful work was greatly simplified, and many who otherwise would have suffered in silence, were brought to the attention of his co-workers and their wants supplied.”

The Jacksonville Metropolis

the city. Kenny was one of the many priests who ministered to the sick and dying until he caught the fever. Bishop Moore came to Jacksonville to take over his duties while he recovered, until he, too, became ill. By the time it was over, more than 5,000 were stricken, and 427 people had died.

In May 1901, disaster would strike again. This time fire destroyed the city including Immaculate Conception, St. Mary's Home and St. Joseph Academy and convent. Only the statue of Our Lady on the facade of the church survived.

Rebuilding efforts in the city began immediately, and Kenny assumed a leadership role, serving on the committees that transmitted messages to families and sorted through the thousands of requests for aid.

He also led the effort to rebuild the parish. Kenny would dedicate the new church in 1910, but by then he was the bishop.

Two months after the fire, Bishop Moore died. The priests of the diocese unanimously recommended Kenny to become the

next bishop. A year after the fire, William Kenny was ordained a bishop at the cathedral, where Bishop Moore had ordained him 23 years before.

He immediately set about recruiting nuns and priests, many from Ireland, and raising funds to expand the church's outreach to the interior of the state. He dispatched the Sisters of St. Joseph to Miami to begin a school and laid the cornerstone for a St. Joseph Academy and convent at Seventh and Market streets in Jacksonville.

He demonstrated his resourcefulness as a fundraiser when he secured a \$1,200 donation from the heiress nun, Mother Katharine Drexel, for the establishment of the diocese's first African-American mission, St. Benedict the Moor in St. Augustine.

Kenny's leadership was cut short in 1913 when at the age of 60, he died while visiting Baltimore. Bishop Kenny High School in Jacksonville is named for him.