



# CENTURY OF LOVE



News of the Centennial of the Diocese of Lafayette, Louisiana

June, 2018

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## The Diocese Comes of Age: Growth of the Church

As Jules Jeanmard was formally installed Bishop of the Diocese of Lafayette on December 12, 1918, the



Bishop Jules Jeanmard

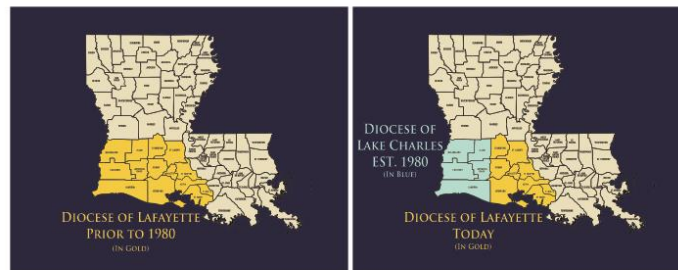
39-year-old Bishop wasted no time in setting forth his vision for growth. The most notable expansion in the early years of the Diocese of Lafayette was in its number of parishes and priests. While the Diocese of Lafayette represented a sizable land area, the population west of the Atchafalaya River was only 25% of the population of the Archdiocese of New Orleans. Lafayette, its

biggest city, had well under 10,000 residents. The new Diocese consisted of 48 church parishes and a total of 72 priests in the area, 27 of which were religious (Jesuits, Josephites, etc.). Forty years later, the Diocese of Lafayette more than tripled its number of priests, with 241 priests serving Southwest Louisiana in 1956. Bishop Jeanmard himself would establish around 60 new parishes in his time as Bishop, a rate of over 1.5 new parishes a year.

Many other significant moments marked the growth of a small rural area into a robust Diocese of Catholic activity. An early goal of Bishop Jeanmard was to bring a cloistered Carmelite community to the

Diocese. His persistence paid off, and 18 years after his installation, the Discalced Carmelites established a home in the city of Lafayette in 1936. Bishop Jeanmard saw this powerhouse of prayer as a "lightning rod" for the Diocese. Still today, the Carmelites continue their support and prayer for the work of the Church in the Diocese of Lafayette.

Jeanmard's pride and joy was St. Mary's Home, an orphanage located only a few blocks from the Cathedral and the Bishop's home. Jeanmard worked diligently to open this home in 1923, which would be run by the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word. Bishop Jeanmard was a true father figure to the boys and girls who lived there. Every afternoon, he would walk over to the home for games of baseball and recreation with the children. In time, St. Mary's Home would care for over 1,100 children. After 52 years of operation, the orphanage was closed in 1975.



Diocese of Lafayette Parishes / Pre and Post 1980.

Early in his episcopacy, Jeanmard desired to open a seminary in Lafayette. Jeanmard, a native of Breaux Bridge, was the first Louisiana priest to be made a bishop, and he was a strong advocate

for developing a Diocese of native vocations rather than relying on priests from Europe or Canada. In fact, Jeanmard's very first Pastoral Letter to the people of the Diocese of Lafayette was on the topic of native vocations. His work to establish a seminary was initially unsuccessful for financial reasons. But on December 8, 1948, the 30th



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anniversary of his consecration as bishop, he laid the cornerstone for Immaculata Minor Seminary.

Bishop Jeanmard worked to establish a place of prayer for the lay faithful of the Diocese of Lafayette in the form of a retreat center. In 1938, Jeanmard opened Our Lady of the Oaks Retreat Center in Grand Coteau, which still serves the spiritual needs of men and women throughout the Diocese by providing retreats. In 1942, Jeanmard oversaw the creation of a Catholic Student Center on the grounds of Southwestern Louisiana Institute (now the University of Louisiana at Lafayette). Our Lady of Wisdom has grown into one of the largest Catholic Student Centers in the country and continues to serve the students and faculty on the campus. Bishop Jeanmard also oversaw the creation of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic hospital in the city of Lafayette, which opened its doors in 1949.

On December 11, 1950, Pope Pius XII appointed Fr. Maurice Schexnayder, a priest of the

Archdiocese of New Orleans, to be the auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese of Lafayette. Bishop Schexnayder would spend the

next five years as the auxiliary bishop, assisting Bishop Jeanmard. In time, Bishop Schexnayder took on more responsibilities and public events as Jeanmard's health began to decline. Jeanmard retired at the age of 76 in 1956, and Schexnayder was appointed the second Bishop of Lafayette. The Diocese of Lafayette looked very different than it did almost 40 years earlier. The actions of Bishop Jeanmard, Bishop Schexnayder, clergy, religious, and lay faithful alike, marked an incredible period of growth within the Diocese.

One month after the Diocese of Lafayette celebrated 40 years since the installation of its first bishop, the Bishop of Rome, Pope St. John XXIII, shocked the world when he called for an ecumenical council on January 25, 1959. The Second Vatican Council began in 1962 and guided the Diocese of Lafayette through the decades to come.



St. Mary's Home



Our Lady of the Oaks Retreat Center



Our Lady of Wisdom Church & Student Center