



Faith IN WV  
DWC

AUGUST 17  
175

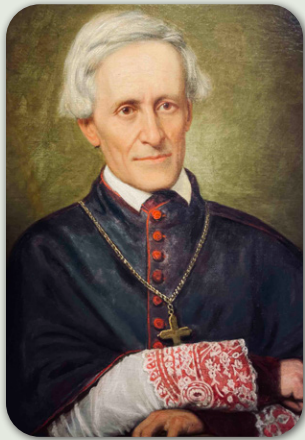
# A JOURNEY OF FAITH AND PERSEVERANCE CELEBRATING OUR 175 YEARS

On July 19, 1850, the Diocese of Wheeling was established by Pope Pius IX, marking the adventurous beginning of our present Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston.

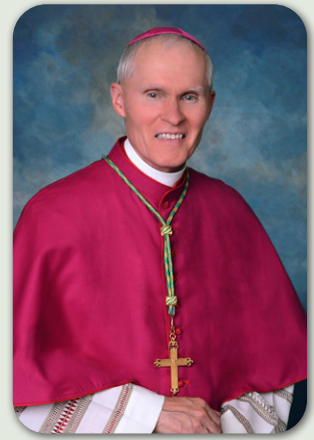
This year marks our 175th anniversary. As our celebration continues through July of 2026, we will reflect on how we began and how we've prevailed - giving praise and honor to God. From our pioneering founding bishop, Bishop Richard V. Whelan, to our present shepherd, Bishop Mark E. Brennan, our diocese has persevered to share the Gospel by word and deed in our families, parishes, schools, hospitals, and organizations.

The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston's clergy, religious, laity, and staff strive to exemplify the resilience, faith, and courage of our ancestors. The hard-working souls who built the Church in these mountains.

As we unfold our story throughout the year, take a moment to look back at how we got here.



BISHOP RICHARD V. WHELAN



BISHOP MARK E. BRENNAN

## STAKING CLAIM – BLESSED LAND



Mural of the French Expedition in West Virginia, 1749, led by Pierre Joseph Celoron de Blainville with Jesuit priest Fr. Joseph Pierre Bonnencamp at right. Painted by Mark Missman and displayed at WesBanco Arena, Wheeling.

Pleasant, WV, in 1846, measuring 11 by 7.5 inches, and the inscription claiming the land for France. (Both France and Great Britain laid claim to the Ohio River Valley, and the French and Indian War ultimately resulted in a decisive victory for Great Britain.)

In 1749, as an expedition led by French explorer Pierre Joseph Celoron de Blainville of New France (Canada) unfolded to claim land along the Ohio River, Masses were celebrated by Jesuit priest, Fr. Joseph Pierre de Bonnecamp, who served as de Blainville's chaplain, navigator, and secretary documenting the trip and ultimately creating the first official map of the Ohio Valley.

Father Bonnecamp journaled that six "Celoron Lead Plates" were buried during the celebrations on the shoreline at the various points where the tributaries met the Ohio River. One was found in Point



Mural from the Basilica of St. Mary of the Assumption, Marietta, Ohio, of Jesuit Priest saying Mass on the banks of the Ohio River in 1749, by Renate Rohn.

## FEW AND FAR BETWEEN

It was more than 200 years ago when Jesuit and Redemptorist missionaries braved the mountainous terrain of western Virginia to serve the few Catholic families who had settled in the region. These visits, however, were infrequent. Like the Apostles and first disciples, these missionary priests relied on the hospitality of those they encountered, sleeping where they could – a barn, a cave, under the shade of a tree, or if blessed enough in the humble home of a kind soul. They ate what they could, packing staples for their journey, but when those ran out their mission and well-being depended on the people who lived in the hills and valleys of this land. Their efforts though were not in vain.

By 1818 more Catholic families settled in western Virginia following the completion of National Road.



The first Masses in Virginia were celebrated in homes, on farmland, along creeks, and tops of mountains. A growing Catholic population resulted in the need to establish the Richmond diocese, encompassing the entire state of Virginia, in 1820.

By 1821, Wheeling had its first Catholic church constructed St. James Parish - on land donated by Noah Zane at the corner of 11th and Chapline Streets in Wheeling. However, the church was not assigned a resident priest – Fr. Francis Rolof – until 1828.

## EASTERN PANHANDLE – TRACKS TO EXPANSION



St. John Parish (later known as St. Joseph's) in Martinsburg was established in 1825, and was served by Rev. John B. Gildea.

By the 1830s, growth and expansion of the railways westward lead German and Irish immigrants to settle in this region of western Virginia.

For the communities of Harpers Ferry and Martinsburg this meant an expanding Catholic community. The Martinsburg Catholics had purchased the land for their church building in 1802, but waited 34 years to see it completed.

## WHELAN ENTERS OUR HISTORY

In Harpers Ferry, Saint Peter's Church was constructed in 1833 on a rocky hilltop near the Maryland border. In 1834, a young priest, Fr. Richard V. Whelan was assigned to what would become the iconic Harpers Ferry church, taking residence there. Father Whelan, a Maryland native, also served the Martinsburg mission. When the church at Martinsburg was completed, Whelan moved his residence to Martinsburg.

Five years later, in 1841, Whelan was named the second bishop of the Diocese of Richmond.



## GROWING PAINS



*Bishop Whelan at Mount de Chantal*

In 1846, Bishop Whelan moved to Wheeling in the northwestern corner of the Diocese of Richmond. He took charge of St. James Parish and opened a small school for German Catholic children.

Within two years, women religious from the

Visitation Sisters came to Wheeling to open the Wheeling Female Academy (later known as Mount de Chantal Academy).

Also in 1848, St. Patrick Parish in Weston was established to serve an increasing Catholic community of Irish immigrants who had labored on the Staunton and Parkersburg Turnpike. Father Austin Grogan purchased property at a corner of High Street for \$100 to build a two-story church. Because of the generosity of both Catholics and non-Catholics, the church was opened in 1848 without debt.



*Old St. Patrick, Weston*

The year 1849, saw the establishment of St. John church in Summersville, and a newly constructed St. James Church in Wheeling – moved from its Chapline Street location to 13th and Eoff Street in Wheeling.



*First Wheeling Hospital*

the sisters' essential ministries in health care, catechism, evangelization, education, charity, and prayer have continued for more than 170 years, an indelible and living link to the earliest days of our diocese.

In 1853, the Sisters of St. Joseph (today the Congregation of St. Joseph) arrived in Wheeling to operate a hospital, which continues to thrive today as Wheeling Hospital, the oldest Catholic hospital in WV. The

## DIOCESAN PROFILE

In the last 175 years, 9 bishops have shepherded our diocese.

### OUR PROFILE NOW?

We have about 61,000 Catholics, making up for 3.5% of the state's population (1,769,979).

According to our 2024 data, we have:

- † 71 diocesan priests (39 active here, 2 active outside the diocese, 30 retired), 28 from other diocese, 38 from religious communities
- † 60 deacons
- † 72 religious women
- † 2 religious brothers
- † 92 parishes
- † 20 mission churches
- † 17 chapels
- † 24 Catholic schools.

## MASS FOR THE 175TH

Celebrate! All are invited to Mass at noon, Friday, August 22, 2025, at the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Wheeling, to celebrate our 175th and also the 6th Anniversary of Bishop Mark Brennan as ninth Bishop of Wheeling Charleston.



## BRUTAL HONESTY

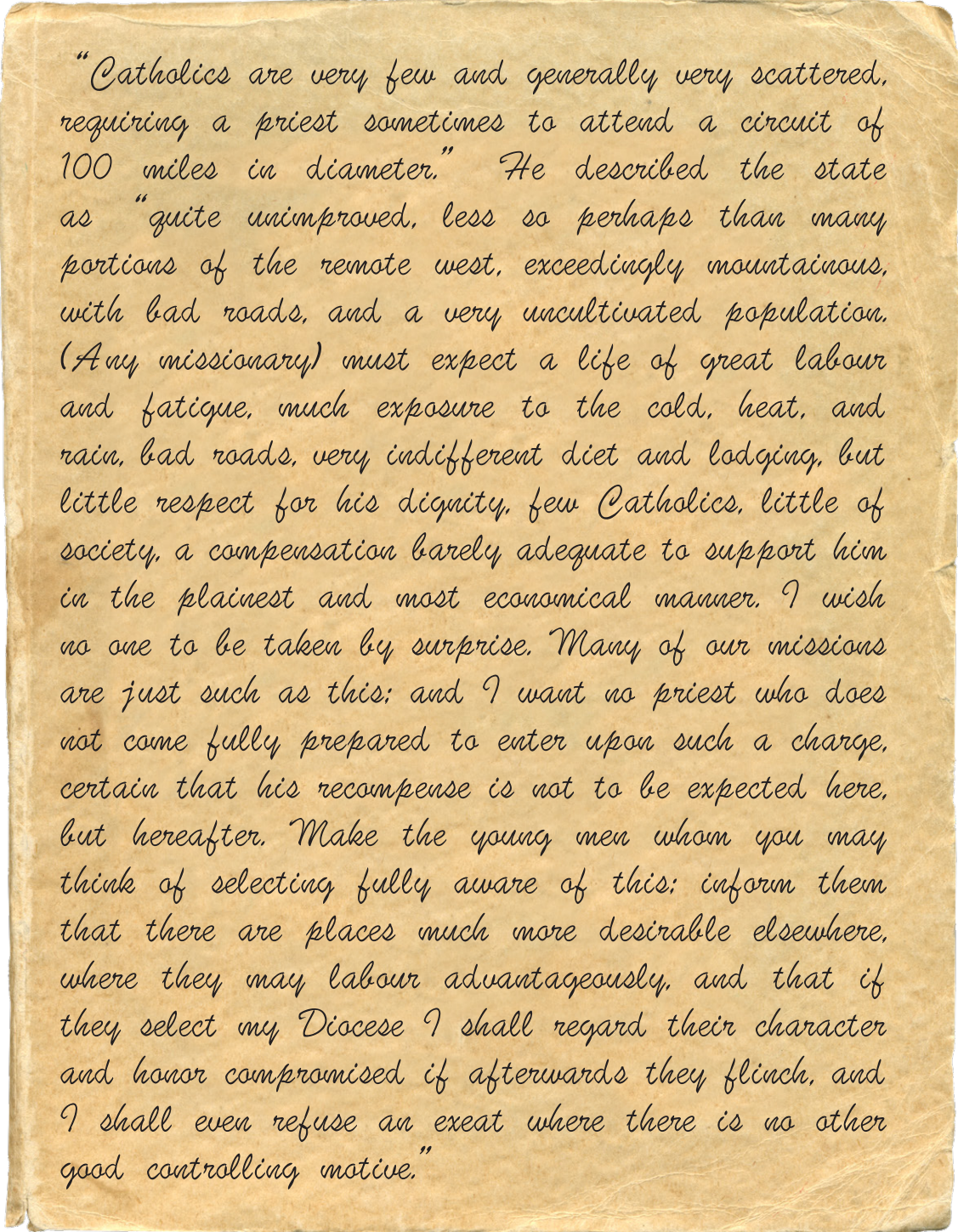
While Catholic populations grew, clergy in western Virginia had a nearly impossible task. Priests were given assignments covering a 100-mile radius, traveled by horseback or on foot.

Bishop Whelan was exhausting the hospitality of bordering priests and knew that in order to properly serve and evangelize, he had to attract priests and seminarians from outside of Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Maryland.

So, putting pen to paper, he wrote a seminary in Ireland.

He knew he had to be brutally honest to attract young men who not only embraced a strong relationship with Christ, but also a strong backbone and an adventurous willingness to endure the many hardships required.

Bishop Whelan's recruiting pitch to All Hallows Seminary in Dublin, Ireland, advised prospective priests:



*"Catholics are very few and generally very scattered, requiring a priest sometimes to attend a circuit of 100 miles in diameter." He described the state as "quite unimproved, less so perhaps than many portions of the remote west, exceedingly mountainous, with bad roads, and a very uncultivated population. (Any missionary) must expect a life of great labour and fatigue, much exposure to the cold, heat, and rain, bad roads, very indifferent diet and lodging, but little respect for his dignity, few Catholics, little of society, a compensation barely adequate to support him in the plainest and most economical manner. I wish no one to be taken by surprise. Many of our missions are just such as this; and I want no priest who does not come fully prepared to enter upon such a charge, certain that his recompense is not to be expected here, but hereafter. Make the young men whom you may think of selecting fully aware of this; inform them that there are places much more desirable elsewhere, where they may labour advantageously, and that if they select my Diocese I shall regard their character and honor compromised if afterwards they flinch, and I shall even refuse an exeat where there is no other good controlling motive."*

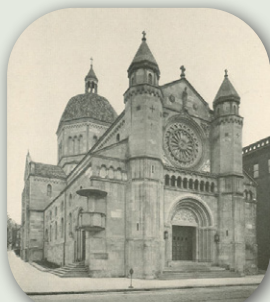
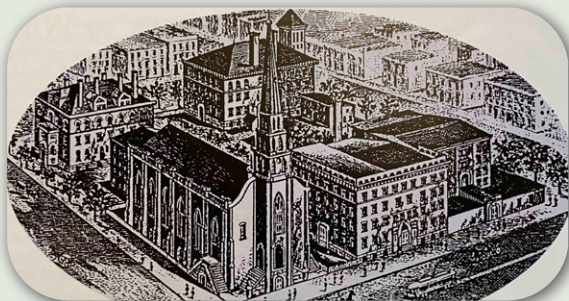
The young priests took Whelan's warnings to heart. Not only did they travel to labor in these West Virginia mountains, but they also continued an association for more than 180 years.

## HE HAD A REPUTATION – TOUGH AS NAILS

When the original St. James Church in Wheeling had fallen in disrepair, Bishop Whelan led the campaign for a new church to be constructed. A site was secured, and in 1847, a cornerstone laid for the parish that later became the Cathedral of St. Joseph.

But it wasn't just his determination and administration that was so impressive, it was also his strength. It was Bishop Whelan that climbed more than 200 feet in the

air to place a cross on top of the new spire at St. James's after construction workers refused the dangerous task. In 1872, Bishop Whelan successfully appealed to Pope Pius IX to change the patronage of St. James to St. Joseph, reasoning that Joseph, the Terror of Demons and Guardian of the Redeemer, patron of the entire church, would further protect and strengthen the faithful of the Diocese of Wheeling.



## BECOMING OUR OWN

In 1849, Bishop Whelan convinced the Church hierarchy in the Archdiocese of Baltimore to divide the Diocese of Richmond by the natural barriers of the Allegheny Mountains.



On July 19, 1850, the Holy See established the Diocese of Wheeling. The diocese included all of what is now West Virginia except for the eastern panhandle and Potomac highlands, and included several counties in southwestern Virginia, all the way to the Tennessee border.

Four days later, on July 23, 1850, Blessed Pope Pius IX named Bishop Richard Whelan as the first bishop for the diocese.

According to Bishop Whelan's diocesan records from

1850, churches completed or nearing completion were in Martinsburg, Harpers Ferry, Bath (Berkeley Springs), Union (Monroe Co.), Sweet Springs, Tazewell Court House (VA), Wytheville (VA), Wheeling, Parkersburg, Howesville, Fairmont, Morgantown, Weston, Braxton Court House, Summersville, Charleston, and Grafton.

Bishop Whelan died at the age of 65 in 1874.

It took another 100 years, in 1974, for the Holy See to redraw the boundaries of the diocese to correspond with the state, and further renaming us as the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston.



Watch the Diocesan Website, FaithInWV e-bulletin, The Catholic Spirit, and parish bulletins for more stories, events, and cause to celebrate. [DWC.ORG/175TH/](http://DWC.ORG/175TH/)

TWENTIETH SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME

**First Reading: Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10**

Because he demoralized the people, the prophet Jeremiah is tossed in a cistern of mud and left for dead. An Ethiopian court official, Ebed-melech rescues the prophet.

**Responsorial: Psalm 40**

“Come to my aid!”

**Second Reading: Hebrews 12:1-4**

“We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses....  
Run the race and fix your eyes on Jesus.”

**Gospel: Luke 12:49-53**

Jesus says: I have come to divide.

[CLICK HERE FOR FULL SCRIPTURE TEXT](#)

PRAYER INTENTIONS

For the Church, that we fully embrace our opportunity to become a great cloud of witnesses, encouraging one another to be confident and persevere in sharing Christ and His word to others through our actions, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For world leaders, that they may ease their tensions in order to listen to one another and be able to peacefully compromise where the gifts of wisdom and understanding from the Spirit prevail, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For all who are suffering visibly and privately, may we comfort them with our prayers, empathy, and kind actions, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For your prayers, let us pray to the Lord. . .

*Lord hear our prayer*



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Clarksburg-Bridgeport	FM	97.5
Dunbar - Charleston	AM	1450
Eastern Panhandle - coming soon	FM	88.5
Grafton - Clarksburg	AM	1190
Keyser - coming soon	FM	98.9
Montgomery - Beckley	FM	89.7
St. Marys - Parkersburg	FM	105.3
Star City - Morgantown	FM	89.7
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Wheeling - Martins Ferry, OH	FM	90.7
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*Liturgy of the Hours*

LITURGY OF THE HOURS

Pray the prayer for this day, this hour!

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Scan the QR code or visit the link below to view a PDF version of the Liturgy of the Hours.



MASS ONLINE

Saturday 6pm Masses will continue to be livestreamed from the Cathedral of St. Joseph, and will be available on our website each Sunday at [DWC.ORG](http://DWC.ORG).