

A History of the Diocese of Arlington

Part II: Years of Growth and Expansion (1983-1998)

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Every diocese experiences a number of "firsts" during the initial years of its existence, and obviously the Diocese of Arlington is no exception to this rule. On Feb. 8, 1983, the diocese found itself without a bishop for the first time since its establishment in 1974 as Pope John Paul II named Arlington's Bishop Thomas J. Welsh the second bishop of Allentown. With the transfer of Bishop Welsh to Allentown, Arlington became a "vacant see" eagerly anticipating the appointment of its second bishop.



GREETINGS — Bishop Keating hugs Bishop Thomas Murphy during his installation ceremony.

Church canon law requires the election of a diocesan administrator to lead a diocese while it awaits the appointment of a new bishop, and Arlington's College of Consultors elected Msgr. John Hannan to fill this role. Msgr. Hannan's term as diocesan administrator was relatively brief, as the pope named Father John R. Keating, chancellor and vicar general of the Archdiocese of Chicago, as the second bishop of Arlington on June 7, 1983. Father Keating became Bishop Keating when he was ordained a bishop and took possession of the diocese on Aug. 4, 1983, the feast of St. John Vianney, patron of parish priests.

Bishop Keating came to the diocese as an internationally renowned canonist and a priest equipped with administrative skills. He had acquired 20 years experience as an official of both the Chicago Tribunal and Chancery while holding numerous offices in the curia of the Archdiocese of Chicago. Bishop Keating is still remembered among canonists for his 1963 doctoral dissertation, "The Bearing of Mental Impairment on the Validity of Marriage," which offered ground-breaking insights into the Church's understanding of a person's psychological capacity to enter into a sacramental marriage.

From the start, it was obvious that Bishop Keating's tenure in Arlington would be marked by growth and expansion. Less than 24 hours after his installation, Bishop Keating dedicated Precious Blood Church in Culpeper. During the next 15 years, Bishop Keating dedicated 20 new churches and seven new parochial schools.

The growth that took place during his years in



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BLESSING — Washington Cardinal William Baum blesses Arlington Bishop John R. Keating during his installation ceremony as second bishop of Arlington in 1983.

Arlington was not confined to just an increased number of parish and school buildings. The greatest sign of growth in the diocese was the rapidly increasing Catholic population. When Bishop Keating took possession of the diocese in 1983, Catholics numbered approximately 188,000. When his successor took office in 1999, that Catholic population had increased to 336,000.

In 1983, there were 57 parishes in the Arlington Diocese. Bishop Keating established six new parishes during the following year: Sacred Heart, Manassas (1984), St. Andrew the Apostle, Clifton (1989), St. Theresa, Ashburn (1991), St. Paul Chung, Fairfax (1996), St. Clare of Assisi, Clifton (1996), and St. Raymond of Penafort, Fairfax Station (1997).

Bishop Keating is remembered for the great number of priests he ordained for the Arlington Diocese. Between 1984-97, he ordained 84 priests who still serve locally, a figure which represents 62 percent of the total number of Arlington diocesan priests in 1997. On May 18, 1996, Bishop Keating ordained 13 men to the priesthood. This was the largest ordina-

tion class in diocesan history and the largest ordination class in any U.S. diocese that year. This ordination increased the number of Arlington diocesan priests by 10 percent in one day.

In addition to encouraging vocations to the priesthood, Bishop Keating is remembered for his episcopal role as teacher of God's people. He published six pastoral letters including: "Consultation in the Parish" (1984), "Reverence for the Eucharist" (1988), "Catholic Schools" (1990), "Handing on the Faith" (1992), "Morality and Conscience" (1994), and "Courage" (1996).

Bishop Keating encouraged a missionary spirit and a desire to spread the Gospel. Under his leadership, the diocese sent four of its priests and numerous lay people to share their time, energy and talent with brothers and sisters in Christ in the Dominican Republic. Father Gerard Creedon was the first Arlington priest to serve in the parish of San Francisco de Asís in Baníca. Msgr. Thomas Cassidy, Father Patrick Posey and Father Donald Rooney also served both in Baníca and in the parish of San José in Pedro Santana. These priests, and many lay men and women of the Arlington Diocese, have served in the Dominican Republic since 1991.

Bishop Keating lent his support to the effort to evangelize students on the college campuses in the diocese. He appointed chaplains at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg and George Mason University in Fairfax. At George Mason, he appointed Father Robert Cilinski as the chaplain. Father Cilinski served during the construction and dedication of St. Robert Bellarmine Chapel and its campus ministry center.

In 1996, Father Anton Justs, became the first Arlington diocesan priest to be ordained a bishop. Bishop Justs was chosen by Pope John Paul II to become the bishop of Jelgava, Latvia, to serve God's people in a country beginning once again to enjoy religious freedom.

Bishop Keating lived a life dedicated to building up the Church founded on the rock of Peter and he died very shortly after reaffirming his loyalty to the Apostle's successor.

While in Rome for his ad limina visit with Pope John Paul II, Bishop Keating died suddenly of a massive heart attack in the 15th year of his tenure as bishop of Arlington and in the 40th year of his priestly ministry, on March 22, 1998.

Fr. Ferguson is parochial vicar at St. Luke Parish in McLean.

Next week: The diocese under Bishop Loverde.



BENEDICTINE ANNIVERSARY — Bishop Keating greets Benedictine sisters May 1, 1994, following the celebration of Mass marking the order's 100th anniversary in Bristow.