Racial, ethnic diversity of South Jersey

The multi-ethnic character of the Camden Diocese had its beginnings in the mid 1800s. A settlement of blacks in Snow Hill built St. James Church in 1865, in what is now Lawnside, below Haddonfield. Black Catholic communities later gathered at St. Monica in Atlantic City, which was founded at the turn of the century by Emma Lewis with the help of St. Katharine Drexel. St. Bartholomew mission in Camden was opened in 1947.

The Germans and the Irish had been the earlier settlers of South Jersey, but by the beginning of the new century there were 14,000 of Polish descent in New Jersey; hence, St. Joseph Church in Camden, and the Polish missions in Egg Harbor, Mays Landing, Swedesboro and Woodbine.

By 1900, there were over 32,000 Italians in North Jersey alone, with thousands more settling the farms surrounding Vineland, and building their first church north of Vineland in 1880. The early presence of Italian citizens in South Jersey is a presence crucial to the growth of Catholicism in the region.

When the Diocese of Trenton was founded in 1881, 11 of its 27 priests were in South Jersey. By 1900, 20 of the 81 parishes of Trenton were in South Jersey. In 1884, the Fathers of Mercy established their seminary and college in Vineland, and Trenton’s bishop sent his seminarians for training and his priests for retreat to Sacred Heart College and Theological Seminary, which lasted only 10 years.

The growth of South Jersey and the church here began to escalate through transportation, industry and immigration. Prosperity and mobility created a new migration to the suburbs. The prosperity of the 1920s became translated into Catholic schools. During Bishop Walsh’s 10-year office in Trenton, 45 parochial and 11 secondary high schools were established. High schools in Camden, Gloucester, Atlantic City and Penns Grove began during this era.

When Bishop Walsh went to Trenton, a good part of the region felt the strain of the Depression. Despite the odds, the number of Catholic schools in South Jersey increased with Sacred Heart High School in Vineland and Vincent Pallotti Seminary, later St. Joseph High School in Hammonton.

With continued growth in the Catholic population during the first decades of this century, Pope Pius XI on Dec. 9, 1937 established the Diocese of Camden for the people of the six southern-most counties of New Jersey, a region containing nearly 2,700 square miles. This also marked the time that New Jersey, previously part of the ecclesiastical province of New York, became a separate province, with the metropolitan see at Newark.

The new diocese of approximately 100,000 Catholics in 49 parishes, 31 mission churches and 35 parochial schools (30 elementary and five secondary) was served by 75 diocesan priests and 11 priests of religious communities. In the whole area there was not a single Catholic human services institution or school of higher learning.

The years of Bishop Eustace, 1938-56

On Dec. 15, 1937, it was announced that the first bishop of Camden would be Father Bartholomew J. Eustace of New York, then 50 years old. On May 3, 1938, 5,000 people lined the streets leading from the railway station at Haddonfield as the new bishop made his way in a motorcade down Haddon Avenue to the rectory of his new cathedral, Immaculate Conception Church, in Camden.

He dedicated the new diocese to the Blessed Virgin Mary “to take under her care and protection from this moment henceforth the infant Church of Camden.”

In human services, the establishment of St. Mary Catholic Home in 1941 by the Little Servant Sisters of the Immaculate Conception would have major implications on the growth of social ministry in the diocese. At St. Mary’s, the Sisters tilled the land and raised the animals so that the elderly and sick residents could receive good care.

A major undertaking was the erection of Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center, still the only Catholic hospital in the diocese.

Bishop Eustace’s support of the Holy Name Society in the parishes resulted in a series of pre-war and post-war rallies with thousands present at each one.

In the early 1940s and during World War II, with the expansion of industry in the area, the population experienced a rapid growth with the development of great numbers of new housing communities. The growth continued throughout Bishop Eustace’s time. Census figures and economic statistics demonstrate the changes from a poor, depressed industrial and agricultural area to a populous suburban residential community, at least financially comfortable, and in many instances, well-to-do. Large numbers of families moved into South Jersey during this time from directly across the Delaware River.

Some 50 students from Ireland were recruited, either by the bishop or his vicar general, Msgr. Augustine Mozier, and were eventually ordained priests for the diocese. The policy of recruiting young men with residence outside the diocese not only built up clergy personnel numerically, but it also resulted in the advantages of diversity of family, cultural and geographical backgrounds, adding to the strength and depth of priestly ministry in the diocese.

Under Bishop Eustace’s direction, 31 new parishes were founded, 25 missions opened (16 of which later became parishes). Three new high schools were opened and six expanded; 22 elementary schools were opened and 14 existing ones expanded.

Bishop Eustace dedicated the new diocese to the Blessed Virgin Mary.
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The years of Bishop McCarthy, 1957-59

Bishop Justin J. McCarthy, 56, served a relatively short time as the second bishop of Camden. He was installed at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception on March 19, 1957. He died after a heart attack on Dec. 26, 1959.

His chief historical legacy was his commitment to total Catholic education. The new schools that were opened and the additions made to the existing ones made room for an increase of over 5,000 students at the elementary level and 1,000 students at the high school level.

A major effort was also undertaken to upgrade the teaching of religion to youth in public schools. The renewal began with intensive training for religious education teachers. At the time of Bishop McCarthy’s death, some 20,000 youth were enrolled in the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine classes, an increase of almost 100 percent from the time of his installation.

The bishop’s second major priority was ministry to the rapidly growing Hispanic population in the diocese.

There were at the time some 20,000 Hispanics, mostly from Puerto Rico, many of whom had come to work on the farms and then remained as permanent residents.

As early as June 1957, the bishop displayed serious concern for the large number of Spanish-speaking immigrants in the diocese, the difficulties experienced by the migrant farm workers, and their need to be served by the church in their native language.

A Mobile Chapel for migrants, named Capilla Rodante Santa Ana, was dedicated in 1957 by Bishop McCarthy. Following a request from the bishop, four sisters of the Oblates of the Sacred Heart arrived in Camden in December 1959 from El Salvador to teach religion and to do social work among parishioners of Our Lady of Fatima Church in Camden. They helped train girls to teach catechism in the homes of the Hispanic Our Lady of Fatima Parish.

Another priority of Camden’s second bishop was encouragement of the laity to participate actively in civic affairs. In addition, various lay groups were of special concern to Bishop McCarthy, including the Friends of the Sacred Heart, the Camden County Bar Association, the Medical Guild, the St. Joseph’s Guild, the Knights of Columbus, the Catholic Daughters of America, Our Lady of Lourdes Auxiliary, and the Bishop’s Committee for Charity.

The years of Archbishop Damiano, 1960-87

It was announced on Feb. 10, 1960, that the third bishop of Camden would be Archbishop Celestine Damiano, 48, then Apostolic Delegate to South Africa. The Archbishop was a priest of the Buffalo Diocese, where he had been a pastor, and afterward, from 1947-52, a member of the staff in Rome of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.

Shortly after his installation in Camden, the archbishop spoke publicly of the plight of the 25,000 Puerto Ricans in the diocese. For the next seven years of his time in Camden, the archbishop put into action several initiatives to provide a better life for Hispanics. Particular significant contributions made under his direction were the opening of a pre-natal clinic for expectant mothers in North Camden, staffed by the Hospitaler Sisters he brought from Rome in 1966, and the establishment in 1962 of the Spanish Catholic Center which is now a parish for all Hispanics in the city of Vineland.

The works of the Neighborhood Apostolate were also important achievements in the upgrading of pastoral care for Hispanics.

A ministry began in 1961 with Father (later Monsignor) Edward Kennedy and Father (later Monsignor) Felix O’Neill assigned to what would be known as Camden’s Brazil Missions.

Probably the most lasting memorial of the archbishop’s ministry in Camden was his establishment of the House of Charity Appeal for funding the human services of the diocese.

In rapid succession, several new social ministries to the poor and needy were announced: the pre-natal clinic on State Street in North Camden, additional classes for the developmentally disabled and handicapped persons, the construction of a new complex planned for the educable and trainable in Deptford Township, and the opening of new nursing homes in Pleasantville and Upper Pittsgrove Township near Elmer. A new chapel and convent were added to St. Mary’s Home, and by 1965 the services there had been expanded to house 95 chronically ill patients.

Just three weeks after his arrival in Camden, Archbishop Damiano announced that his main work in Camden would be to advance Catholic education. By September 1962 the new Camden Catholic High School on Cuthbert Boulevard in Cherry Hill opened to replace the Camden building substantially destroyed by a fire on Easter night in April 1960. St. James High School was built and an addition to Gloucester Catholic High School. The new Holy Spirit High School opened in Absecon in 1964, and in the winter of 1965 the archbishop broke ground for the third new high school, Pope Paul VI in Haddon Township. The old Camden Catholic High School reopened as a girls’ academy, Cathedral Academy, in September 1965.

Other new high schools were also rising. St. Augustine Preparatory School was opened in Richland, Our Lady of Mercy Academy in Newfield, and an addition to St. Mary of the Angels Academy in Haddonfield. Bishop Eustace Preparatory in Pennsauken was extensively expanded.

On the elementary level, 17 parish schools were built during the archbishop’s time; other schools were modernized and expanded. A diocesan board of education was established in 1965, a board which has been instrumental in recommending policies to further Christian formation and educational quality in the schools of the diocese.

On the post-secondary level, Our Lady of Lourdes School of Nursing opened in January 1961. In addition, the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) program experienced major growth during Archbishop Damiano’s time.

The archbishop also fostered involvement in ecumenical and inter-religious activities.
The clergy and people of Saint Rose of Lima Parish, Haddon Heights celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Diocese of Camden and asks God’s special blessing upon our Diocese

Father Joseph Byerley, Pastor
Father Jerry Gomez, Parochial Vicar
Father Alfred Hewett, Retired, in residence
Deacon Brian Ayscue
Deacon Douglas Crawford
The years of Bishop Guilfoyle, 1968-89

Bishop George H. Guilfoyle was 54 when he was appointed the fourth Ordinary of the Camden Diocese by Pope Paul VI. Less than a month after his installation, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. In his first pastoral letter, the bishop called racism in America “not a mere myth but an ugly reality.”

The bishop directed that each pastor in the diocese establish a parish council before the end of 1968. He also established a Diocesan Pastoral Council the following year.

In 1971, an Office of Pastoral Planning was established to chart the purpose and direction for the future of the church in the diocese. During 1976 the Office of Pastoral Planning coordinated a process of wide consultation about diocesan mission in light of the Exhortation on Evangelization issued by Pope Paul VI in 1975.

RENEW, a three-year program to foster parish spiritual development was recommended for the Camden Diocese by the Diocesan Pastoral Council and was in place in many parishes by 1983.

During Bishop Guilfoyle’s time in Camden, the diocese witnessed the revision of the rites of all seven sacraments. The Liturgical Commission was charged from the beginning to direct the changes in the rites, forms and methods called for by the Second Vatican Council.


The first ordination to the permanent diaconate took place in the diocese on October 4, 1976, at St. Rose of Lima, Haddon Heights.

Like his predecessors, Bishop Guilfoyle made Catholic schools and religious education major priorities and in 1980 established the Tuition Assistance Fund to help parents in financial need meet tuition costs for their children’s attendance at Catholic parochial schools.

Evangelization in the Hispanic community, through religious service and social ministry, was accomplished through a newly-established Hispanic Apostolate. Spanish-language Masses in many South Jersey parishes were instituted, while the diocese worked to obtain Spanish-speaking priests and religious for pastoral work among Hispanics.

Bishop Guilfoyle increased both social services and the revenue to fund them, including the Hispanic Apostolate, the hospital chaplains and prison ministry, Archbishop Damiano School in Westville - Grove and other special education in the elementary and secondary schools, the Apostolate to the Deaf, the works of Catholic Charities; St. John the Baptist Pre-Natal Clinic, St. Luke’s Medical Services and Legal Services to the needy, all in Camden, the Visiting Nurse and Home Health programs.

A Department of Housing was established in June 1969 by Bishop Guilfoyle, specifically to look to the needs of the aged and to seek to resolve some of the problems connected with the growing aged population.

Resulting from this work was the dedication of the Victorian Towers in Cape May in September 1973, with the diocese serving as non-profit sponsor. The facility accommodates hundreds of older individuals in its 205 residential units. The same type of project was dedicated in Cherry Hill in April 1984 with 150 residential units for the elderly at St. Mary’s Village. Davenport Village in Hainesport, meanwhile, was established in 2002.

During Bishop Guilfoyle’s time in Camden, eight new parishes were established, 23 churches were built, with many more renovated to meet the changing needs, 11 convents were erected, 37 rectories were built, a recreation center was erected, six new schools were built along with 14 additions to existing schools, and 24 parish halls were erected.

St. Pius X Retreat House was acquired by the diocese, special education facilities were expanded, and a Newman Center was erected at Glassboro State College. Nursing homes construction and acquisition increased to four.

Auxiliary Bishop James L. Schad

Bishop James L. Schad was the Camden Diocese’s first and only auxiliary bishop, serving from 1966 until his retirement in 1993.

He was born in Philadelphia but when he was a child his family moved to Vineland, which was part of the Camden Diocese when the diocese was formed in 1937.

He was ordained a priest April 10, 1943. After six years as an associate pastor in Atlantic City, he did a three-year stint as an Army chaplain in South Carolina and Germany.

In 1958 he was made founding pastor of Most Holy Redeemer Parish in Westville Grove and earned a reputation among fellow priests as “bingo king.” Through parish collections and bingo proceeds he purchased a rectory and convent and built and completely paid off a new church and full-size school, leaving a fully built parish facility that was debt-free within nine years.

Named a bishop in 1966, he remained pastor of Holy Redeemer for the next year but also became diocesan consultor and vicar general and director of Catholic Charities and the House of Charity.

From the early 1970s, when he welcomed a new prayer group that asked to meet in his parish, until 1990 he was diocesan moderator of charismatic renewal.

He was pastor of St. Rose of Lima Parish in Haddon Heights 1967-79, of Maris Stella Parish in Avalon 1979-85, and of Immaculate Conception Cathedral in Camden from 1985 until 2002.

When he became pastor of the cathedral, its list of registered parishioners had declined to 25 and one of his first jobs was to complete the final phases of closing the school.

Within a short time he turned the cathedral’s small soup kitchen into a massive operation that since then has served hundreds of people every night. He regularly served the food himself and delighted in planning holiday meals.

He died March 27, 2003.
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Congratulations

Diocese of Camden
on your 75th Anniversary

Parishioners of
Holy Trinity Parish,
Downbeach
The years of Bishop McHugh, 1989-99

On May 21, 1989, it was announced that Auxiliary Bishop James T. McHugh of Newark had been appointed fifth bishop of Camden. He was installed on June 20, 1989.

For his 10 years in Camden, upholding the teachings of the Catholic Church in a society that too easily dismisses religion was of paramount importance. He was an ardent defender of the faith and of the sanctity of human life, and, as architect of the plan of the American bishops to promote all human life, has been called the “father of the pro-life movement in America.”

Bishop McHugh undertook a major reorganization of the diocese’s administrative structure and pushed to safeguard Catholic education. A diocesan synod process, in which thousands of Catholics came together in locations all over the diocese to have their say in the future direction of the Church of Camden, culminated in a three-day Synod event Sept. 11-13, 1992, at Camden Catholic High School, Cherry Hill.

Bishop McHugh also authorized the relocation of the Diocese’s headquarters from Haddon Avenue to downtown Camden in 1998 in the PNC Bank building at Market and Broadway, directly across from the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, the Mother Church of the Diocese. It was in the midst of the move to the new offices that it was announced, on Dec. 7, 1998, that Bishop McHugh had been appointed coadjutor of Rockville Centre. Until the appointment of a new bishop for Camden, he served as apostolic administrator of Camden.

The years of Bishop DiMarzio, 1999-2003

It was announced on June 8, 1999 that Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio, 54, had been appointed sixth bishop of Camden by Pope John Paul II.

Bishop DiMarzio assumed a high-profile role in speaking out for immigrants and refugees. As chairman of the Bishops Committee on Migration, he testified before Congress about the effects of mandatory deportation and mandatory detention provisions of a 1996 immigration law. While he was director of the USCC Migration and Refugee Services Office, he created the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, known as CLINIC, a legal services corporation through which dioceses offer new immigrants help in resettling.

Bishop DiMarzio established St. Katharine Drexel Parish in Egg Harbor Township. A new parish for all Hispanics in Vineland, Immaculate Heart of Mary (Immaculada Corazon de Maria), was founded in December at the former site of the Spanish Catholic Center.

In addition, the Vicariate for Pastoral Planning, with the collaboration of the Vicariate for Pastoral Life, developed a pastoral plan for meeting the needs of the approximately 110,000 Hispanics in the South Jersey area.

The Korean communities of the diocese benefited from the establishment of two missions to serve their spiritual needs and established individual missions at Holy Rosary Parish in Cherry Hill, and St. Andrew Kim Korean Catholic Mission in Pleasantville.

Vietnamese, Haitian, Filipino and Polish apostolates were also established.

Bishop DiMarzio established a scholarship fund for low-income families who wish to send their children to Catholic schools. He also oversaw the dedication of new elementary schools, Bishop McHugh Regional Catholic School of Dennis Township, which opened in September 2000, and Guardian Angels Regional School in Gibbstown, which opened in September 2001. Regionalization plans were implemented to alleviate situations of declining enrollment at several elementary schools.

A new Human Services Center, housing the offices of the Vicariate, was blessed and dedicated in 2003 at the renovated site of the former diocesan offices on Haddon Avenue.

The bishop’s spiritual concerns reached beyond the diocese’s own parishes and schools to include other faith communities. Joining in the celebration of its 50th anniversary, the bishop addressed the local Jewish community of Temple Emmanuel in Cherry Hill, calling both faith communities to mutual respect and understanding. The bishop presided at an ecumenical prayer service with the Lutheran community to celebrate the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification which was signed by Catholics and Lutherans in Augsburg, Germany.

He also participated in services at Temple Beth El Synagogue in Margate City with the local Jewish community.
Bishop Eustace Preparatory School congratulates the Diocese of Camden on 75 years of service to the Catholic community of South Jersey.