

DIOCESAN FACT SHEET

DIOCESE OF BIRMINGHAM IN ALABAMA

ESTABLISHED JUNE 28, 1969

Comprises the following counties of North Alabama (28,091 square miles): Bibb, Blount, Calhoun, Chambers, Cherokee, Chilton, Clay, Cleburne, Colbert, Coosa, Cullman, DeKalb, Etowah, Fayette, Franklin, Greene, Hale, Jackson, Jefferson, Lamar, Lauderdale, Lawrence, Limestone, Madison, Marengo, Marion, Marshall, Morgan, Perry, Pickens, Randolph, St. Clair, Shelby, Sumter, Talladega, Tallapoosa, Tuscaloosa, Walker & Winston

Most Reverend Robert J. Baker, S.T.D.

4th Bishop of Birmingham

Ordained a priest March 21, 1970; appointed Bishop of Charleston July 21, 1999;
ordained & installed September 29, 1999; appointed Bishop of Birmingham August 14, 2007;
installed Bishop of Birmingham October 2, 2007

Personnel

Priests: 118

Diocesan: 64

Active in diocese: 47

Active outside of diocese: 0

Abroad: 3

Retired, sick, absent: 14

Non-diocesan: 19

Religious: 35

Permanent Deacons: 68

Religious Brothers: 36

Religious Sisters: 115

Seminarians: 8

Parishes: 65

Missions: 15

Pastoral Centers: 0

Catholic Hospitals: 4

St. Vincent's, Birmingham

St. Vincent's, East (Birmingham)

St. Vincent's, Blount (Oneonta)

St. Vincent's, St. Clair (Pell City)

Total number of patients assisted: 466,510

Health Care Centers: 1

Assisted Living Center for Clergy: 1 (St. John Vianney Residence for Priests)

Special Centers for Social Services: 11

Catholic Social Services: 1 (Birmingham)

Catholic Family Services: 3 (Birmingham, Florence, Huntsville offices)

Catholic Centers of Concern: 5 (Birmingham, Anniston, Tuscaloosa, Gadsden, Huntsville offices)

Guadalupan Multicultural Services, Eutaw

Hispanic Pastoral Center: 1 (Birmingham)

Total assisted: 94,000

Schools

Diocesan and Parochial Elementary Schools: 16

Total students: 4,224

Private Elementary School: 2

Total students: 261

Diocesan High Schools: 4

Total students: 1,223

Private High School: 2

Total students: 466

Religious Education Programs:

Elementary School (PreK - 8) students: 10,498

High School students: 3,183

Total students: 19,865

Teachers in Catholic schools:

Lay teachers: 543

Brothers: 0

Priests: 6

Sisters: 10

Sacraments

Baptisms:

Infant: 2,108

Youth and adult: 708

Total: 2,816

First Communion: 2,479

Confirmations: 1,917

Marriages: 420

Deaths: 578

Alabama Population Statistics

Total population: 3,060,222

Total Catholics: 103,695

Percentage of population that is Catholic: 3%

Sources: Official Catholic Directory - 2016

U.S. Census Bureau - 2016

MISSION STATEMENT

DIOCESE OF BIRMINGHAM IN ALABAMA

PREAMBLE

We are the Catholic Church of Birmingham, Alabama.
We are responding to God's call to proclaim
Jesus Christ as the Eternal Son of the living God.
We are witnesses to the Gospel as we announce the death of the Lord,
proclaim His resurrection, and await His coming in glory.
At the heart of our Christian Community is celebration:
of the Word, of the Eucharist, of the Sacraments.
We journey with the Holy Spirit as our guide, with Mary,
the Mother of God as our model, and in communion
with the Holy Father, the Bishop of Rome.

STATEMENT

Established in 1969 under the patronage of St. Paul, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama is missionary in nature. We are a community of disciples, representatives of many races and cultures, priests, deacons, women and men religious, and laity. As Church, our ministries and outreach encompass families, parishes, schools, associations, and a myriad of programs. We are spread through 39 counties over a geographic area of 28,092 square miles in the northern part of Alabama.

We are a pilgrim people, called to evangelize and to be evangelized. We are a Church committed to responsible stewardship of God's many gifts. Our vision is to be a Church renewed and renewing the face of the earth as a baptized community empowered by the Spirit, faithful to the Gospel, and committed to building the Kingdom of peace and justice.

We are committed to:

- > empower one another to the fullness of our sacramental commitment.
- > experience the love of the Triune God, and share that love with all peoples, especially the poor and the unchurched.
- > help heal our sisters and brothers in their brokenness with the compassion and peace of Jesus, regardless of religion, race, gender, age or social status.
- > promote a God centered society that respects the dignity of each person, especially the unborn, the elderly, and the marginalized.
- > work ecumenically with other religious traditions in an effort to reach out to our unchurched sisters and brothers.
- > appreciate God's gift of cultural diversity that expresses itself in worship, in leadership, and in service.

HISTORY

THE DIOCESE OF BIRMINGHAM IN ALABAMA

FORMER BISHOPS

Bishop Joseph G. Vath

Dec. 9, 1969 - July 14, 1987

Bishop Raymond J. Boland

Feb. 2, 1988 - June 22, 1993

Bishop David E. Foley

May 13, 1994 - May 9, 2005 (Administrator May 10, 2005 - Oct. 2, 2007)

The Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama was formally established in 1969. It encompasses 39 counties of northern Alabama and covers 28,091 square miles. The diocese currently has a Catholic population of over 88,000, which includes an additional large number of Catholics of Hispanic origin.

Although Roman Catholicism in northern Alabama has an ancient history, its lasting impact was only felt at the beginning of the 19th century. Our faith was first missioned with the arrival of Hernando DeSoto in 1540. DeSoto entered what is now our diocese with priests who were charged with the missionary responsibility of bringing the indigenous population to the Faith. His continual aggression upon the indigenous peoples made their work very difficult. As he moved out of the area there were many men who deserted his ranks, even so, the Faith did not gain a foothold. Desoto was ultimately killed in the Americas. His plan for amassing great wealth and for propagation of the faith both failed.

It would be 277 years before there would be another concerted effort to bring the Faith to northern Alabama. In 1817 French settlers were land-granted an area that would ultimately be named Demopolis, Alabama. These settlers brought with them their Catholic Faith and for a short time, through the devastation of famine and fever, the Faith flourished. Unfortunately, because of the lack of priests, the faithful ultimately intermarried with the local American protestant population and our Faith progress was again at a standstill.

Northern Alabama during this period was a wild unsettled conglomeration of small agricultural villages. Though there was a thriving Catholic population along the coast of southern Alabama, northern Alabama lacked a Catholic infrastructure. The few Catholics in the north, mostly English, Irish and Scottish, intermarried with the local protestant population.

This trend continued until after the Civil War (1861-1865). When the war ended, there was greatly increased settlement in what was to become the Birmingham diocese. The city of Birmingham, Alabama was founded in 1871 and was named for the industrial city located in England because of the abundance of iron ore and coal in the area. The town and its industry began to attract Catholic immigrants. Initially they came from Scotland, Ireland, England and later, from Italy.

Our concern for the poor and our outreach to the needy has accomplished much to communicate our commitment to Christ and the poor. Every time a non-Catholic is helped we dismantle one more prejudice and put to rest a little more ignorance about our Faith.

It was the waves of immigration that helped the Catholic Church establish a firm foundation in the diocese. These faith-filled men and women were strong, persistent and resilient in their faith. They refused to be proselytized by the local evangelicals. It was not easy for them. There was then, indeed, there still is now, in some parts of the diocese, a strong anti-Catholic sentiment. Based upon ignorance and prejudice, this sentiment gave rise to organizations that were blatantly anti-Catholic. The strongest and most widespread of these organizations was the Ku Klux Klan. They felt Catholicism to be anti-American.

The Catholic school system has had a tremendous impact upon the diocese. Time and time again, the faithful here have been threatened by anti-Catholicism, ignorance and even physical abuse. But they have been stalwart in their defense of the Faith.

Now there is a new challenge that has been developing in the diocese. Hispanics from Mexico, Central and South America have arrived here in huge numbers. There is an irony here: the first presence of Catholicism in the diocese came from the progenitors of these very people. Now, driven by economic need, they have been again arriving in the diocese in great numbers. In 1990, there were about 9,000 people of Hispanic origin in this diocese. Now the Hispanic population is approximately ten times that number. Recently, immigration legislation focused on undocumented immigrants was enacted by the Alabama State Legislature and challenged by Catholic, Episcopal, and Methodist bishops as excessively harsh. This legislation has resulted in the departure of many Catholic Hispanics from the State of Alabama.

Finally, the Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama is a faith-filled diocese of Catholics who believe and who desire to believe more fully. Their lives represent a centuries-old history of encountering and living the Faith.

COAT OF ARMS

THE MOST REVEREND ROBERT J. BAKER, S.T.D.
BISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM IN ALABAMA



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BLAZON

Arms impaled. Dexter: Argent, a bend of five lozenges azure between in chief a sword and in base the Cross of Saint Chad both gules. Sinister: Vert, the Great Cross of Saint Augustine argent between, in dexter a garb of three or, and in sinister, a palm tree of the third, in base on the sun in his splendor also of the third, an anchor erect azure.

MOTTO

For his motto Bishop Baker chose the words “Rejoicing in Hope” which are adapted from Saint Paul’s letter to the Romans, 12:12: “Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer.” This is Christ’s gift of grace to us all.

SIGNIFICANCE

The arms to the viewer’s left (Shield bearer’s right, from behind the shield) are the escutcheon of the Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama. This includes elements from the arms of the English city after which the Alabama city is named. The five blue lozenges or diamond shapes charges appear in the arms of Birmingham in the U.K.; the red cross of Saint Chad reminds us of the titular saint of the metropolitan cathedral of the archdiocese of Birmingham in the U.K., and the upright sword is the symbol of Saint Paul, patron of the Birmingham, Alabama cathedral.

Bishop Baker impales his personal heraldic device onto the coat of arms of his diocese to represent his governance of the people of God in the Church of Birmingham in Alabama. Impalement also represents the mystical “marriage” between the local Ordinary and his jurisdiction. The shield of arms is ensigned with the green heraldic hat which has sixteen “houppes” or tassels depending from either side denoting the hierarchical rank of a diocesan bishop.

The Bishop’s personal arms are composed of “charges” or elements which have religious, personal, and family significance.

The green field represents growth in the Faith as suggested by the liturgical color for “Ordinary Time” when the Church teaches us to mature in our faith commitment.

The Great Cross is located in the city of Saint Augustine, Florida; Bishop Baker’s diocese of ordination to the priesthood, and it denotes the location of the first Mass celebrated on this continent. It is the cross of our redemption and its special design and location remind us of the beginnings of the Faith in our country. The garb or sheaf of wheat appears as three bundles bound together and recalls the state of Ohio, where the Bishop was born and educated for the priesthood. His family roots are in that state. The three parts of the garb speak of the virtues of faith, hope, and charity which the Bishop wishes to be the foundation of his episcopal ministry. The palm tree suggests Florida and South Carolina, the two states where Bishop Baker has lived out his ministry.

The “sun in his splendor” denotes the Risen Christ who is our hope and salvation. He gives us light and life by the grace of redemption which should shine in our lives. The anchor is an ancient symbol of hope, a central theme in the Bishop’s life and ministry. Its blue color represents the Blessed Virgin Mary who is described in the “Salve Regina” as “our life, our sweetness, and our hope.”

DESIGN

The Bishop’s Coat of Arms was designed by the Reverend James Parker, a retired priest of the diocese of Charleston. The artwork is by the Reverend Larry D. Lossing, a retired priest of the Diocese of Orlando, with assistance from Rodney Davidson of the Diocese of Birmingham.

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