

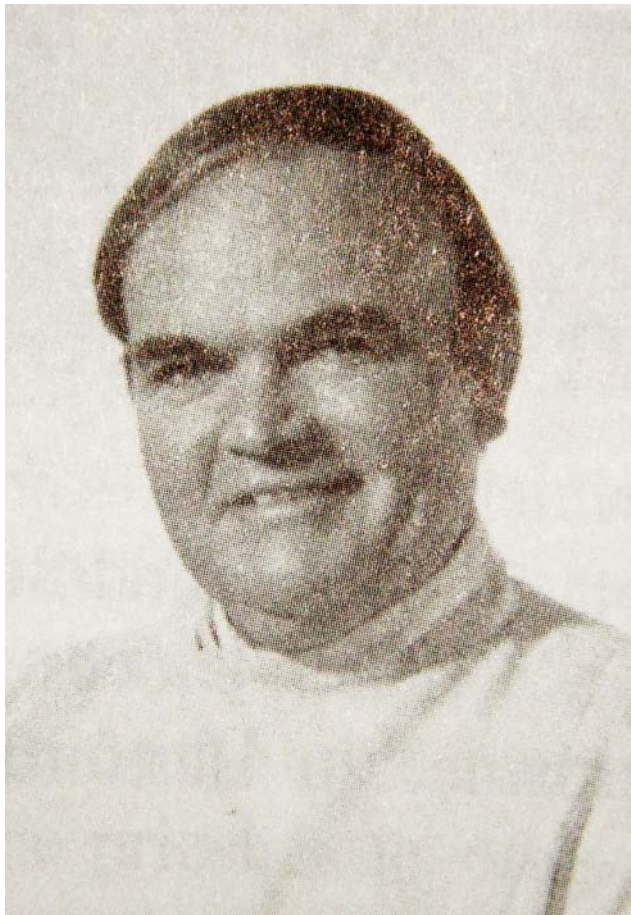
# History of St. Joseph Parish continued.

1925 – 2003

## Father Vincent Eugene Smith 1970 - 1981



To capture the essence of Father Vincent E. Smith's eleven years at St. Joseph is much like trying to contain Niagara Falls in a thimble. A children's program to celebrate Father Smith's Silver



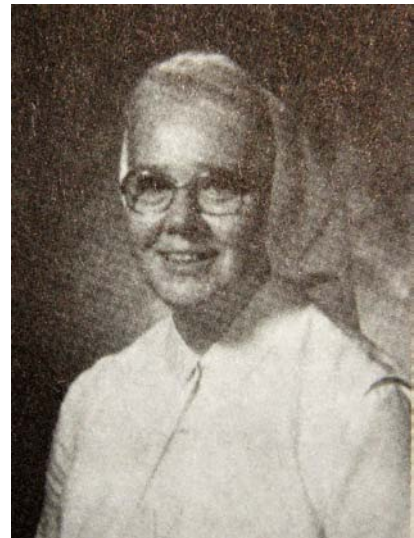
Jubilee of Ordination in May of 1981 was titled "The Hats of Father Smith." This seems an appropriate theme for a priest who is remembered with deep love by the many who knew him. He energized the parish and delegated many responsibilities to the many who could find no way to refuse his suggestions and requests. Much of the information recorded for these years is derived from The Chronicle, a monthly parish bulletin apparently initiated by Fr. Smith in 1970. It was published from September to May and continued through 1983.

Fr. Smith came to St. Joseph after being pastor of several parishes and being Executive Editor of the Florida Catholic. Named dean of the western deanery of Orlando, he had been a builder in previous parishes and continued building here. He built the Parish Center, Library, Learning

Center and kindergarten, and renovated the convent and the rectory. A small house behind the rectory often used for meetings and special projects was called “Our House.”

Since the Sisters of St. Joseph of St. Augustine had left St. Joseph before his arrival. He traveled to Cleveland, Ohio to persuade the Sisters of Notre Dame of Chardon to help staff the school. Sister Mary Charlita was the first principal of the school. She served for six years from 1970 to 1976 and it was claimed she knew all the children and their families. Fr. Smith called her the “first lady of the parish.” In 1972, the school population was 278 students. Working with Sr. Charlita in the school were eight full-time teachers and seven part-time. One faculty member had a Master’s degree.

Sr. Charlita was followed by Sr. Mary Eduard (Therese Marie) who was here from 1976 to 1982. When Sr. Eduard was assigned elsewhere after six years at St. Joseph, she was honored with three days of festivities, according to the *News Chief* of May 26, 1982. Other Sisters here during those years were Srs. M. Madeleine, Berne, Linda (Rosemary), Joan of Arc (Margaret Mary) and Leanette (Mary Helen). Father also brought the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary from Michigan to serve in lay ministries of the church.



In the community, he was active in securing funds and developing the Haven Community Day Care Center, which provided for young children of the Florence Villa community. His name was placed on the building and when Martin Luther King Drive was named, this community erected a memorial there for him after his death. He was instrumental with the Episcopal Church in erecting the Episcopal-Catholic Apartments for the elderly of both parishes. With one of his assistant pastors, he was

instrumental in founding the Good Shepherd Hospice. In 1975, because the parish was continually growing, St. Matthew parish was begun to serve Catholics, particularly in southeastern Winter Haven.

In October 1980, Father Smith attended the Vatican II Institute for clergy education in California for six weeks. Shortly after his return from the Institute, the year before his jubilee celebration, a brain tumor was detected. From the end of 1980 until his death on December 22, 1981, he continued to share his love, inspiration and dedication with his parishioners. Kathleen Holden said of him, “Fr. Smith “cast bread on the water and got back angel food cake.” ”

Sara Ellen McNamee wrote this letter to him after his death; “You taught us how to live with our flawed selves. Instead of going to great length to hide your imperfections, you simply allowed us to come close enough to see. When you experienced failure, you weren’t afraid to say, “I was wrong. I’m sorry.” You were aware, sometimes, of rejection, by those who disagreed. You felt blows, as we all do, but you never yielded to the human tendency to give up. You never said, “This effort is being misunderstood. Why fight defeat?” You seemed to say, “I believe in this. I’ll give it my best and leave the outcome to the Lord.” And those who were watching learned that to fail doesn’t mean to stop trying.

Sbased on Isaiah 49:15, “I will never forget you, my people.”