

History of St. Joseph Parish continued.

1925 – 2003

Father John O'Sullivan 1952 - 1956

Father O'Sullivan was responsible for providing St. Joseph with its first real school. It was apparent that the parish was growing, and a new church on new property would be necessary. And although the school had been long awaited, some were displeased that the school took precedence in the building plans over the needed new church. Frank Goodman, Sr. wanted the church to buy the property on the southwest corner of highway 17 and Havendale but it seems ironic now that the Bishop felt this property was too far from the center of town. One night Father O'Sullivan finally heard from the Bishop at one a.m. that the property on Avenue M, now the site of church, school and other buildings, should be purchased.



Construction of the first unit of the school began with clearing the land in July of 1956. The cost was estimated at \$75,000.00 and the contract of construction was awarded to the Gerald Emry Construction Company as announced by Archbishop Joseph P. Hurley of the Diocese of St. Augustine. I. A. de Minicis of Tampa designed the school. The school was constructed of concrete block and steel. This was the second Catholic school built in Polk County. (The first school as at St. Joseph in Lakeland.)

School classes were begun in an existing building on the south side of Avenue M. Apparently, enrollment continued to



rise. In that first year, figures from 57 to 110 students are given. Three Sisters of St. Joseph from St. Augustine and Nadine Hoffman taught the grades from 1 – 3 with a combined 4 – 5th grade. Sr. Mary Clement was the first principal. Serving with her were Sr. May Paul and Sr. Margaret Jean. At first, classes were held in the convent located where the present chapel is today. Perhaps some were held in Lyceum Hall. When the school building was completed in mid-year with four classrooms, classes moved to the new facility.

Unfortunately, Fr. O’Sullivan, who was only 55 and had been a priest for 29 years, did not live to see the completed school. He had been in failing health for some time and died at St. Joseph Hospital in Tampa on December 23, 1956. According to a *News Chief* article, on December 28, 1956, he had “led the parish in an expansion program that added many members and much physical property.” His funeral was held on December 27 at St. Joseph and on the 28th, a high requiem mass was said in the Cathedral at St. Augustine. He was buried there in San Lorenzo Cemetery.