

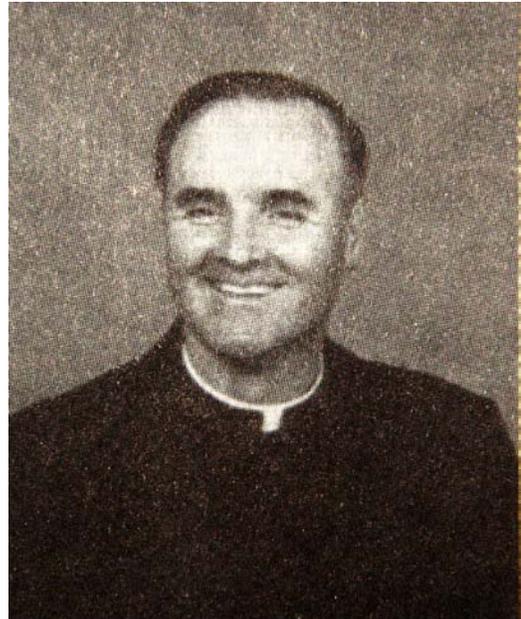
History of St. Joseph Parish continued.

1925 – 2003

Father Sean Heslin 1984 - 1991



When Father Heslin moved into the rectory on Ave. M, it was a pretty dismal place. It had originally been a mule shed. It served not only as a rectory but as an office for the church. Although it had been remodeled over the years, it was beginning to show its age and origin. For a spot of beauty, Father planted a rose garden in front to brighten the area. Father, himself, was a brightener. An article in *The Florida Catholic* in 1987 describes him as “a truly nice guy/” The article quoted Father as saying, “When I finally stand before God, I hope the Lord can say to me that I treated everybody fairly. That I was the same to you whether you were rich or poor, educated or uneducated.” These words have special relevance in the light of the beating that Father suffered in his new parish at Cocoa Beach in 2002 while he attempted to counsel someone who sought his help. Father is well remembered for his home visits and for visiting the hospital every day. During this time, a fund-raising project brought in about \$700,000, and Father began adding two classrooms and offices on the east end of the school. A meeting room was added between the Julie Center and the Library. A new ceiling was added to the church and the pews were refinished. The parking lot was increased, improved and gated.



Father's largest building project was the Family Life center built across the school on Ave. M. Bob Bagby, a parishioner, was the contractor. Currently, many events are designated as being behind one of the three doors of this building. Door #1 leads to the parish offices, where there is space for all the offices and activities that are necessary to keep the parish running efficiently. Door #2 opened for several years to the site for daily Mass as well as other meetings later in the day, particularly for events, which use the convenient kitchen. Several parish organizations such as RCIA, Cursillo, and the youth group meet regularly behind door #3.

On a smaller scale, Father oversaw the construction of some unusual and challenging playground equipment for the school. George Maily, a Winter Haven psychologist, designed the equipment. Total cost for building would have been \$25,000, but because parents and other parishioners pitched in to help with the construction, the cost was only



\$7,000. In February 1986, the gym equipment was blessed by Father William Newman and later "christened" with water balloons.

When Winter Haven suffered from a rash of fires around 1990, St. Joseph was not spared, but the damage was slight. The fire was started on a counter in the Family Life Center

while it was being built. The fire was quickly contained.

Although there were some 46 ministries, activities, and community affairs listed in a handbook produced at this time, Father felt that he wanted to be involved with another spiritual ministry and presented to the parish council a plan for introducing the Stephen Ministry. The purpose of the ministry is to give support and consolation to those suffering emotional, spiritual or physical troubles. It is described as “Christ caring for people through people.” Father and three others participated in a weeklong training program in Orlando to begin the program. Some 31 parishioners were retrained as Stephen Ministers in a 52-hour training program with the help of Grace Lutheran Church.