he Florida Catholic Heritage Trail – El Camino de la Herencia Católica en la Florida – is a scholarly undertaking that collates, in one booklet, the relevant facts on how the Catholic Church became a positive influence in the cultural history of the State of Florida and, indeed, in this great enterprise that we call the United States of America. In fundamental terms, Florida is the “Cradle of Christianity” in North America.

This undertaking would have been impossible without the help of many persons. I am profoundly indebted to Dr. Michael Gannon, Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Florida, and editor of this publication. As the preeminent author on Florida, Dr. Gannon has written here a brilliant account of the early history of Florida Catholicism, and he and his wife Genevieve devoted numerous hours to correcting and editing manuscripts from a variety of contributors. In addition, I owe a debt of gratitude to Reverend Monsignor Diego Conesa for documenting the little known history of Spanish priests in Florida and for translating the major part of this booklet into Spanish. Also I thank Reverend Monsignor James Lara and Reverend Joseph L. Mena for their expertise and contributions to the Spanish text.

To Reverend James Hoge, O.S.B., who spent many hours, and traveled many miles, to collect significant information for this booklet, I give thanks for a job well done. To Dr. D. Michael McCarron, Executive Director of the Florida Catholic Conference, and Vice President/Vice Chair of the Florida Catholic Heritage Trail, goes my special respect because without his help and that of his assistant Ms. Michele Taylor this undertaking would not have succeeded. To V. Jean Owen, Esq., George B. Howell III, Esq., Chairman, Tampa Bay History Center, and to Michael J. Colitz, III, Esq., goes my gratitude for their pro bono work. Thanks go also to Worthy State Deputy Stanley J. Zgorzynski of the Florida State Council of the Knights of Columbus; to Janie D. Southerland, President and Province Director, Florida Council of Catholic Women, Province of Miami; to the National and State Presidents of the Ancient Order of Hibernians in America, Ned McGinley and Joseph LaGuardia, and officers John Brogan, Tom Bennis, John Cullinan, and Donald P. O’Brien; and to Joyce Massei and Nancy Fay and the Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians; to President J. Terry Ryan of the Children of Ireland Group; and to Fathers Desmond Patrick Gill and Clarence Murphy.

This booklet was match grant-funded by the Florida Department of State, Bureau of Historic Preservation, and administered by Mary E. Rowley and Robert C. Taylor. I am particularly appreciative to Mary Rowley for her exceptional support, proving that government and the private sector can effectively cooperate to preserve our common heritage.

A special thanks to the communications and archival professionals who provided historical profiles of Florida dioceses: St. Augustine, Dr. Charles Gallagher, S.J.; Orlando, Mr. Steven Gataletto; St. Petersburg, Ms. Mary Jo Murphy; Venice, Ms. Gail M. McGrath; Palm Beach, Ms. Merke Baron; Pensacola-Tallahassee, Dr. Carlisle Semmes; and Archdiocese of Miami, Ms. Ana Rodriguez-Soto. For translating certain parts of the text into Spanish I thank Ms. Maria Gonzales, Ms. Piedad Aristizabal, Ms. Vilma Estenger, and Dr. Marla Alvarez. My thanks also go to Ms. Tricia Zermeño, historian, Florida Council of Catholic Women, and to Ms. Elizabeth L. Dunham, Director of Public Programs, Tampa Bay History Center, and to John Brackin.

I thank His Eminence Desmond Cardinal Connell, Primate of Ireland, and the Honourable Bertie Ahern, An Taoiseach of Ireland, for their written endorsements; Florida Senator Tom Lee and his chief of staff Ron Pierce for their support; His Excellency the Most Reverend John C. Favalora, Archbishop of Miami; His Excellency the Most Reverend Sean Brady, DCL, Archbishop of Armagh, Primate of All-Ireland, and His Excellency the Most Reverend Joseph Duffy, Bishop of Clogher, for their prayers and encouragement.
I thank, too, Ronald Shackelford our treasurer, who has kept us financially sound, the Reverend Leonard J.M. Plazewski our board secretary; my wife Christa who has been patient with me for the past four-plus years of this exciting journey into the unique history of Florida, and Reverend Monsignor Harold B. Bumpus, Dr. Theol., who supported me when I began promoting "my vision." Finally, a prayer of thanksgiving goes to Saint Perigrine, called "The Wonder Worker," who has been the patron of this worthy journey into history.

James J. Harkins IV
President
The Florida Catholic Heritage Trail, Inc
El Camino de la Herencia Católica en la Florida

This publication has been financed in part with a historic preservation grant assistance provided by the Bureau of Historic Preservation, Division of Historical Resources, Florida Department of State, assisted by the Florida Historical Commission. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the Florida Department of State, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Florida Department of State.