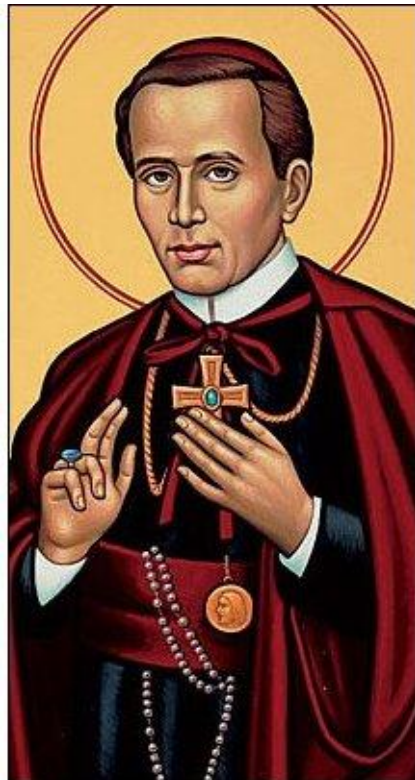


*St. John Nepomucene Neumann*  
(1811-1860)



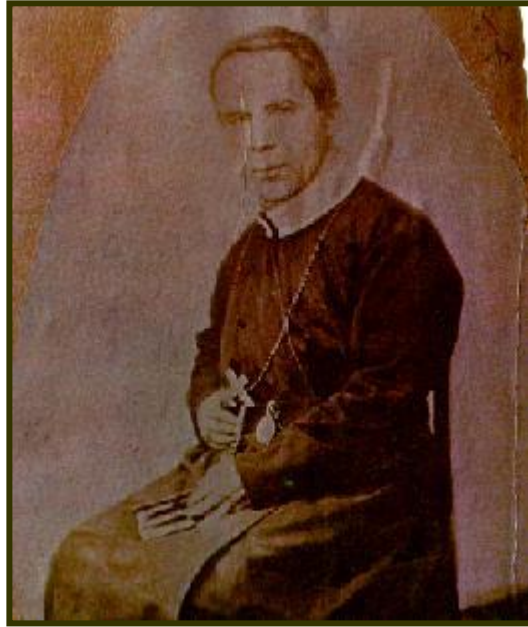
*First U.S. Bishop to be Canonized*  
*(June 19, 1977)*  
*Memorial: January 5*

Saint John Neumann Catholic Church  
9000 Warfield Road ✕ Gaithersburg, Maryland

# *St. John Nepomucene Neumann*

“The Little Bishop”

*Feast: January 5*



*Photograph of St. John Neumann, taken in 1854, from the Redemptorist Archives*

A baby boy was born on March 28, 1811 in the centuries-old village of Prachatitz in Bohemia (now the Czech Republic). He was taken the same day to the parish church, baptized and named for one of the patron saints of his homeland, John Nepomucene.

The baby was the third child and the first son in the family of Philip and Agnes Neumann. His father, a native of Bavaria, owned a small stocking mill and was a minor village official. His mother was a Czech, a devout woman who attended Mass daily.

*Painting of young John Neumann by itinerant artist*

Young John Nepomucene Neumann developed into a keen student with a passion for books and for learning. He was gifted with a quick mind for study and a rare ability for languages. His schooling began in Prachatitz and continued after he was twelve in the town of Budweis, twenty-two miles away. He attended the Budweis Gymnasium (high school) and a philosophical institute there.



At age seven, the boy began to receive the sacrament of penance. At eight, he was confirmed by the Bishop of Budweis on the occasion of the first episcopal visit to Prachatitz that villagers could remember.



*Old print of town and church of Prachatitz.*

Neumann had no strong inclination for the priesthood in childhood, and at twenty he was still undecided about the choice of a career. The story of how he came to enter seminary is told in his own autobiographical sketch:

*“When the time came, at the end of the philosophy course, for me to decide either for theology, or law or medicine, I felt more of an attraction for the last. This was all the more so because, out of eighty or ninety applicants for theology, only twenty were to be accepted. For this, along with the best scholastic transcript, recommendations were also required, and I wanted to have nothing to do with them.*

*“In this uncertainty about the choice of a profession, I came home in the autumn vacation of 1831 and found that my father was not against letting me study medicine in Prague, even though the expenses involved were great. My mother was not too happy with this. Even though I pointed out to her that I did not know anyone who would back my request for admission into the institute for the study of theology, nevertheless she thought that I should give it a try. I then wrote a letter of application and sent it to Budweis by a special messenger... Shortly after that I received the letter of acceptance into the Budweis Theological Seminary.*

*“From that moment on I never gave another thought to medicine and I also gave up completely the study of physics and astronomy on which I preferred to spend time, and this without any great difficulty.”*

John Neumann spent two years at the diocesan seminary in Budweis, then transferred to that of the archdiocese at the University of Prague, where he completed his studies in 1835. Some of his textbooks and theological papers, transcripts of his marks and written reports of his instructors are all still in existence--as shown in photo.



His academic record was excellent, and he had exceptional skill in mastering languages. In addition to his native German and Bohemian, he knew Italian, Spanish, Greek and Latin. In Prague he undertook to learn English and French as well. In later life he taught himself Gaelic in order to minister to Irish immigrants.

At the seminary, Neumann made up his mind to become a missionary in America. Tens of thousands of German Catholics had emigrated to the United States. Whether living in crowded eastern cities or in the sparsely settled farm country to the west, most of them spoke only German and were out of communication with their Church. Urgent appeals for the assistance of German-speaking priests were being received in the homeland, and Neumann dedicated his life to that service. *“My resolution was so strong and lively,”* he wrote, *“that I could no longer think of anything else.”*

He met only disappointment at first. After passing his examinations, he learned that no new priests would be ordained in his diocese that year. He then attempted, even before ordination, to obtain an assignment to a diocese in the United States. This required his receiving a formal request from one of the American bishops.

Neumann tried to procure such an invitation and waited in vain for months at Prachatitz. Finally, he set out for America on his own-without knowing when he would become a priest or where he would undertake his missionary service. He knew only that he faced a life of hardship and lonely separation from his family.

After a long, slow journey from Prachatitz, Neumann reached the French port of Le Havre. Along the way he hoped to receive a request for his presence from one of the bishops in the United States, but none reached him. Discouraged but stoutly determined, he bought passage to New York from the captain of the *Europa*, an American three-master engaged in transport of immigrants. It had no comforts for its passengers. The young priest-to-be had to supply his own food for the voyage and to buy a pot to cook it in. He purchased a straw mattress on which to sleep on deck. For ten days he lived uncomfortably on the vessel until the captain had attracted enough passengers to make the voyage profitable.

Finally, on April 20, 1836, the *Europa* sailed for a rough, forty-day crossing of the Atlantic. John Neumann could not wait for the ship to dock. When it was delayed several days at quarantine, he found a ride in a row boat to Staten Island and reached Manhattan by a small steamer. It was June 2. All that afternoon he tramped the streets of New York alone looking unsuccessfully for a Catholic Church. He was 25 years old, not yet a missionary, not yet a priest, and so far as he knew not wanted by anyone in America. But next day all his uncertainty was ended. He was welcomed to the Diocese of New York by Bishop John DuBois and told that a letter had been sent him shortly before, gratefully accepting his service as a missionary.

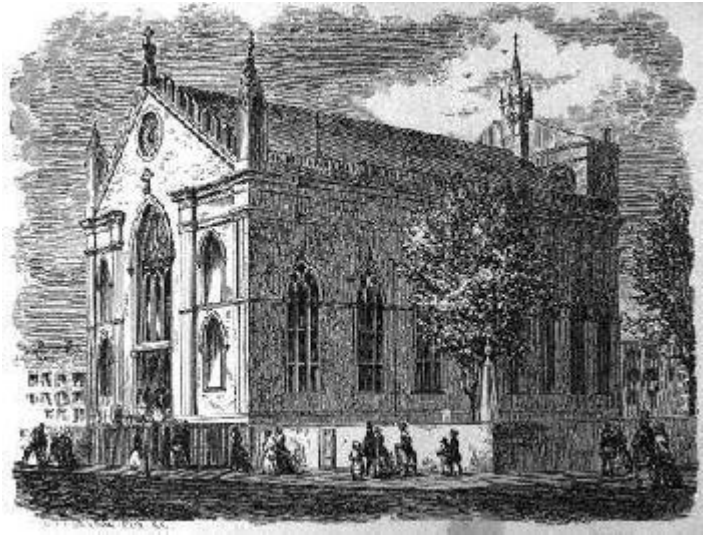


In the whole New York Diocese with its thousands of immigrants, there were only three priests who could speak the German language. “I can and must ordain you quickly,” said the Bishop. “I need you.” He sent the young man to the German Church of St. Nicholas on Second Street in Manhattan to prepare for ordination (*photo to left*). It was most appropriate that Neumann’s first assignment in America was to teach catechism in German to the group of children soon to receive first Communion. All his life he was deeply concerned for the religious education of young people in church and in school.

On Saturday, June 25, 1836 in old St. Patrick's Cathedral on Mott Street in New York, (*sketch below*) John Neumann was at last ordained by Bishop DuBois. The very next day he celebrated his first public Mass at St. Nicholas and gave first Holy Communion to the group of children he had prepared. The church overflowed with families, friends and parishioners who shared the joy of their German-speaking priest. That night, in his journal the new Father Neumann poured out to God his resolution for the days and years to come:

*"I will pray to You that You may give me holiness, and to all the living and dead, pardon, that some day we may all be together with You, our dearest God."*

Two days later, Neumann set out for Erie County at the far western edge of the New York diocese. He traveled by Hudson River steamer, railroad, stage coach and canal boat, headed for the remote area of the state where an inrush of immigrants had followed the opening of the Erie Canal. It was exactly the type of missionary duty to which the newly-ordained priest had dedicated himself.



For four years, 1836 to 1840, Neumann served as missionary in the farm country near Buffalo, New York. Much of the land was just being cleared of woodland and put into cultivation for the first time. Families were poor and widely scattered; towns were no more than a handful of houses; roads were bad, sometimes non-existent. The priest walked many miles from house to house, village to village, in good weather and foul. His duties took him as far northwest as Niagara Falls and as far east as Batavia. It was scarcely less fatiguing after he learned with some difficulty to ride a horse.

In his diary he describes his life: *"Only a poor priest, one who can endure hardship, can labor here. His duties call him far and near... he leads a wandering life. There is no pleasure, except the care of souls... the Catholic population is continually increasing... many are in extreme poverty. They live in miserable shanties, some with not even a window."*

His headquarters at first were at Williamsville, which consisted of half a dozen houses and a stone church still roofless when he arrived. Since there was no rectory, he boarded with a Catholic family in an apartment over the village tavern. One of his first tasks was to dismiss a schoolmaster addicted to alcohol. For months he taught the children himself until a new instructor was found.

After a year, the young priest moved his base to North Bush, a settlement near the present Kenmore, New York. There he was guest in the cabin of a farmer. He had to walk a mile and a half through muddy woods to reach his church--a small log chapel which he helped to complete. Later the people of the community gave him a five-acre lot near the chapel and built a two-room log cabin for a rectory.

For some time he lived alone, cooking his meals, doing the housework, and often neglecting both in order to attend his priestly functions. But in September, 1838, his younger brother, Wenceslaus, came from Bohemia after many invitations to live in North Bush. Thereafter, Wenceslaus took over the chores of the rectory household and taught in the local school.

In New York state, Neumann observed the missionary work being done among German immigrants by several priests of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. Although the Redemptorist Order had been established in Italy a century before, missionaries had not been sent to America until 1832. Father Joseph Prost, Superior of the small group then in the country, had been active at a church in Rochester, New York, and Neumann was particularly impressed by the religious devotion he found among parishioners there.

He came to feel that he might be more effective in nourishing the spiritual life of the people if he were a member of a religious community rather than a lone missionary-pastor. He recalled the saying: *'Vae soli! Woe to the one who is alone!'*

He decided to apply to Prost for admission to the Redemptorist Congregation. A factor in this decision undoubtedly was the complete physical collapse which left him unable to attend to his duties for three months in the summer of 1840. *"I think this is the best thing I can do for the security of my salvation,"* he wrote to his family.

After receiving prompt acceptance for admission and after asking relief from his responsibilities in the New York Diocese, Neumann left Buffalo for the Redemptorist foundation in Pittsburgh in October, 1840. His brother, 'Little Wenzel' remained behind only long enough to gather up their few possessions. Then he, too, traveled to Pittsburgh and became a Redemptorist lay brother, serving for the rest of his long life.

John Neumann took the habit of the Redemptorist Congregation on November 30, 1840 in Pittsburgh at old St. Philomena's Church, at that time called "The Factory Church," because it was located in an old industrial building. As a novitiate, his experience was unique. Instead of a quiet period of reflection and community prayer, he found himself repeatedly transferred from foundation to foundation, city to city, as need arose for interim pastors for German congregations. A Redemptorist chronicler reported:

*"The first novice of our American Province did not enjoy the advantages found in the regular instruction and careful discipline of a well-regulated novitiate. He was entrusted with duties which usually fell to the charge of a professed religious only; nevertheless he distinguished himself by a faithful observance of rules, unaffected love for the Congregation, and the practice of eminent virtues."*

After this busy probation, Neumann made his religious vows in Baltimore on January 16, 1842--the first Redemptorist Profession in America. His first assignment was as assistant rector at St. James Church in the Maryland city. In March 1844, he was sent to Pittsburgh as Superior of the Redemptorist Foundation there.



A great new church had been started to replace the old factory building of St. Philomena (*photo of St Philomena's*). Financial difficulties had been encountered, and it became Neumann's task to solve these problems as well as supervise the endless details of construction. When the new St. Philomena was at last dedicated in 1846, it was said that he had accomplished the impossible and had built a church without money.

Along with his responsibilities as Superior, Neumann made it his rule to carry more than his share of pastoral care for 6,000 German Catholics in Pittsburgh at that time. He visited the sick, heard confessions, celebrated Mass and preached regularly.

He labored to build up attendance at the parish schools. He made himself available to all who wanted his counsel. He drove himself hard and again sacrificed his health as he had in North Bush. He developed a persistent and racking cough which took much of his strength. He himself believed that his end might be near, but he refused to give up his work. Finally, it became necessary to order him to leave Pittsburgh and return to Baltimore.

“I am only doing what is necessary,” wrote the American Superior. “Without doubt, if he continues as he is, he may have to face an early death.”

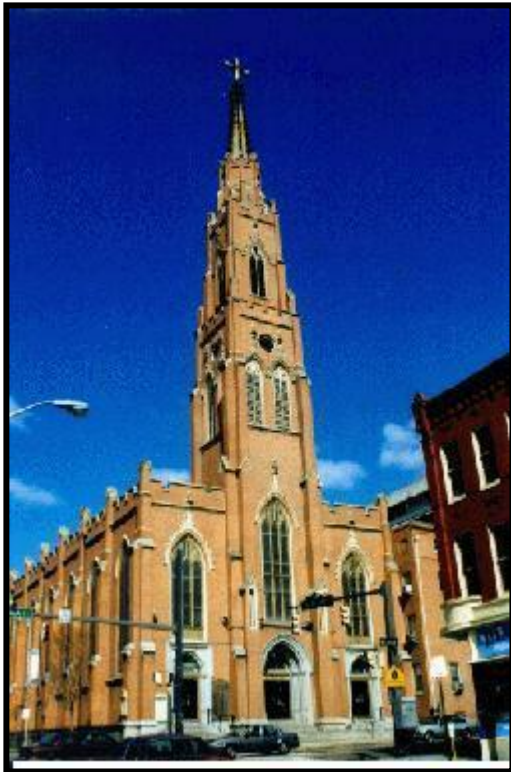
During his two years at the Pittsburgh foundation, notwithstanding the pressures upon him, Neumann found time to write catechisms which – in many editions both in German and English – were in use among Catholic children in the United States long after the author’s death. Two catechisms that he wrote were approved by the American bishops at their Plenary Council in 1852.

The rest and recuperation anticipated on his return to Baltimore were not forth coming for the ailing 35-year old priest. Within a few day of his arrival he received unexpected instructions from Europe that he was to serve temporarily as Superior of all Redemptorists in the United States.



Although he had been a member of the Congregation only five years, he was called upon to cope with serious administrative problems which had been encountered during a period of rapid expansion. The Congregation had too few priests and much too little money, but was being pressed by Catholic bishops in important cities to assume responsibility for the ever-growing number of German congregations.

For 23 months, Neumann carried the burden of his assignment. He strengthened the Redemptorist Congregation, resisted pressure for unsound expansion and struggled to maintain focus upon spirituality and missionary zeal. Simultaneously, he undertook responsibilities for pastoral care among Germans in Baltimore and continued his unflagging interest in education.



One of his major accomplishments was to arrange for the School Sisters of Notre Dame, newly arrived in the United States from Munich, to locate in Baltimore and to take charge of schools at the Redemptorist churches.

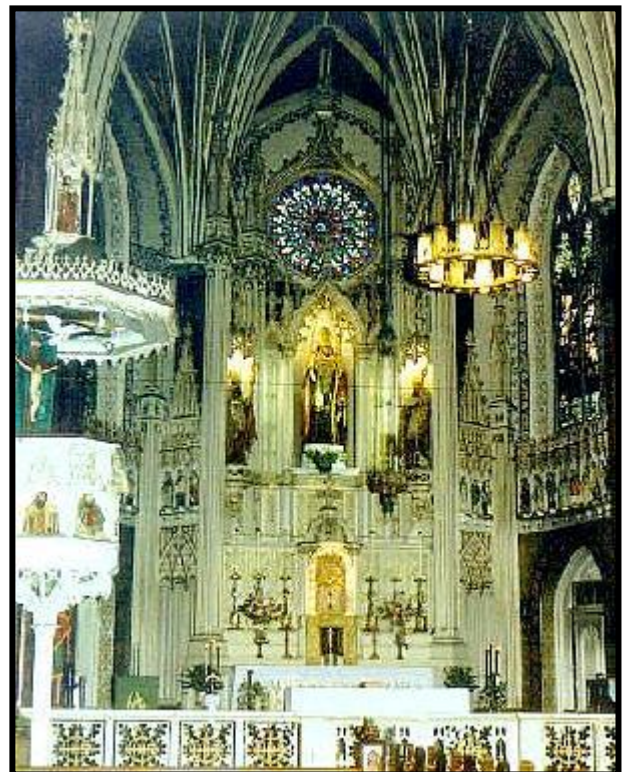
While in Baltimore during this period, Neumann appeared in Federal Court and became a citizen of the United States. After his successor as American Superior arrived from Europe, Neumann became the first rector of the great German church which had just been completed and named for the founder of the Redemptorists, St. Alphonus Liguori. The church stands today in the heart of downtown Baltimore (*photo to left*).

As rector, Neumann rejoiced in the opportunity for personal ministry among the people of the parish. He sought to be always available to anyone who needed or wanted him. When the present rectory was built next door to St. Alphonus on Saratoga Street, he selected for himself the tiny first-floor room nearest the main door so he could easily be found, day or night, by any who came. During the night he himself often served as rectory porter.

In 1851, a new Archbishop of Baltimore arrived—James Patrick Kenrick, who had just completed twenty years as Bishop of Philadelphia. It was not long before Kenrick became aware of the outstanding virtues of the rector of St. Alphonus. Attracted by Neumann's extraordinary spirituality and devotion, the Archbishop began visiting the small room in the rectory to make his confession to Father Neumann.

*Interior of St. Alphonus Church*

Toward the end of 1851, Kenrick astounded and dismayed his confessor by hinting that Neumann was under consideration to become the next Bishop of Philadelphia.





The Oblate Sisters of Providence, a group of black women religious, was saved from dissolution by John Neumann in Baltimore in 1847. The Community had been founded twenty years before to provide education for children of slaves. Its spiritual director had died, a number of Sisters had moved elsewhere, and the Archbishop of Baltimore felt the group should be disbanded. As confessor and adviser to the Sisters, Neumann interceded and won a reprieve. He assigned a zealous young priest to be director of the Community. It took on new life; its school grew in size, and the number of Sisters increased. They conduct schools, day nurseries and catechetical centers.



*A photo of the Oblate Superior in 1847, Sister Louise Noel*

Shaken by the prospect of becoming a bishop, John Neumann did all he could to avoid the appointment, appealing to Archbishop Kenrick and asking superiors of the Redemptorist Congregation to present his case in Rome. His plea was considered at a full meeting of the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda at the Vatican. Notwithstanding his sincere reluctance, it was believed that he was the proper choice for Philadelphia. Pope Pius IX put an end to any further review by designating John Nepomucene Neumann Bishop of Philadelphia “under obedience and without appeal.”

When this news reached Baltimore in March 1852, Archbishop Kenrick undertook to deliver it. The following dramatic account of the occasion is contained in the authoritative and scholarly Neumann biography published a century later by a Redemptorist, Michael J. Curley:

*“Archbishop Kenrick walked down to St. Alphonsus Rectory and went to Father Neumann’s room, as was his wont when going to confession. Finding his confessor out of the house at the time, he laid on the rector’s table the episcopal ring and the pectoral cross he himself had carried for twenty-one years as bishop in Philadelphia. Then he went home without saying a word to anyone.*

*“When the rector returned to his room the sparkle of the ring caught his eye; he asked the brother porter who had been in his room. Informed that the Archbishop had been there, the full significance of the episcopal ring and the pectoral cross broke in on the soul of the priest who had never wanted any position of authority. He was like a stricken man. He went down on his knees in prayer. Still there and still praying, his brother Redemptorists found him the next morning.*

*“But he could do nothing about his elevation. He was Bishop of Philadelphia by the Pope’s command.”*

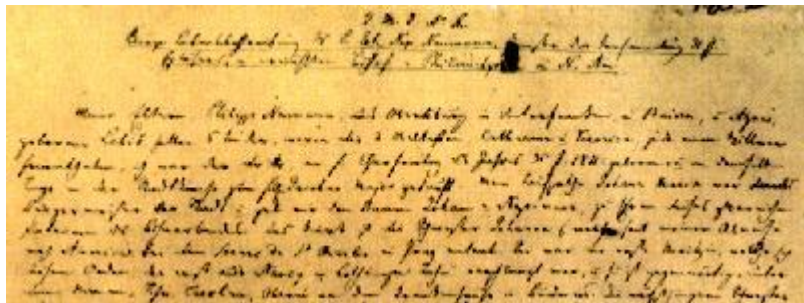


The Neumann Chalice

Archbishop Kenrick was consecrator at the traditional and colorful rites in St. Alphonsus Church when John Neumann became Bishop of Philadelphia on March 28, 1852. The day was Neumann's forty-first birthday. The majestic church where he had been rector was thronged with German parishioners joyful over the elevation of their friend and pastor. Among other gifts, German Catholics of Baltimore gave him the beautiful chalice which is still used in the Philadelphia Basilica on special occasions (*chalice seen to left*).

Under instructions from his Redemptorist Superior, John Neumann spent most of the night before his consecration writing in German this 6,000-word sketch of his life. It is signed as Bishop-elect of Philadelphia with the episcopal motto which he had chosen: "*Passion of Christ strengthen me.*" The original seven-page manuscript is in the Archives of the Congregation.

*See below for a section of this original manuscript of Fr Neumann as he prepared to receive episcopal ordination*



John Neumann was to be Bishop of Philadelphia less than eight years before his sudden death in 1860. In that relatively short period of time, the priest who had not wanted any position of authority not only faced serious administrative and financial problems but also the feeling among some clergy and laity that he was not a good choice to be Philadelphia's Bishop. In his own way he overcame the difficulties which confronted him, strengthened his Church, brought new spirituality into his diocese, and won the recognition of all as a religious of extraordinary sanctity.

*To right: the Pectoral Cross worn by Bishop John Neumann:*

Ever since the creation of the Diocese of Philadelphia in 1808, its bishops had all been Irish. Neumann's German background led some to think him unsuitable. Others felt him not sufficiently impressive in appearance, manner and speech. He was short, only two or three inches over five feet; he was a man of humility, self effacing and soft spoken, with an old world accent. Even the diocesan newspaper, the Herald, had expressed some reservation at the news of his prospective appointment. Years later, his vicar-general, Father Edward J. Sourin, would say:

“He knew well when he came to this proud city there were many not only among those who differ from us in religion but hundreds of our own Faith who wished as an occupant for the episcopate of this diocese a man more according to the judgment of the world.”



Undaunted, the new Bishop plunged into his duties with vigor. On the first day after his arrival in Philadelphia, he began visits to all the parishes and Catholic institutions of the city. During his first week he preached six times and conferred confirmations. He delivered a noteworthy lecture to members of the Philopatrian Institute, a Catholic literary society, which had been founded two years before and which still flourishes in Philadelphia. He visited the county jail to comfort condemned prisoners.

Ironically, one of his unpleasant tasks was to deal with open rebellion at the historic German Catholic Church, Holy Trinity, at Sixth and Spruce Streets in Philadelphia. Established in 1788, it was the first ethnic or national congregation in America. A clash of authority had developed between the trustees of the church and its German-speaking pastor during the regime of Neumann's predecessor, Bishop Kenrick, and Kenrick had closed Holy Trinity. Soon after Neumann's tenure began, moreover, a court decision was rendered holding that the rebellious trustees were the legal owners of the Holy Trinity property.



*To left: Bishop John Neumann's Coat of Arms with motto: "Passion of Christ strengthen me."*

The normally mild Bishop met the situation head-on. He refused to appoint a pastor for Holy Trinity. He took the legal battle on appeal to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, and he ordered construction of another German church, St. Alphonsus, in South Philadelphia. Much bitterness followed, and the Bishop suffered in silence a great deal of public abuse. But after two years of litigation he won a landmark victory, the Supreme Court decreeing that those who did not recognize the authority of the Catholic Church were not members and therefore could not hold title to church property. Holy Trinity was reopened under the authority of the Bishop and services are still conducted there in the historic section of Philadelphia.



*On his first Sunday night in Philadelphia, Bishop Neumann preached here in Old St. Joseph's Church in Willings Alley, a landmark of religious freedom in America.*

*St. Joseph's was founded in 1733 at a time when British law forbade public celebration of Catholic Mass. The colonial government of Pennsylvania decided, however, that William Penn's Charter of Liberties for his settlers superseded the law of Great Britain. For a time St. Joseph's was the only place in the English speaking world where Mass was openly celebrated.*

When Bishop Neumann arrived in Philadelphia, there was another important German Catholic church, St. Peter the Apostle, at Fifth Street and Girard Avenue. Built to accommodate the large number of German immigrants settling in the neighborhood just north of the city's boundary, St. Peter's was staffed by Redemptorists. It had been dedicated in 1848, when Neumann was serving as the American Superior of the Redemptorists. This was perhaps the place in Philadelphia where Bishop Neumann always felt most at home. It was one of the largest and most magnificent houses of worship of its time, seating 1,200 worshippers.

It became the Bishop's weekly custom to walk about a mile and a half from his residence on Logan Square to make his confession at St. Peter's. His monthly and annual retreats as prescribed by the Redemptorist Rule were spent at the old rectory on Fifth Street. On such occasions he avoided all display of rank or special privilege, mingling with the Community in his well-worn habit. It is said that no stranger could have identified him as a bishop.

Neumann celebrated Mass and preached often at St. Peter's. He was friend and adviser to many of the poor German parishioners. When he died, special permission was given for his burial in the crypt of the church, and today the Neumann shrine is located here.

The beautiful Church of St. Peter the Apostle has changed little over the century since Bishop Neumann was so often here. A memorial plaque reads: *"St. Peter's is more than Bishop Neumann's resting place. He walked its aisles; he often knelt here, lost in prayer. His crozier rang on the sanctuary stones. His little feet moved up and down these aisles as he bore the Blessed Sacrament in Forty Hours Processions. The walls recall his voice; preaching at High Mass, catechising little ones before Confirmation, complimenting the nuns who taught them--the School Sisters of Notre Dame. St. Peter's was very close to his heart."*

Next door to Bishop Neumann's official residence on Eighteenth Street opposite Logan Square, construction was underway on Philadelphia's imposing new Cathedral. Work had been started six years

before his coming to the city. The brownstone building was to be the largest and most costly cathedral in the nation, but in 1852 construction was not one-third completed. The walls were not yet up to roof height. Large sums of money were needed to carry on the project, and these were not always forth-coming. The Bishop found himself urged by many to speed up construction and to authorize borrowing by the diocese to provide financing when necessary. But while he wanted to see the great edifice completed, he regarded the construction of parish churches and schools to be of first importance.

Times were hard; money was short, and what was available went first to the other construction. The Bishop refused to incur new debt for the cathedral, and at times the work on that building came completely to a halt. As a result, the Cathedral was still unfinished at the end of Neumann's lifetime. It was not completed and consecrated until four years after his death.



The Bishop did have the happiness, however, to see the great copper dome completed and a shining eleven foot cross erected above it - *photo to left*. A special ceremony was arranged to mark the occasion on September 14, 1859-the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. On that day, which meant so much to him, the Bishop chose not to be celebrant, but rather to serve as an assistant.

In 1976, Pope Paul VI designated Philadelphia's Cathedral as a Basilica.

Bishop Neumann was distressed on coming to Philadelphia to learn that despite the large size and population of the diocese, no more than 500 children were attending parochial schools. He set out at once to correct the situation. Meeting at his residence with clergy the very first week he was in the city, he assigned high priority to the strengthening of existing schools and the establishment of new ones in parishes

where none then existed.

Within a month of his arrival, a new Central Board of Catholic Education was created consisting of the pastor and two laymen from each parish. Neumann asked the Board to devise a general plan of instruction for the diocese and assist the parishes, particularly the poor ones, in fund-raising. But selection of teachers and fixing of salaries were left to the pastors of the several churches. Major campaigns were started to raise money for schools. The Bishop preached far and near on the necessity of quality education for young people under sponsorship of the Church.

Results were immediately apparent. In a letter to his father, Neumann wrote that within about a year the number of students in parochial schools had increased from 500 to 5,000. After two years, he was able to report to Pope Pius IX that enrollment had reached 9,000. Neumann's concern put Philadelphia in the lead in Catholic education in the United States, and his influence continues to this day.

*This painting by Giovanni Gagliardi, c. 1860, shows Bishop Neumann's lifelong concern for Catholic education*

In October 1854, Bishop Neumann traveled to Europe to be present in Rome at one of the most solemn and stirring events of Catholic Church history—the promulgation by Pope Pius IX of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. Afterwards, he made the only return visit of his lifetime to his homeland.

Five prelates from the United States journeyed to Rome for the great occasion of the proclamation. Nearly two hundred other cardinals and bishops were there from all parts of the world. During the preceding month they met in convocations at the Vatican to review the papal bull to be issued in connection with the ceremony presided over by Pope Pius IX (*image below*).

December 8, 1854 was the memorable and historic day. Fifty thousand people gathered at St. Peter's Basilica. More than a thousand priests sang the litany. "I thank the Lord God," wrote Bishop Neumann, "that among the many graces he has bestowed upon me, He allowed me to see this day in Rome." He added that no words of his could describe the solemnity of the occasion as the Supreme Pontiff read to the hushed throng the words of the celebrated definition:



"We declare, pronounce and define that the doctrine which holds that the Blessed Virgin Mary in the first moment of her conception by the singular privilege and favor of Almighty God in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved immune from all stain of original guilt, has been revealed by God and therefore must be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful."

Bishop Neumann was in Rome for two months, living with the Redemptorist Community of Santa Maria in Monterone. He took part in a number of ceremonies related to the proclamation of the dogma, and he visited most if not all of the historic churches of Rome. He made daily pilgrimages on foot, enjoying the rare chance for religious contemplation. Most of the time he wore the simple habit of his Congregation.

In early 1855, he visited Northern Italy and Austria. He met the former Emperor Ferdinand and received from him a gift of gold to help with the financing of the Philadelphia cathedral. Finally reaching his native

Bohemia, he was met at Budweis by a nephew, John Berger, who became a constant companion for the remainder of the visit. Berger was so influenced by his uncle's life that three years later he came to the United States and became a Redemptorist priest. (When Neumann died, Berger spent years gathering records and correspondence, talking and writing to people who had known the Bishop at various times from his school years to his final days. In 1883, Berger published in German the first authoritative Neumann biography.)

Returning to his birthplace, Prachatitz, after eighteen years, Bishop Neumann was reunited with his 80-year old father and with his sisters. His mother had died five years before. He stayed for a week in the modest family homestead and visited the scenes of his childhood. Relatives, friends and village folk



regarded him as quite the most famous son of the old community. They gave him a public reception in the town hall and presented him a handsome album with signatures of the people of Prachatitz. He kept it with him for the rest of his life, and it is now preserved at the Neumann Shrine (*photo of album to left*).

Accompanied by Berger, Neumann visited Munich before his return home. He was persuaded to sit for a portrait photograph so lithographs might be made and sold to raise money for the poor. He wore his Redemptorist habit, the episcopal ring and his pectoral-cross. In his hand he held the album from Prachatitz. John Berger records in his biography that the Munich photograph and another taken in Baltimore just prior to consecration were the only ones ever made of Neumann.

Bishop Neumann gave religious communities of nuns, brothers and priests importance in his diocese. He fully appreciated the need for their unselfish service in schools, hospitals, homes for children and the aged, and help for the poor. In eight years, he brought into the Philadelphia diocese seven religious orders which had not previously been located here -The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, the Sisters of the Holy Cross, the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Christian Brothers, the Holy Cross Brothers, the Benedictines and the Franciscan Conventuals.

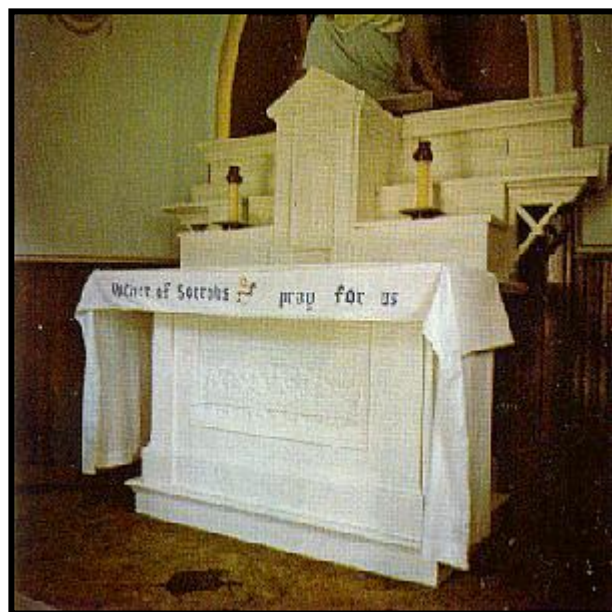
In addition, Neumann founded in Philadelphia a wholly new Congregation of women, the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis. This action was suggested by Pope Pius IX himself. While in Rome, Bishop Neumann had discussed his intention of inviting one of the European Congregations, the Dominican Sisters, to come to Philadelphia to help care for the poor of the diocese. The Holy Father approved, but thought that the purpose might be better served by training a new group of religious specifically for the work, and he suggested placing it under the patronage of St. Francis.

Providentially, at that very time, word reached Neumann that three Philadelphia women who had established a hospice for working girls in St. Peter's parish were seeking permission to form a Franciscan community. Before leaving Rome, he obtained authority to found the Sisters of St. Francis and to receive the Philadelphia trio as its first members. On April 9, 1855, only a few days after his return from Rome, he invested them with the habit of novices at St. Peter's. He heard their final vows on May 26, 1856 at the altar of the private chapel in his residence.

*The Bishop's private altar before which the three original Sisters made their vows is preserved in a tiny shrine on the grounds--see photo to right.*

Marie Ann Bachman, a young widow, became Sister Mary Francis, the first Superior. The others were her sister, Barbara Boll, who became Sister Mary Margaret, and a friend, Anna Dorn, who became Sister Mary Bernardine.

The Sisters began devoting much of their time and energy to the care of the sick. After their numbers increased, they established St. Mary Hospital in St. Peter's parish. Moreover, at the request of Bishop Neumann, they became teachers as well. They serve in many other parts of the country and conduct missionary centers in Puerto Rico. (Other religious communities of women in Buffalo, New York City, Pittsburgh and Syracuse also trace their origin back to Bishop Neumann's founding of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia.)



The Motherhouse of the Philadelphia community is located on a scenic hilltop at Glen Riddle, Aston, Pennsylvania--a property which Bishop Neumann first purchased for the preparatory seminary which he established. A bell which he gave to the seminary is still used at the convent to call the Sisters together.



Notwithstanding all the financial difficulty of the times, Bishop Neumann regarded it a holy duty to provide new churches and new church buildings wherever and whenever need arose. His biographer, Father Curley, records that more than 80 were begun or completed during Neumann's tenure of less than eight years (*ed. comment: that's about one new church per month for his episcopate!*).

Bishop Neumann proposed at the Eighth Provincial Council in 1854 that his widespread diocese be divided in two. With characteristic modesty, he volunteered for transfer to a newer and smaller See in upstate Pennsylvania so a new bishop could be named for Philadelphia. But such action did not meet approval in Rome. Instead, James Frederick Wood, a native Philadelphian then stationed in Cincinnati, was brought to assist Neumann as Coadjutor Bishop with right of succession.

Bishop Wood was consecrated in April 1857. By taking charge of business and financial affairs in Philadelphia, including construction of the Cathedral, he enabled Bishop Neumann to give even more of himself to the spiritual care of the diocese and the expansion of churches and schools.

The two bishops were complete contrasts in personality. James Wood was a native American who had been trained in banking before his conversion to Catholicism and his ordination as a priest. He was tall, robust, self-



confident, a fluent speaker and completely at home in any situation. When the two went to the Ninth Provincial Council in 1858, Bishop Neumann once more recommended division of the diocese and proposed that Bishop Wood remain to lead Philadelphia. Again, immediate approval was not forthcoming. After Neumann's sudden death in 1860, Bishop Wood was the leader of the diocese for 23 years, becoming in 1875 the first Archbishop of Philadelphia.

Although the appointment of the Coadjutor Bishop relieved Neumann of many administrative and temporal matters, he continued to work day and night in the service of his diocese. He poured all the more of his energy and strength into pastoral care and an exhausting schedule of visitations throughout his widespread territory. The Christmas season in 1859 was typical. On Christmas Eve he heard confessions until eleven o'clock at the temporary chapel which had been built on Logan Square pending completion of the Cathedral. An hour later he was at St. Peter's celebrating midnight Mass for the German congregation there. Later he returned to offer a private Mass at the chapel, and at ten on Christmas morning he conducted services at St. John's.

Ten days later he had to cancel a trip which he had planned to make to Reading, Pennsylvania. "I am not feeling well these last few days," he wrote in a letter of regret. Next day, January 5, 1860, he was no better, although he continued his usual busy schedule. A priest who saw him at his residence after lunch that day reported that the Bishop said, "I feel as I never felt before. I have to go out on a little business and the fresh air will do me good." Shortly after that he left the residence, never to return.

One of the errands he undertook that day—on foot, as usual - was an act of kindness for a priest of Bellefonte, Pa., who had sent a chalice to Philadelphia for consecration. The vessel had been misplaced in transit, and Bishop Neumann planned to go to the railroad express depot to see about it.

He went first to an attorney's office to sign some real estate papers. Afterward, hurrying along the icy sidewalk of the south side of Vine Street, he collapsed on the front step of a house at 1218 Vine. He was carried inside the building to the warmth of a fireplace in the front parlor. But it was too late to aid him. He was dead when one of the young priests he himself had ordained came hurrying to his side with holy oil for extreme unction. John Neumann's life on earth was over, a few weeks before his 49<sup>th</sup> birthday. Deep shock and disbelief swept the entire community when the news spread. Then there followed an unprecedented display of the people's respect and affection for "The Little Bishop."

Thousands came to bid farewell at the Cathedral Chapel where the body first was placed. Two days later, streets were thronged as the funeral procession moved through center city by way of Eighteenth Street and Chestnut Streets to the Pro-Cathedral of St. John's. Four black horses pulled the glass-sided hearse past weeping mourners. That night, all night long, St. John's was filled with men and women of many faiths and from all walks of life coming to see the Bishop for a last time.

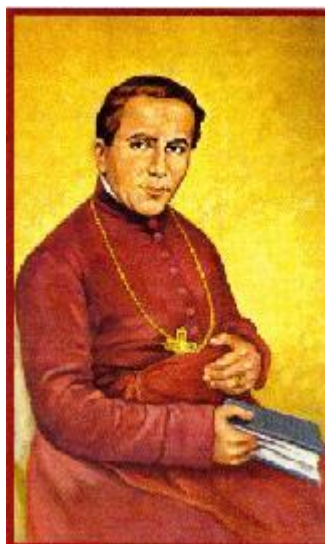
Burial was at first planned for the narrow yard beside St. John's, but the Redemptorists of Philadelphia emphasized a Neumann wish to be laid to rest at St. Peter's. When Archbishop Kenrick arrived from Baltimore, he authorized a change of plans. Kenrick understood Neumann's feeling. He knew very well how much Neumann would have preferred the life of a simple member of the Congregation to that of Bishop.

Another solemn funeral cortege moved through packed streets from St. John's to St. Peter's. Far into another night, German parishioners filed by the casket of the diminutive Bishop they had known so well and loved so deeply. Next morning there was a second funeral Mass and a sermon preached in German by a Redemptorist. Then the body was carried to a vault beneath the floor of the sanctuary of the lower church.

Men and women who felt that Bishop Neumann had always been close to God began coming to his burial place to pray almost from the day of his interment. People who had known him told of his extraordinary sanctity. Clergy recalled his many virtues and his tireless work for the Church. As additional visitors were attracted to the crypt chapel of St. Peter's, there were reports of individuals and families who had experienced relief from spiritual distress and physical ills after visiting his tomb. From the beginning, many thought of the Bishop as a saint.

Twenty-five years after Neumann's death, in 1885, Philadelphia Archbishop Patrick J. Ryan instituted a diocesan investigation of his virtues. Eleven years later, the cause was formally accepted for study by the Congregation of Rites, now called the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints. The body was exhumed and examined by Church commissions. Relics were obtained. In 1921, the Christian virtues of Philadelphia's fourth Bishop were proclaimed to be of heroic degree by Pope Benedict XV, who said:

*"Works even the most simple, performed with constant perfection in the midst of inevitable difficulties, spell heroism in any servant of God. Just because of the simplicity of his works, we find in them a strong argument for saying to the faithful of whatever age, sex or condition: 'You are all bound to imitate the Venerable Neumann'."*



***On October 13, 1963, John Nepomucene Neumann was beatified. He was canonized on June 19, 1977, and became the first American bishop to be so honored.***

Source: <http://tbemissionchurch.com/stjohnneumann.htm>