

# John Neumann

For other meanings, see [Saint John Neumann \(disambiguation\)](#) and [John Neumann \(disambiguation\)](#).

**John Nepomucene Neumann, C.Ss.R.** (Czech: *Jan Nepomucký Neumann*, German: *Johannes Nepomuk Neumann*; 28 March 1811 – 5 January 1860), was a native of Bohemia who emigrated to the United States, where he became a Catholic priest, Redemptorist and the fourth Bishop of Philadelphia (1852–60). He is the first American bishop (and thus far the only male citizen) to be canonized. While Bishop of Philadelphia, Neumann founded the first Catholic diocesan school system in the United States.

## 1 Early life

John was born March 28, 1811 in Prachatitz, in the Kingdom of Bohemia,<sup>[1]</sup> then part of the Austrian Empire, now in the Czech Republic. He attended school in České Budějovice before entering the seminary there in 1831. Two years later he transferred to the Charles University in Prague, where he studied theology, though he was also interested in astronomy and botany. By the time he was twenty-four, he had learned six languages.<sup>[2]</sup> His goal was to be ordained to the priesthood, and he applied for this after completing his studies in 1835. His bishop, however, had decided that there would be no more ordinations for the time being, as Bohemia had a large number of priests. In 1836 Neumann traveled to the United States with the hope of being ordained.

## 2 Priesthood

He arrived in New York with one suit of clothes and one dollar in his pocket.<sup>[2]</sup> Three weeks later, Bishop John Dubois, S.S., ordained him in June 1836 at what is now the Old St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City.

The Diocese of New York at that time encompassed all of the State of New York and half of New Jersey.<sup>[1]</sup> After his ordination, Bishop Dubois assigned Neumann to work with recent German immigrants in the Niagara Falls area, where there were no established parish churches. His first assignment was the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Williamsville, New York. His parish in western New York stretched from Lake Ontario to Pennsylvania.

People laughed at the clumsy way Father Neumann rode

the horse because he was short, his feet did not reach the stirrups.<sup>[2]</sup> He traveled the countryside—visited the sick, taught catechism, and trained teachers to take over when he left. Neumann took up full-time residence in North Bush (now part of Tonawanda) as the first pastor of St. John the Baptist Church (1836–40), and used this as the base for his missionary work.<sup>[1]</sup>

Because of the work and the isolation of his parish, John longed for community. In 1840, with Dubois' permission, Neumann applied to join the Redemptorist Fathers, was accepted, and entered their novitiate at St. Philomena's Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was their first candidate in the New World and took his religious vows as a member of the congregation in Baltimore, Maryland, in January 1842. He served as the pastor of St. Augustine Church in Elkridge, Maryland, from 1849 to 1851.<sup>[3]</sup> After six years of difficult but fruitful work in Maryland, he became the Provincial Superior for the United States. Neumann became a naturalized United States citizen in Baltimore on 10 February 1848. He also served as parish priest at St. Alphonsus Church in Baltimore.<sup>[4]</sup>

## 3 Bishop of Philadelphia

On 5 February 1852 the Holy See appointed Neumann Bishop of Philadelphia.<sup>[5]</sup> His predecessor in that office, Francis Kenrick (who had become Archbishop of Baltimore), presided over the consecration on 28 March, and Bishop Dubois assisted. Philadelphia had a large and expanding immigrant population, for German Catholics who fled the Napoleonic and other Continental wars had been followed by Irish Catholics fleeing famine caused by the potato blight and wars, and soon Italians and other southern and eastern European Catholics would arrive. Some left for rural parts of the diocese, similar to the rural areas of New York state where Neumann had begun his ministry. However, many stayed in the city, one of the largest in the new country—and an industrializing mercantile hub known for its volatility. Philadelphia had experienced anti-Catholic riots in the 1830s and the Philadelphia Nativist Riots in 1844, and would soon experience more, particularly since it was a stronghold of the Know-Nothing political party, known for its anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic prejudices.

During Neumann's administration, new parish churches were completed, almost one a month. Many served immigrants from particular regions, who often did not speak English or know how to access needed social services.<sup>[5]</sup>

Bishop Neumann became the first bishop in the country to organize a diocesan school system,<sup>[6]</sup> and the number of parochial schools in his diocese increased from one to two hundred. Neumann's facility with languages endeared him to the many new immigrant communities in Philadelphia. As well as ministering to newcomers in his native German, Neumann also spoke Italian fluently. A growing congregation of Italian-speakers received pastoral care in his private chapel, and Neumann eventually established the first Italian national parishes in the country for them.

Bishop Neumann actively invited religious institutes to establish new houses within the diocese to provide necessary social services.<sup>[6]</sup> In 1855, Neumann supported the foundation of a congregation of religious sisters in the city, the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia.<sup>[5]</sup> He brought the School Sisters of Notre Dame from Germany to assist in religious instruction and staff an orphanage. He also intervened to save the Oblate Sisters of Providence, a congregation of African-American women founded by Haitian refugees in Baltimore, from dissolution.

The large diocese was not wealthy, and Neumann became known for his personal frugality. He kept and wore only one pair of boots throughout his residence in the United States. When given a new set of vestments as a gift, he would often use them to fit the newest ordained priest in the diocese. Discouraged by constant conflict with religiously and racially prejudiced people, even anti-Catholic riots and arson of religious buildings, Neumann wrote to Rome asking to be replaced as bishop, but Pope Pius IX insisted that he continue. In 1854, Neumann traveled to Rome and was present at St. Peter's Basilica on December 8, along with 53 cardinals, 139 other bishops, and thousands of priests and laity, when Pope Pius IX solemnly defined, *ex cathedra*, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

While doing errands on 5 January 1860, Neumann collapsed and died on a city street, due to a stroke. He was 48 years old. Bishop James Frederick Wood, a Philadelphia native who converted to Catholicism in Cincinnati in 1836 and been appointed Neumann's coadjutor with right of succession in 1857, succeeded Neumann as Bishop of Philadelphia.

## 4 Veneration

The first step toward proclamation of Neumann as a saint was his being declared venerable by Pope Benedict XV in 1921. He was beatified by Pope Paul VI during the Second Vatican Council on 13 October 1963,<sup>[6]</sup> and was canonized by that same pope on 19 June 1977. His feast days are 5 January, the date of his death, on the Roman calendar for the Church in the United States of America, and 5 March in the Czech Republic.



*National Shrine of St. John Neumann*

After his canonization, the National Shrine of Saint John Neumann was constructed at the Parish of St. Peter the Apostle in Philadelphia. The remains of St. John Neumann rest under the altar of the shrine within a glass-walled reliquary.

In 1980, Our Lady of the Angels College, founded by the congregation of Franciscan Sisters he had founded and located within the archdiocese, was renamed Neumann College. It was granted university status by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 2009.<sup>[7]</sup>

## 5 Jubilee year

In 2011, the Redemptorist Fathers celebrated the 200th anniversary of the birth of St. John Neumann. The Closing Mass for the Neumann Year was held on June 23, 2012 in Philadelphia.<sup>[8]</sup>

## 6 Schools named for Neumann

Neumann Classical School<sup>[9]</sup>

## 7 See also

- National Shrine of Saint John Neumann

## 8 References

- [1] "St. John Nepomucene Neumann", The National Shrine of St. John Neumann
- [2] "Saint John Neumann", Loyola Press
- [3] St. Augustine Church, Elkridge, Maryland
- [4] "St. John Neumann, The Redemptorists of the Baltimore Province

- [5] “Saint John Neumann”, St. John Neumann Catholic Community, Reston, Virginia
- [6] Foley, O.F.M., Leonard. “St. John Neumann”, *Saint of the Day, Lives, Lessons, and Feast*, (revised by Pat McCloskey), Franciscan Media
- [7] Neumann University
- [8] The Neumann Year celebration, Redemptorists of the Baltimore Province
- [9]

## 9 External links

- “Homily preached by Pope Paul VI at the canonization of Saint John Neumann”, 1977, Vatican website

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