



Biography of the Most Rev. David B. Thompson, Eleventh Bishop of the Diocese of Charleston

The Most Rev. David B. Thompson was born May 29, 1923, in Philadelphia, PA. He attended St. Alice and St. Carthage parochial schools and graduated from West Catholic High School in 1941. In September of that year, he began studies for the priesthood at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, Overbrook, in Wynnewood, Pa., where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Master of Arts degree in history. He was ordained a priest in the Philadelphia Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter & Paul on May 27, 1950, by the late Bishop J. Carroll McCormick. On March 17, 1963, Pope John XXIII named Father Thompson a Domestic Prelate to His Holiness, an honor which bears the title of Monsignor. Pope Paul VI elevated him to the rank of Prothonotary Apostolic (P.A.) on Dec. 21, 1974. In September 1950, he began postgraduate studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., where he earned a licentiate in canon law (J.C.L.). On Sept. 2, 1952, Father Thompson was appointed a professor at St. Thomas More High School in Philadelphia, where he taught for five years and also served as a guidance counselor. During that time, he took courses at Villanova University and served as an advocate on the Archdiocesan Tribunal. Father Thompson was named the founding principal of Notre Dame High School in Easton, Pa., on July 15, 1957. He served in that position for four years. The Notre Dame Years - "Father Bandstand" Responding to students' requests for a social outlet similar to "American Bandstand," the priest started Notre Dame "Bandstand" on a Saturday in November 1957. When his first emcee transferred out of the area, he hired Gene Kaye, a disc jockey at an Allentown radio station. Kaye helped propel the record hop to national prominence and dubbed the priest-principal "Father Bandstand." Among the teen idols that appeared on Notre Dame's stage were Paul Anka, Frankie Avalon, Chubby Checker, Connie Francis, Fabian, The Four Aces, Annette Funicello, Herman's Hermits, Brenda Lee and Bobby Rydell.

On Jan. 28, 1961, Pope John XXIII created the Diocese of Allentown. The Pontiff named The Most Rev. Joseph McShea as the founding Bishop of Allentown. One of Bishop McShea's first official acts was to appoint Father Thompson the first chancellor of the new diocese, and shortly afterwards, its first secretary to the Diocesan Consultors, and first Assistant Judicial Vicar to the Diocesan Tribunal. In early 1965, he became the first chairman of the diocesan Committee on Ecumenism. In the early years of the diocese, the priest served as the diocesan moderator of an \$11 million educational building campaign. On Nov. 9, 1966, the Council of Priests was established and he was named a charter member. Bishop McShea appointed then Msgr. Thompson his Vicar General on Oct. 11, 1966. He was reappointed on March 21, 1983, by Bishop Thomas J. Welsh. He served as vicar general for a total of 22 years. On Feb. 1, 1967, he was named the pastor of Immaculate Conception Church, the oldest Catholic Church in Allentown, established in 1857 by St. John Neumann. Two months later, on April 3, 1967, Bishop McShea announced his intention to convoke a diocesan synod and appointed Msgr. Thompson as Promotor of the Synod and Chairman of the Central Commission. While serving as pastor of Immaculate Conception Church, he established the National Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of the Americas, in 1974. He was named the pastor of the Allentown Cathedral Church of St. Catharine of Siena, the largest of the diocese's 152 parishes, on Feb. 20, 1975, serving in this capacity until May 24, 1989. Msgr. Thompson served 26 years as the personal representative of the

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Bishop of Allentown on the administrative board of the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference in Harrisburg. For 18 years, he served as its vice president (1969-87). On April 20, 1988, Msgr. Thompson was awarded the highest non-academic honor of the Allentown College of St. Francis de Sales when it presented him with its de Sales Medal. He had served as a trustee of the college since 1966. He also served as the chaplain to the Allentown Serra Club and was a member of the first board of directors of the Allentown and Sacred Heart Hospital Center (1972-75). He was a member of the Canon Law Society of America.

On April 22, 1989, Pope John Paul II appointed Msgr. Thompson as Coadjutor Bishop of Charleston, with right of succession. His ordination took place on May 24, 1989, at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Charleston, with Archbishop Pio Laghi, Apostolic Pro-Nuncio to the United States, as ordaining prelate. Upon the retirement of Bishop Ernest L. Unterkoefer on Feb. 22, 1990, Bishop Thompson became the 11th Bishop of Charleston. During his nine years as shepherd of South Carolina, Bishop Thompson travelled thousands of miles in order to visit every parish and mission in his diocese, which encompasses the entire state of South Carolina. He was known for his stance against the Confederate flag over the Statehouse, gambling, abortion and the death penalty. On Dec. 8, 1992, Bishop Thompson wrote a pastoral letter, "Our Heritage - Our Hope", convocing the Synod of Charleston, the first in the diocese since 1956. Work on the official gathering of laity and clergy began in 1990, and the process culminated with a third session and celebratory closing in January 1995. Under his leadership, the diocese sponsored the Palmetto Project Community Relations Forum, a community effort to erase racism through friendship. The bishop was awarded the Tree of Life Award, which is the Jewish National Fund's highest honor, for his efforts on behalf of interfaith harmony. He also received the Order of the Palmetto award, considered the highest civilian honor in South Carolina. Bishop Thompson brought new energy to the Church of Charleston. An indication of this was the increase in vocations (400%) and the growth of Catholicism in the state. In 1994 alone, there were more than 30 building projects in the 114 parishes and missions of the diocese. The bishop set parochial education standards that improved the quality of diocesan schools. By attending World Youth Day in 1993 and assigning a synodal category to Youth and Young Adults, he encouraged youth participation in the life of the Church. Across his 31,055 square-mile diocese, Bishop Thompson was a constant presence at important local events. The bishop was a member of the United States Catholic Conference's Education Committee and served for a year as chairman of its Sapientia Christiana Committee, dealing with colleges and universities under papal jurisdiction. He served a three-year term on the board of the Southeastern Pastoral Institute for Hispanic ministry. Bishop Thompson retired on July 13, 1999, at the age of 76. Throughout his retirement, he was an avid golfer and continued to serve the diocese as called.