

History of St. Joseph Parish continued.

1925 – 2003

Father Patrick Nolan 1928 - 1934

Father Patrick E. Nolan came to St. Joseph in 1926 and the parish continued to grow, as did Winter Haven. A 1927 government census listed the population of Winter Haven as 7,138 and in the next four years, the parish population had increased by 400 percent. Soon a pipe organ was installed in the new church. A home on Ave. I, NW, where there is now a small shopping center, was purchased and renovated for Fr. Nolan. Lyceum Hall was jumping with events sponsored by the Women's Club.

Father Nolan established a club for boys so that they could play baseball, among other things. Fred Langerhorst tells the story that the club was organized after Father found some of them shooting craps. First, he challenged them to a bet of 15 cents, which Fred took. When Fred lost his money, Father found better activities for them.

At this time, one writer calls the parish “one of the strongest and most active parishes in the county.” Parishioners were hoping that President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal would hasten the day when the parish would have a school staffed by religious Sisters, but that would not be a reality for almost thirty more years.



Religious instructions for children continued two days a week with vacation school for two or three weeks run by the Catholic Women's Club.

Father Nolan enjoyed playing golf with other priests of the area. He would serve the parish until 1933, when he was transferred to St. Joseph in Lakeland. He was served by a housekeeper, Julie, whose donuts were legendary. The love parishioners had for Father Nolan is exemplified by Sophie Fleming, Helen Eastman's mother who, when he was transferred to Jacksonville, spent several months there, helping him get organized in his new parish. During World War II Father Nolan, who had long been a Chaplain for the National Guard, served with the U.S. Air Force. He served in China, India, and Burma and reached the rank of Colonel, the highest rank a chaplain can achieve.