

Bishop Thomas Wenski Biography

Motto: All Things to All Men (I Corinthians 9:22)

Bishop Wenski, born in West Palm Beach on October 18, 1950 grew up in Lake Worth, Florida where he attended Catholic school at his home parish, Sacred Heart. He studied at St. John Vianney Minor Seminary in Miami and later at St. Vincent de Paul Major Seminary in Boynton Beach and was ordained a priest of the Archdiocese of Miami on May 15, 1976. He earned a B.A. Degree in Philosophy (1972), and Masters of Divinity (1975), from the Boynton Beach Seminary and in 1993 a MA from the School of Sociology of Fordham University in New York. He has also taken summer courses at the Catholic University of Lublin (Poland).

He served three years as associate pastor of Corpus Christi Church, a mainly Hispanic parish in Miami. In 1979, after briefly ministering in Haiti, he was assigned to the newly established Haitian Apostolate of the Archdiocese. He was associate director and then director of the Pierre Toussaint Haitian Catholic Center in Miami from that time to his appointment as a Bishop in 1997. The Pierre Toussaint Haitian Catholic Center in addition to providing for the pastoral and spiritual needs of the Haitian communities of South Florida also provided numerous social, educational and legal services to newly arrived Haitian immigrants. He also served concurrently as pastor of three Haitian mission parishes in the Archdiocese—Notre-Dame d’Haiti in Miami, Divine Mercy in Fort Lauderdale, and St. Josephin Pompano Beach.

Through the 1980’s he also conducted a circuit-riding ministry that led him to help establish Haitian Catholic communities from Homestead in the south to Fort Pierce to the north, Immokalee to the West and Fort Lauderdale to the east. In the early 1980’s his outreach to Haitians led him to preach in migrant camps near Lake Wales and Winter Haven.

He celebrated the weekly Mass in English for shut-ins at the local ABC affiliate from 1992-1997. He directed the Archdiocese of Miami Ministry to Non-Hispanic Ethnic Groups.

In January 1996, the then Father Wenski was appointed the Archdiocese Director of Catholic Charities, one of the largest Catholic social service agencies in the United States. In this capacity he helped forge a collaborative relationship with Caritas Cuba, the social service arm of the Catholic Church in Cuba. Since early 1996 he has traveled to Cuba on many occasions on behalf of the Church.

In late 1996, he spearheaded a relief operation that delivered over 150,000 pounds of food to Caritas Cuba for distribution to people left homeless by hurricane Lily. This was the first time that Cubans in Miami participated in a humanitarian relief effort directed to Cuba. In subsequent years, similar relief efforts were also directed to Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and the countries of Central America and Colombia.

Appointed auxiliary Bishop of Miami on June 24, 1997, he was ordained to the episcopacy on September 3, 1997 along with Bishop Gilberto Fernandez in the Miami Arena. Besides his duties in the Archdiocese of Miami, where he served on numerous boards including Catholic Hospice, Catholic Charities, Catholic Charities Legal Services, and St. Thomas University, he also served as chair of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops Committee on Migration and was a member of the Conference’s Secretariat for the Church in Latin America and CLINIC (Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.). On behalf of his work on these committees, he has traveled to the Congo and the Great Lakes region of Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. He also served on a number of community and civic organizations, including Miami-Dade County’s Homeless Trust, the Coordinating Council of Broward and in 2001, Governor Bush appointed him to the Florida Council on Homelessness. He is currently the Episcopal Moderator for Catholic Health Services for the Florida Catholic Conference.

Bishop Wenski speaks Haitian, Creole and Spanish fluently and preaches and celebrates Mass regularly in both languages. He learned Spanish while still a seminarian and worked with various Spanish speaking groups including Cubans, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans during his seminary training. He also has a limited knowledge of Polish, the language of his immigrant father and Polish American mother. His parents moved to Florida from Detroit, Michigan shortly after their wedding in 1947. They are both deceased. His sister and niece live in Lake Worth. He is the only Florida native serving as a bishop in the state.

Pope John Paul II appointed Bishop Wenski as coadjutor bishop of the Diocese of Orlando on July 1, 2003.

In August 2004, U.S. Attorney Paul I. Perez appointed Bishop Wenski to the Human Trafficking Working Group.

In September 2004, Governor Jeb Bush appointed Bishop Wenski to the Governor's Task Force on Haiti.

Bishop Wenski assumed the role of the fourth bishop of the Diocese of Orlando on November 13, 2004.

Bishop Wenski was elected chairman of the USCCB International Policy Committee on November 16, 2004 and served in that role for three years.

In October 2007, Bishop Wenski was selected to serve on the Board of Directors of The Florida Specialty Crop Foundation, a non-profit public charity that responds to challenges that confront specialty crop producers and their stakeholders.

In March 2009, Bishop Wenski joined the Catholic Leadership Institute's national advisory board.

In June 2009, Bishop Wenski was elected to a four-year term on the Board of Trustees of The Catholic University of America. The Board of Trustees is a diverse group of individuals; 25 members of the hierarchy including all the residential Cardinal-Archbishops and 25 members of the laity. The Board holds scheduled meetings four times each year. Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron, Archbishop of Detroit and CUA alumnus, is chairman of the Board.

The civil charter and the Bylaws place in the Board of Trustees ultimate responsibility for governance and sole responsibility for fiscal affairs of the University. The Board's membership is limited to fifty persons of whom twenty-four must be clerics of the Roman Catholic Church. The Chancellor, who is the Archbishop of Washington, and the President are members ex officio.

As the national university of the Catholic Church in the United States, founded and sponsored by the bishops of the country with the approval of the Holy See, The Catholic University of America is committed to being a comprehensive Catholic and American institution of higher learning, faithful to the teachings of Jesus Christ as handed on by the Church. Dedicated to advancing the dialogue between faith and reason, The Catholic University of America seeks to discover and impart the truth through excellence in teaching and research, all in service to the Church, the nation and the world.