



## Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee

### Media Release

*Contact* Sharmane Adams  
Director of Communications  
*Phone* 850.435.3528  
*Email* adamss@ptdiocese.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
May 25, 2018

## BISHOP WILLIAM A. WACK CSC TO SEEK CUBAN PARTICIPATION IN CAUSE OF FLORIDA MARTYRS

**PENSACOLA, FL (May 25, 2018)** – Bishop William A. Wack CSC of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, will be traveling to Havana, Cuba on May 28, 2018 to seek the formal involvement of Catholic Church authorities in Cuba with the cause for the beatification of the Martyrs of la Florida. He plans to meet with Archbishop Juan García Rodríguez, of San Cristóbal de la Habana (Havana), as well as with other archdiocesan officials, historians, and researchers.

The cause for the beatification of the Martyrs of la Florida formally opened on October 12, 2015 in Tallahassee. The cause includes 17 priests and religious brothers, 7 Spanish laypersons, and over 60 Native Americans who were killed between 1549 and 1761 during the evangelizing of la Florida, which at that time included much of the southeastern United States. The lead martyr, Antonio Cuipa, a member of the Apalachee tribe, was killed in January 1704 when the Franciscan missions of northern Florida were attacked by bands of Creek warriors instigated by the English from Charleston, South Carolina.

Eight of the proposed martyrs in this cause are natives of Cuba, including the Franciscan missionary priest Luis Sánchez, who was killed at a mission in central Florida in October 1696. Two young Native American altar servers were also killed with him.

The effort to beatify the Martyrs of la Florida dates back to the late 1930s and the work of Bishop John Mark Gannon of Erie (1877–1968). Bishop Gannon, who learned Spanish at an advanced age, was a strong supporter of Pan-American efforts, including Montezuma Seminary and a Spanish language version of the Catholic News Service. Gannon was convinced of the importance of Cuba for the work of beatification.

Throughout the colonial period, Havana remained the base and port of departure for those missionaries serving in what is now the southeastern United States. Florida, along with other present-day states in this region, was once part of the diocese of Santiago de Cuba. Additionally, the Franciscan province of Santa Elena, established in 1612, encompassed both Cuba and la Florida.

On the verge of his departure for Havana, Bishop Wack expressed his gratitude and appreciation for Cuban participation in this cause: “Cuba had a key role in the missionary efforts across the Americas, and indeed our communities thought of themselves as one during the colonial period. It is thrilling to be united now in this cause.”

Bishop Wack will be accompanied by Rev. Joseph Fowler of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, a member of the diocesan tribunal for the beatification cause. For more information on the Martyrs of la Florida, visit <https://www.martyrsoflafloridamissions.org>.

###