

## St. Mary's Parish School Agency History



### Mission and Initial Founding:

*St. Mary's School is part of the life of St. Mary's Parish whose mission is to make known the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to help people grow in His Truth and Grace.*

*We Participate in this mission as Catholic educators whose call is to communicate to our young people an experience of God's love and the teaching of Jesus in His Church by means of the multi-faceted life of our school and the life of the parish*

*The children's religious education was always the most important aspect of St. Mary's school program. Along with Mass and the sacraments they frequently viewed religious movies about the life of Christ, the saints, and vocations. Children's missions were held. On April 13, 1945, the entire school said the rosary in church for the repose of the soul of President Roosevelt and the success of President Truman. (Excerpt taken from, St. Mary's; 200 Years for Christ, published by the parish in 1995).*

As was made clear to me in my interviews with Ms Cantwell and Fr. Kleinmann, the school has two very specific goals: To give a good Catholic education to the children of the Parish of St. Mary's, and to be responsible for their faith formation.

Although the Catholic community in what is now Old Town Alexandria dates back to 1788 when a certain Col. Fitzgerald, a contemporary of George Washington, sought funds to build the first Catholic Church, the school that is now St. Mary's is just the culmination of a number of schools that came and went and blended into each other. What remained stable through the centuries was actually the Sunday school teachings with which it began.

### Milestones:

1818 Fr. Joseph Fairclough establishes first Sunday school in Alexandria with missionary priests from the early stages of Georgetown College.

- 1830 Fr. John Smith, S.J. invites the Sisters of Charity from Emmitsburg, MD (founded by Mother Seton) to help establish a parochial school. It lasts a few years and then closes.
- 1833- 1841 Fr. Smith also starts St. John's Academy for boys, again with the help of several other Jesuits. These Jesuits although they came for brief periods, also taught at the St. Mary's Sunday school.
- 1850's Dramatic increase in Catholic population due to increased immigration, mostly from Ireland.
- 1847-1895 St. John's Academy revived. It moves twice within Alexandria because of increased enrollment. Boys wear grey uniforms, tuition is relatively quite cheap (board and tuition \$125 in 1854). Annual bivouac at Harpers Ferry. Eventually with the rise of the public school St. John's closes its doors permanently in 1895.
- 1869 Fr. Peter Kroes, S.J. the pastor of St. Mary's arranges for the Sisters of the Holy Cross to come and teach. Fr. Kroes pays for new school building that was also a house for the Sisters by borrowing money from the local bank. The male parishioners contributed \$220, and the ladies held a fair that yielded \$1,700. The parish school is free to the children of the parishioners.
- 1870 There were 6 sisters, 7 pupil boarders, and 86 students at St. Mary's Academy (not to be confused with the parish school), but it was not actually owned by the parish.
- 1871 Alexandria establishes first public schools in response to federal mandate.
- 1872 Sisters of the Holy Cross continue to live at a new much larger Academy but the parishioners of Alexandria pay each sister \$200 a year to teach their children.
- 1881 Slave gallery removed from the Church.
- 1885 The parish was still segregated at this time. Fr. Denis O'Kane opened a school for the black parishioners at a separate location. Plays and musicals were attended by both blacks and whites of the parish. Enrollment at peak was 126. Sisters of the Holy Cross are the teachers at this school as well.
- 1897 Enrollment diminishes at the African American school, and the Sisters are withdrawn. The school closes in 1897.
- 1905 Enrollment grows to 250 at St. Mary's Academy and an addition is built.
- 1913-1919 Sister M. Vincentia Fannon (a former student), is the superior at St. Mary's and she is responsible for having the school become an affiliate of Catholic University of America, and the Virginia State Board of Education. Eventually she becomes the Superior General of the Sisters of the Holy Cross.

- During World War II St. Mary's Academy is forced to sell its building for it to become a hospital. They move too far away to continue their association with St. Mary's parish.
- 1916 St. Joseph's School opens for the black parishioners, staffed by the Oblate Sisters of Providence. Again, when plays or musicals were performed, the sisters from St. Mary's would bring their pupils.
- 1919-1930 The parochial school of St Mary's is becoming overcrowded and a boy's school (middle and high school) is opened staffed by the Xavieran Brothers. By 1930 there were 154 students taught by only four brothers. During the Depression the parish could not afford both schools and closed the secondary school. Male students could then attend St. Mary's Academy.
- 1940's St. Mary's School continues as a parish school, celebrating 150 years in 1945. In 1944 90% of the school's costs were covered by the parish collections. Non-parishioners were turned away due to over crowdedness.
- 1944 St. Mary's Mother's Club is founded. It eventually becomes the Mothers and Father's Club, the PTA, and finally the present St. Mary's Home and School Association.
- 1948-1950 New building is built for the school which is its present location. Original ambitions are scaled back from a primary and full 4-year secondary school, to a first through eighth grade school: \$500,000.
- 1952 School enrollment increases dramatically, new wing added.  
New convent to accommodate increase in sisters is built: \$200,000.
- 1954 Again overcrowded; a second new wing is built.
- 1960-1990 St. Mary's Academy returns to being a girl's private school run solely on tuition until it closes in 1990. Bishop Ireton, a 4-year diocesan high school opens in 1960, subsidized by the county of Alexandria.
- 1961 St. Mary's is integrated. St. Joseph's, already suffering from sharp decrease in enrollment, closes and remaining students go to St. Mary's.
- 1962 School teachers are required to have a college degree. Many sisters have to go back to school themselves. Enrollment is at 1,700.
- 1968 Enrollment starts to drop due to end of "baby boomers".
- 1970's-1980's School advertises its quality education, begins to attract some foreign students; Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, etc. However, Catholic teaching remains central.
- 1983- 1995 St. Mary's introduces Apple computers to the school. Classes begin with fifth to eighth grades but by 1993 extend to the kindergarten. Every classroom has computers. Sister Marion Joseph is first computer teacher.

1994 Technology Committee established among the parishioners.

1995 28 new Macintosh workstations are introduced to replace old computers. Computer laboratory is created. Apple II software is used throughout school including kindergarten.

2000- present

- All teachers are laypeople, but they are also all Catholic.
- School is still completely supported by the Parish.
- Enrollment is up from the slump that began in the 80's. The school is filled to capacity with a waiting list.
- By far the enrollment is mostly upper middle class white.
  - However, there is noticeable presence of Hispanics, Asians, and some African Americans.
- Volunteerism has a long history at the parish, but mainly in its own behalf (with the exceptions of the intervening wars). However, volunteerism and public service are now part of the curriculum at St. Mary's School, even among the elementary school children.
- St. Joseph's Catholic Church continues to function as a majority Afro-American church. Every first Sunday of the month they feature a Gospel choir. Perhaps, in view of the history it is somewhat ironic that some white parishioners from St. Mary's enjoy attending this Mass (see 1885, and 1916, above).

It is worth noting that although the Catholic Church in the U.S. Northeast (the bastion, until recently, of the white Catholic majority) has been in steady decline, this trend has not affected St. Mary's parish. There are three Mass's given on Sunday, and each one is filled to capacity. Furthermore there are no signs of any abatement for the near future. The Church is filled with children, young adults, adults, and senior citizens, all in proportion that one would expect within a growing community.

Nonetheless, the trend in multi-culturalism and globalization has not passed the parish by either. Fr. Atusameso is a resident priest assigned to St. Mary's parish from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He has been very well received there, and many parishioners have taken part in, and responded to, his fundraising work on behalf of his own charity; Jatukik Providence, an organization that helps war orphans in the Congo.

### **Changes in sponsorship:**

The first major theme that persists throughout the history of the parish school is that the central goal is the same as when the first school was founded- perpetuating the religious teachings of the Catholic Church to succeeding generations. With all the coming and going of actors and agents through the two centuries, the Sunday school with which the schools began, is still the unifying thread. There is today a confraternity within the parish dedicated to teaching Church doctrine; St. "Mary's Confraternity for Christian Doctrine". In this sense, there are some intriguing similarities between Georgetown Prep and the many transformations of the St. Mary's parish schools, besides the obvious early involvement of the Jesuits.

The second major theme is equally obvious: the "faith community" in this case is the parish. The parish has been the foundation of the school and its reason for existence. There has been no change in this relationship for over two hundred years. Even the spin-off schools such as Bishop Ireton, is completely the ward of the Diocese (rather than a specific parish).

St. Mary's relationship at this time to its founding faith community, the parish community, is one of complete identification. The school exists for, and is supported by, the parishioners. Its function is twofold: Educate the children of the parish so that they can become more successful, and educate them in the spiritual teachings of the Catholic Church. It does not appear that either one is more important than the other, or that the two are even essentially different in the eyes of the parishioners.

### **Relationship with the Bishop/Diocese:**

Since the relationship with Fr. Kleinmann seems to be good, there seems to be no reason to think that the relationship to the Diocese would be any different - the parish priest is selected/approved by the Bishop.

### **Agency Financial History:**

In general, other than what was readily available through the websites or of public record, the parish was not inclined to furnish financials, nor did I press the matter. The obvious can be

discerned from the history in regards to the present inquiry- the school is completely the creation of the parish and is supported and funded by the parish.

Some information taken from the website relative to our inquiry:

***General tuition trends:***

- 1940's- 25 cents a week per family
- 1950's - \$3 month for one child, \$6 for family
- 1980's- \$1,000.00 per student
  - Attributed to an almost entirely lay faculty, and the demands of a technological society.
- 1990's- increases to nearly \$4,000
- Present:

***Annual tuition cost for Catholics***

One child \$6,556

Second child \$12,684

Third child \$17,903

Fourth child \$21,570

Five or more children - additional tuition and fees of \$2,062 for each additional child.

***Annual tuition costs for non-Catholics***

One child \$7,305

Second child \$4,075

Third child or more - \$20,310

Note: An endowment provides operational money to the parish school solely from interest accrued. There is over 1 million dollars in total assets in the endowment at present. However, over the past three years there has been a dramatic decline in revenues from those investments for obvious reasons. The revenue last year was under \$35,000.00.



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