

Sacred Heart Academy – Then and Now

The Beginning

The year is 1930. The stock market crash of October, 1929 has plunged the economy into what will come to be known as The Great Depression.

On August 24, 1930, Reverend Theodore A. Ray, S.J. arrives in Tampa to succeed Reverend William Reagan, S.J. as Pastor of Sacred Heart Parish. Sacred Heart is widely recognized as the “Mother Church” of West Central Florida because the Jesuit priests assigned there have founded and/or supplied so many Catholic parishes in the area since arriving in 1888.



Fr. Theodore Ray, S.J

However, Sacred Heart Parish has no parochial school. Thus, Catholic education is not available to many families who lack the means to transport their children to the few Catholic schools that exist. Father Ray resolves to correct that matter! Undaunted by The Depression, he promptly petitions the Most Reverend Patrick Barry, Bishop of the Diocese of St. Augustine, of which Tampa is a part, to open a parish school. The school will be built on an eight-acre tract on Florida Avenue, several miles north of Sacred Heart Church. On October 1, 1930, Bishop Barry gives permission “for the Jesuit Fathers of Sacred Heart Parish to build a school and convent at 3515 North Florida Avenue.”

With permission in hand, and prompted by Bishop Barry, Father Ray asks the Superior General of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, if she will agree to staff the school. The Sisters of the Holy Names already have a strong presence in Florida, having come to Tampa from Key West in 1882. They had opened the Academy of the Holy Names first in downtown Tampa and later on Bayshore Boulevard. They also taught at St. Peter Claver School and St. Joseph’s School, both in Tampa, and St. Ignatius School in Port Tampa. So, the nuns are no strangers to Tampa or to the people of Sacred Heart Parish.

On November 18, 1930, Mother Marie-Odilon, Superior General of the Sisters of the Holy Names signs the contract between her community and Sacred Heart Parish, “agreeing to teach in the future parochial school of Sacred Heart Parish of Tampa, Florida, with the approval of the Right Reverend Patrick Barry, Bishop of St. Augustine”.

Meanwhile, the first step in the construction project is to clear the site that is currently a Catholic cemetery. Permission is granted to relocate the graves, and that phase of the project is completed, save for two family mausoleums that remain.



*Mother
Marie-Odilon, SNJM*

William I. Sultenfuss, a parishioner and general contractor agrees to build the school and convent. His son, John, works on the job site as a young lad during the summer of 1931.



Construction of the school and convent ... on this holy ground that once was a Catholic cemetery ... are completed as planned, in time for the opening of school in September.

On September 8, 1931, the Sisters of the Holy Names under the guidance of Sister Mary of Lourdes, Superior, take up residence in the new convent on the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady. Despite the lack of prayer desks, the first Mass is offered for the nuns in the chapel the following morning.

William I. Sultenfuss

On September 13, 1931 excitement is in the air and scores of parents and children are on campus. With the Sisters and the Jesuit Priests as hosts, Bishop Barry presides at the dedication ceremony of the school and convent at 3:00pm. His Excellency blesses each room and the cornerstone which is set in the red brick outer wall of the school's front porch. At last, Sacred Heart Parish has a parochial school, and hundreds of Catholic children have a new place to learn and grow under the skillful, loving guidance of the Sisters of the Holy Names. Needless to say, it is a great day!



Classes begin the following morning, September 14, 1931. Even though families still have difficulties making ends meet financially, their children's Catholic education is of paramount importance ... so much so, that 325 students are enrolled in kindergarten through eighth grade on opening day. And, of course, one of those students, young John Sultenfuss who had helped his Dad build the school, is in the first 8th grade class!

Enrollment increases to 343 by the beginning of October. The children are eager to come to their new school even though there are not enough desks for everyone. More desks finally arrive in November!

The original faculty is comprised of nine Sisters of the Holy Names, two secular teachers, and Father Ray as Principal.

The High School, consisting of only girls, opens September, 1933 with a freshman class of twenty girls. An additional grade opens each year until 1937. On May 23, 1937, eight graduates receive their diplomas from Bishop Patrick Barry. That first Graduating class includes Betty Fabian, Carmen Garcia, Marie Gordon, Margaret Alice Ingram, Cecilia McHale, Bernice Rowe, Agnes Scott, and Genevieve Sultenfuss (daughter of William I. Sultenfuss).

The following year, Sacred Heart Academy High School is fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.

The Growth

In 1934, Father Michael McNally, S.J. succeeds Father Ray as Pastor of Sacred Heart Parish. Father McNally is replaced in 1935 by Father Felix Clarkson, S.J. On January 4, 1939, Father John McAtee, S.J. replaces Father Clarkson. Father McAtee remains for five years.

During his tenure as Pastor, a \$10,000 cafeteria/gymnasium is added to the school campus in 1940. At this time, Jesuit High School is located in downtown Tampa at the corner of Twiggs and Marion Streets, behind Sacred Heart Church. Jesuit has no sports facilities, so SHA's gym becomes the "home court" for the Jesuit basketball team. It remains so until 1956 when Jesuit moves to its new location on North Himes Avenue.



Gymnasium

The Home Economics building is added next to the gymnasium. It, too, is built by the William I. Sultenfuss Company.



Auditorium/Cafeteria

In 1959-60, Sacred Heart Parish celebrates its Centennial Anniversary while Reverend James M. Buckley, S.J. is Pastor. Enrollment for the 1959-60 school year at Sacred Heart Academy in grades 1 through 12 totals 487 students. During this time, a new auditorium/cafeteria with its fully-equipped kitchen is added to the school campus. His Excellency, the Most Reverend Joseph P. Hurley, Archbishop of St. Augustine, dedicates the new facility on Sunday, February 20, 1960. This is the first building on campus to be air conditioned.

In February, 1966, Father Buckley, Pastor since 1953, dies after a long illness. Father Norman Rogge, S.J. is appointed Parish Administrator until a new Pastor can be assigned. Father Rogge promptly mounts a drive to raise funds for a memorial. As a result, the new air conditioned library is built and dedicated as the James M. Buckley Library.

The Spirit

The climate at SHA is "classic Holy Name". Their objective is simple ... to strive to make each student want to return the following day. At the same time, they create an air of reverence for all matters spiritual.

The accessibility of their chapel to all students every day promotes that spirituality. Students of all ages visit the chapel daily during recess and lunch breaks ... to say the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross, or simply say a short prayer. Availability of a chapel on campus with the Blessed Sacrament reserved is a benefit second to none.



Chapel

The school year is filled with academics, as one expects. But, it is also filled with activities that make each new day different from the last. The Sisters achieve their goal and more. Students are actually anxious to come to school and, at each grade level, they look forward to what lies ahead.

The boys enjoy a host of sports programs and look forward to becoming patrol boys whereby one might win a trip to Washington, DC. Boys serve as altar boys at Sacred Heart Church at daily and Sunday Masses. And, during the war years, SHA takes pride in its ROTC unit. The girls, too, have sports programs in addition to *Cor*, the school newspaper, class plays and Christmas plays. In High School, they enjoy the spiritual and social benefits of the Sodality with its national and state conventions, Student Council, Quill and Scroll Society, “I Speak for Democracy” contests, National Honor Society, and the Lettermen’s Club.



Sisters Annette Teresa, Frances of the Eucharist, George Edmund and Irene Marie, SNJM

But, the signature of SHA is the Glee Club ... Junior Glee Club for Middle School and the Senior Glee Club for High School. The Glee Club sings for the 9:00am Mass every Sunday at Sacred Heart Church and, of course, at Christmas Midnight Mass. Christmas really begins at 11:30pm when the silence of the church is broken by the first *a capella* voices from the choir loft. The Senior Glee Club sings Christmas hymn after hymn for 30 minutes. No sound is sweeter!

Then, there are numerous dances like the Harvest Moon Hop and, of course, the Junior-Senior prom. At the Ring Ceremony in October, each Senior receives her class ring. At Rose Night in May, each Junior receives a single long-stemmed rose from a Senior, symbolic of her new leadership responsibility ... and Valedictory and Salutatory addresses are given.



A special part of the SHA experience is its devotion to Mary, the Mother of God. The Living Rosary in October is a high school event, while the beautiful May Procession is an all-school event. In it, those ranking first in religion in each class play special roles, while the Senior with the highest religion average for four years crowns Mary. In years to come, most will look back on the May Procession with a special fondness.

May Procession

If there is a phrase that typifies the Sisters of the Holy Names, it is “attention to detail” ... evident in everything they do. If there is one word that sums up Sacred Heart Academy, it is *spirit* ... spirit derived from so many opportunities to bond with classmates, enjoy so many daily and special events, and learn along the way the power and beauty of lasting friendships.

The Turning Point

At a special meeting of the SHA parents and students in grades eight through twelve, Father Emil Bordenave, S.J., Pastor, announces the sad news that the high school division of Sacred Heart Academy will close as of June, 1971. Sister Ann Marean, SNJM, Superior, explains the pressing conditions that are forcing the Holy Name Community to withdraw high school personnel. Sister Patricia Mills, Principal, outlines the educational benefits of having students transfer to larger local Catholic high schools. The reaction is one of great dismay and sorrow ... but of understanding and acceptance.

Thus, on May 28, 1971, a large crowd fills the church at 8:00pm to witness the 35th and last Commencement for graduates of Sacred Heart Academy High School. Graduates in white caps and gowns process slowly down the center aisle, one by one, to the strains of Pomp and



Circumstance played on that magnificent organ. Each Graduate is preceded by a flower girl dressed in a floor length gown, and each carries a dozen red roses. The Graduates and flower girls take their seats on either side of the center aisle. As each Graduate's name is called, she approaches the main altar to receive her diploma from Reverend Frank Mouch, Diocesan Superintendent of Schools. Sister Elizabeth Crean, SNJM, senior class teacher, looks on.

And then ... it's over! To be a part of a Sacred Heart Academy Graduation Ceremony is an experience like no other. To witness it is almost as touching. To be here for this final Commencement is historic.

A New Era

During the summer of 1971, Sister Ann Regan, SNJM is assigned as the new Principal of Sacred Heart Academy. The 1971-72 school year opens a new era in the school's history.

When school opens in the fall, kindergartners through eighth graders attend a school that has an art room, a science lab, a gym, and a cafeteria with a full kitchen. What an ideal situation for K through 8 students! Kindergartners set about changing the Home Ec room from a sewing and cooking hub to a coloring and clay modeling beehive. Older students enjoy wonderful physical education facilities as well as a science lab and a modern, well-equipped library.



Home Ec Building turned Kindergarten

Parents continue to work tirelessly supporting the school and raising funds to improve the plant. Their goal is to air condition the school, a goal they proudly meet. But, in addition, the spirit and camaraderie that results from events like "Night in Las Vegas", family picnics, and bingo is a huge bonus ... one that SHA parents have been enjoying for many years. The SHA community is truly a family.

During the 1973-74 school year, plans are made to merge Our Lady of Perpetual Help (OLPH) School in Ybor City and Sacred Heart Academy. On August 1, 1974, four School Sisters of Notre Dame from OLPH join the SHA faculty with Sister Maureen Michael, SSND, as Principal. Sadly, even though several Sisters of the Holy Names remain at SHA through another school year, the Holy Name era at Sacred Heart Academy is all but history!

The Post-Holy Name Years

On August 30, 1974, the student body attends the first school Mass of the year celebrated by Father Naigle, C.S.S.R., from OLPH Parish.

In March, 1975, it is announced that the convent, home to the Sisters of the Holy Names for forty-four years and the School Sisters of Notre Dame since August 1, 1974, will close and be



Convent

converted to classrooms and office space. Thus, on June 6, 1975, the Sister of the Holy Names and the School Sisters of Notre Dame close the convent and return the keys to the Pastor. Never again will nuns call the convent at 3515 North Florida Avenue home!

In 1981, Sacred Heart Academy celebrates its Golden Anniversary under the direction of Sister Maureen Michael, Principal, and the School Sisters of Notre Dame. In June, SHA is designated “an interparochial school”, making official what has, in fact, existed since OLPH closed in 1974 and Epiphany

School became a special education facility in 1978. This means that, as an interparochial school, SHA will hopefully receive support from parishes based on the number of their parishioners that attend Sacred Heart. Unfortunately, that plan never really works.

The School Sisters of Notre Dame remain at Sacred Heart until 1986. Thereafter, there are many administration changes. Enrollment fluctuates and each administration implements changes it thinks will increase enrollment. In the 1990s, a lay administrator creates a Master Plan for renovation of the physical plant and grounds.

Also, many academic changes are implemented during this time:

- Grade levels become divisional.
- The Early Childhood Program is aligned with the standards of the National Association for the Education of Young Children resulting in accreditation by that body.
- The Middle School is aligned with the standards of the National Middle School Association.

Enrollment increases to 285 students.