

ST. FRANCIS SCHOOL

HISTORY OF ST. FRANCIS SCHOOL

Upon the closing of Iota's first Catholic school, Sacred Heart Private, in 1912, plans for opening a new school began almost immediately. At the request of Reverend Francis Bouquet, pastor of St. Joseph Catholic Church, and with the sanction of the Most Reverend J. Blenk, Bishop of New Orleans, St. Francis School was born. The year was 1916.

Reverend Mother Mary Florence, Superior General of the Sisters of Divine Providence in San Antonio, Texas, along with Sisters Marcia, Felix, Sylvia, and Zinta were assigned to take charge of "the little school in the middle of the rice fields". During their first few months, the Sisters resided in Father Bouquet's old rectory. Their home, which was also the school at the time, was a two-story wooden structure surrounded by a porch and located directly in front of what is St. Francis School today. Their home was also used to board students who were unable to be transported daily; thus the school became commonly known as the "convent". The school building, which was under construction at the time, was connected to the west porch of the Sisters' home and contained at least six classrooms.

On September 11, 1916, St. Francis Catholic School, named in honor of Father Bouquet, opened its doors and welcomed 163 students. The following year, Sister Mary Pierre and Sister Mary Dympna, were added to the teaching staff and the high school department was started. The enrollment was now 211. The school was thriving. The cost to send one child in elementary was fifty cents per month and one dollar per month for each high school student. Those unable to pay tuition made up for it by bringing food items to the Sisters or by working at odd jobs around the school.

At this time, St. Francis was governed by Texas's school law and consisted of twelve grades. However, in May of 1926, Louisiana recognized the school and required that it have only eleven grades until 1949, when the requirement was changed to twelve. The first record of any graduates was Inez McGee, who was the lone graduate of the class of 1921-22. The years to follow showed a slow increase in the number of graduating students.

In 1929, public school transportation was provided for students attending St. Francis and the lunchroom program was begun in the late 1940's. In 1950, the present brick building was constructed under Father Olan Broussard, pastor of St. Joseph Catholic Church at the time. With its Roman Neo-Classical architecture, it housed eleven classrooms, four restrooms, one faculty room, a library, two offices, and a gymnasium, all of which surrounded an open courtyard patio. The estimated cost was \$165,000 and was paid by the church parish within twenty years.

Sometime in the mid-fifties, St. Francis hired its first lay teacher, Mrs. Marie Spears of Iota. Since 1996, the school has been totally staffed by lay teachers.

School enrollment reached its highest peak during the 1962-63 school year with a total of 346 students. The spring of 1967 marked the last year that St. Francis housed a high school department due to the consolidation of three area high schools (St. Francis, St. Joseph's of Rayne, and St. Michael's in Crowley) to form Notre Dame of Acadia Parish. The last graduating class of thirty was the largest since its inception.

Since 1967, St. Francis has remained an elementary school serving grades first through eighth. A kindergarten class was added in 1976 and in 1988, a Pre-Kindergarten class opened.

To accommodate the students, acquisition of two portable buildings was added to the east side of the building adjacent to the school cafeteria. These portable classrooms were used to house the junior high department. In the summer of 2012, renovations were completed to restore the building to the original architecture. This was done in order to have all of the students housed in classrooms within the courtyard area. The two portable buildings will now be used as the teachers' lounge and Special Services Room.

Under the guidance of former principal Louis Cramer, a grant was obtained during the spring of 2008, with the aid of the State Department of Agriculture and Forestry, whereby six acres were set aside in the rear of the school to house a nature trail. The trail was given the name "Le Jardin de St. Francis" (The Garden of St.

Francis). In 2010, in honor of his hard work and dedication to the project, the trail was renamed the Louis Cramer Nature Trail. Students are able to study and observe nature as well as enjoy outdoor classroom learning. An outdoor classroom was built on the Nature Trail by Eagle Scout Tyler Floyd and Mr. Tommy Miller with a dedication to two St. Francis Alumni supporters, Mr. Henry Foret and Mr. Rodney LeJeune. Mr. Foret and Mr. LeJeune were long time supporters of St. Francis School and their families decided to honor their memory by donating to our Nature Trail.

Since its beginning in 1916, the primary goal of St. Francis School has been to provide its students with a sound academic foundation in a warm and friendly Christian environment. It takes pride in the progress made in the field of technology. The athletic program offers a wide variety of activities and several clubs are available for students to join. Computer technology along with enrichment programs are presently offered to the students. St. Francis would not be complete without its outstanding catechetical program under the direction of the pastor and master catechist religion coordinator. Along with daily class and prayer, and weekly mass and rosary, students are also encouraged to participate in different acts of community service in order to live their faith.

The school is presently governed by the policies set forth by the pastor in accordance with the principal and members of the St. Francis School Advisory Council, which includes parents elected from the owner church parishes, affiliate parishes, and members-at-large representing all other families. This council operates within the policies and guidelines of the Office of Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Lafayette. St. Francis is fully approved by the State of Louisiana and is subject to the Louisiana standards for non-public schools.

Here it is, ninety-nine years later, and St. Francis Catholic School remains steadfast. Set in the midst of giant ponderous oaks with Spanish moss aloft their every-expanding limbs, St. Francis is truly an asset to our community, both spiritually and physically—just one iota of His plan.

MISSION OF ST. FRANCIS SCHOOL

The mission of St. Francis School is to provide an environment of academic excellence and a lived Catholic Faith that challenges each student to achieve his or her greatest potential with the support of family and community.

PHILOSOPHY

St. Francis School is a Catholic educational institution established for the prime purpose of teaching and fostering Catholic values and beliefs. These values and beliefs should enable each student to select principles of conduct that will lead to a good Christian life.

In order to attain our primary goal, we endeavor to adhere strictly to the Catholic philosophy of education and to provide an environment in which excellence can prevail. The best curriculum possible is provided for a strong foundation in Religion, mathematics, science, language arts, social studies, physical education and other enrichment programs. Particular emphasis is placed on the language arts and math programs, which are the key to all learning. Every effort is made to provide for individual differences among our students so that each child will be able to achieve his or her highest potential. Therefore, we believe that St. Francis School is committed to carrying out the three dimensions of educational ministry of the Catholic Church:

1. To announce the message revealed by God, which the Church proclaims;
2. To build fellowship in the life of the Holy Spirit;
3. To give service to the Christian community and the entire human community.