



# History of Saint Mary School

In 1955, Reverend Joseph F. Buckley, newly appointed pastor of Saint Mary Church, realized the facilities of the parish would soon be inadequate to accommodate Newington's rapidly expanding community. The parishioners, who had been asking for a parochial school for a long time, were very happy upon hearing the news that a school would be built. Their subsequent financial support exceeded the minimal goal of \$225,000 by \$75,000. So, after a successful capital building campaign, construction of Saint Mary School began during July 1957.

In September 1958, the school opened as a junior high school with an enrollment of 165 students in two grades, seven and eight. Five Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur served as the first teaching staff with Sister Josepha Julie as principal. As part of the original plan, grade nine was added in 1959, and in June 1960 the first Saint Mary School graduation took place.

The school was founded "in order to advance the educational mission of the Church. Its philosophy enveloped the Christian spirit and educational endeavors. With the conflicts and crises of our times, it is hoped to prepare our youth to adapt to life situations while maintaining a solid value system." The objective of the curriculum was "to provide each student with a diversified knowledge and understanding of himself, his family and his world, with the young people are exposed to daily Christian Witness and its application in their own lives. Hopefully each youngster who has passed through Saint Mary School has become aware of a second world – a world of sickness, poverty, loneliness and hunger – and knows how to help."

During the mid-1960's, Sister Julie Edwina served as principal. No significant organizational changes occurred at the school until 1969 when Newington High School added grade nine. To conform to the other junior high schools in town, Saint Mary School dropped grade nine and added grade six. At that time, grade five was also added on a trial basis for one year only.

In June 1970, Reverend Joseph F. Buckley retired and Reverend Thomas F. Toohey was appointed pastor of Saint Mary Church. In 1971, a scarcity of teaching sisters necessitated a move to an all-lay faculty with Miss Mary McGrail as principal. Also during this period, Saint Mary School and the Newington public schools were experiencing declining enrollment.

In May 1976, Reverend Thomas F. Toohey was appointed pastor of Saint Patrick Church in Collinsville in a experimental "pastor exchange" program, and the pastor of Saint Patrick Church, Reverend Donald J. O'Leary, was named pastor of Saint Mary Church. Donald Cipriano was named principal of Saint Mary School. Led by the efforts of the new pastor and the school administration, the school began to phase in elementary grades effective with the 1977-1978 school year. At this time, the pastor, Reverend Donald J. O'Leary, hired three Sisters of Charity to fill these positions.

The next year, 1978, kindergarten and grade three were added. In 1979, grade four was added followed by the addition of grade five in 1980. By 1980, Saint Mary School was a complete elementary school offering grades kindergarten through eight and boasting an enrollment of over 200 students for the first time on record. The school's program was further enhanced in 1982 with the establishment of a pre-kindergarten class of 35 three and four-year olds.

In 1981, David Milardo was appointed principal of Saint Mary School. He served as principal from 1981 – 1989, leaving in 1989 to become an assistant principal at Newington High School.

In 1986, Reverend Thomas Lynch was appointed pastor of Saint Mary Church. In the same year, Saint Mary School was accredited by the Archdiocese of Hartford after a comprehensive self-study in 1985. Following the 1986 site visit, Saint Mary School developed an action plan to implement the recommendations of the visiting committee.

Patricia O'Neil Tiezzi, assistant principal during the 1988-1989 school year, assumed the role of principal. Mrs. O'Neil Tiezzi was instrumental in continuing the fine work which was begun by her predecessor.

Also in 1989, a part-time Development Coordinator was hired to oversee the Development Program at Saint Mary School. Alumni Newsletters were sent out, an aggressive public relations campaign was started, and the first Annual Fund and Phone-a-thon were launched in the spring. Established development efforts continued, even though the role of Development Coordinator was discontinued for a brief period. In January 2005, a new part-time Development Coordinator was hired.

With the opening of school in September 1990, a new program, TLCare, was offered at Saint Mary School. TLCare is a program that provides inexpensive afterschool care for the students.

In 1991, having successfully completed the implementation of the accreditation recommendations, Saint Mary School received accreditation.

In the early 1990's, as Saint Mary School became a more integral part of the Newington community, the Human Services Department opened their programs to our students. The D.A.R.E. Program was incorporated into grade five and the R.O.P.E. Program into grade six.

Effective with the 1992 school year, the position of physical education (PE) teacher was expanded to include the responsibilities of Athletic Director.

In 1993, a modified all day kindergarten program was introduced to help our students become better prepared for the academic demands of our primary grades. The program was half day from September to December and full day from January to June. With the start of school in 1998, our kindergarten program became full day for the entire school year.

Since Latin is the base for most other languages, it was felt that our students would benefit from its inclusion in our curriculum. During the 1994-1995 school year, the study of Latin was added to the seventh grade course of study. Realizing that not all students have the ability to master this difficult language, it was decided that a second foreign language, French, be added to the curriculum. In 2003, Latin and French were phased out and Spanish became the foreign language taught at Saint Mary School.

Starting in the mid 1990's, our financial records were computerized. In conjunction with this, the position of bookkeeper was upgraded to business manager.

After undergoing another comprehensive self-study, Saint Mary School was accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEAS&C) in 1994.

In 1997, along with the new pastor, Reverend Thomas Barry, Robert Biancamano was hired as the new principal of Saint Mary School and served until 2000. During Mr. Biancamano's administration, the accelerated math program was added to the curriculum. Through this program, students who qualify have the opportunity to complete the student of Algebra I in grade eight. Also under Mr. Biancamano's leadership, the sports program was expanded to include a soccer program which was introduced to complement the already existing basketball and cheerleading programs.

Thomas Gersz served as principal from September, 2000 until June of 2004. Under his leadership, the computer program was expanded to include kindergarten through grade eight. In June of 2003, the last of the Sisters of Charity retired. The school is now entirely staffed by lay faculty.

The current principal, Thomas Maynard, was hired during the summer of 2004. Saint Mary School immediately benefited from his presence. He has implemented a website which makes the school's offerings accessible to everyone. His encouragement of the use of technology in the classroom and his vision for the future offers promise for the continued growth of Saint Mary School.

Saint Mary School continues to benefit from the generosity and support of the parishioners who have remained fully committed to their school, respecting the important role it plays in the educational mission of the Church. This support, coupled with an active school community, offers the promise of continued growth and sustained commitment to Catholic education.