

A History of All Saints School

More than 2,200 men and women have graduated from All Saints School since it opened in 1936, and those graduates have gone on to notable accomplishment in the religious, scholarly, business, civic, artistic, and athletic arenas. But perhaps the greatest measure of the school's excellence is the number of graduates who later sent their own children to All Saints. The loyalty inspired by the school is perhaps the most eloquent testimony to a consistently high quality of education that places All Saints among the very first rank of Catholic schools in Oregon.

All Saints School was conceived in 1924 by Father William Cronin and Archbishop Alexander D. Christie, both of whom envisioned an elementary school as a natural addition to All Saints Church. But the school was born only after prolonged battles in the federal, state, and county courts, and it didn't open until 1936. Its biggest obstacle was a proposed Oregon state law—colloquially known as the Anti-Parochial Schools bill—which dictated that all school-age children must attend public schools.

While this law was ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1925, All Saints' legal battles had just begun. When the time came to actually build the school, a new county zoning ordinance blocked construction: The proposed site of the school, along Northeast Laddington Court near 39th Avenue, was zoned residential. Eventually the Oregon Supreme Court overruled the City Council's zoning decision and the way was cleared for construction.

The new school was a one-story building that was staffed by the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. It opened on September 13, 1936, with a student body of about 100. By 1942 enrollment had climbed to 175 students, a student population big enough to tax the capacities of the building and its faculty. By the early 1950s, the student body was so large that the parish had to remodel a 16-bedroom convent in order to ensure that

enough nuns would be on hand to educate the children. This facility was completed in late 1953. Eighteen months later, the Sisters of the Holy Names, in a personnel shift, left All Saints and were replaced by the Sisters of Saint Francis, from Dubuque, Iowa.

Not long after the convent was finished, Monsignor Thomas Tobin spearheaded fundraising and planning for construction of a new school building stretching along 39th Avenue. The new building was finished in 1955. The original building was taken off its foundation and moved to St. Anthony's in Southeast Portland.

The 1955 building remains as the center of the current school. Additions in 1983 gave the school a thoroughly modern facility, with its shimmering library perched aloft like the press box at a ballpark, and its magnificent gymnasium crouching behind the trees on 39th Avenue.

As All Saints' enrollment and physical plant grew, so did its traditions. At one time or another those traditions included the All Saints Fair, which for several years in the 1970s brought a cavernous circus tent to the playground each fall; the Book Fair, an annual drama revue designed to encourage book donations to the school's library; the Christmas and Spring shows; the Junior Olympics, an athletic competition held at the end of the school year each spring; and most recently the All Saints Auction and the All Saints International Faire.

But the greatest tradition at All Saints remains the poignancy of memories for those youths who were lucky enough to matriculate there. The quality of an education can be measured by the clarity of memory, wrote Henry Adams long ago, and the truest accounting of an All Saints education is the affection of its alumni.

Here is one man's account.

"I entered All Saints School as a first-grader in 1939, the third year of its existence. There were six sisters in those days: four to teach the eight grades, and two more to earn their keep with their one-dollar piano lessons. Those of us who sang in the Junior Schola were taught to sing Gregorian Chant, Palestrina,

Orlando Lasso, and other composers most American kids never hear or hear of.

"There was one communal duty which, as I remember, was co-ed: the daily cleaning of our classrooms. Fr. Tobin would return to the parish every day at about 3:00 p.m., and the squad of children on shift that day would report to him, unaware that he had just acquitted his duties as vicar general of the diocese, officialis of the marriage tribunal that presided over marriage cases in the entire Pacific Northwest, and chairman of the region's labor-management board. He would don a sweatshirt, pick up a big push-broom, and lead us in our scouring of the school. We swept the floors, washed the blackboards, dusted the lockers and library counters, and raked the pea gravel back to its proper bounds on the playground.

"We were simply unaware of the frugality that allowed our school to exist. All mothers had to take their turns working as volunteers in the hot lunch program, whether or not their children had signed up for it or brought their own lunchpails. The principal had to teach two grades herself and run the school from an office only a few feet from the school's furnace.

"Most of us only appreciated much later that our sisters coached us into responsible study habits that would see us through years of more rigorous higher education. Those sisters were asked to make gold from lead, and the fact that they managed this task with such startling consistency is a tribute to their devotion, energy, and wit.

"When Fr. Tobin eventually retired, it came to light that some 50 All Saints graduates had gone on to become sisters, brothers, and priests. I am not the only one of those men and women to look back to the school as the place where service in the church was bred into us. I can smell the sweeping compound as surely as I can remember my multiplication tables up to twelve times twelve."

—Chris Myers