

Sacred Heart

THE HISTORY & THE JOURNEY



Sacred Heart Catholic School is a non-profit organization located in Farmington, New Mexico. The school serves families of all faiths from San Juan County who desire quality education for their children.

Founded

The following is written using excerpts from "Sacred Heart Parish: The History: 1908-2008" by Sacred Heart Catholic Church

In May 1900, Rev. Jean M. Garnier, a diocesan priest of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, took residence in Largo and visited Farmington. Later, in 1908, Sacred Heart Parish officially became a parish when Father Garnier took up permanent residence in Farmington.

By 1909, a new chapel was built by parishioners in the southwest corner of the town of Farmington. The simple, white-framed chapel was used for a school until money could be raised to build a proper school building. It took four or five years, but eventually a small school was built with monies pieced together from the Franciscans who gave \$800 down to the parishioners who gave \$1.25 to \$2.10. The total budget for the new school was \$903.

The absence of a proper school building didn't stop Father Garnier from starting a parochial school in Farmington. He promptly made an announcement on October 2, 1910 to the people of the parish:

Tomorrow is the beginning of the parochial school. All those who have children of school age should send their children. There will be no school money to pay. So there is no excuse unless it be the distance from here. For the present we shall use the chapel for the school. It will be a little inconvenient, of course, there being no desks and other sundries, but we hope that all will be remedied in time. The only outlay you will have to present is for the books. I shall try my skill at teaching, and though I have not a territorial or district diploma, I daresay I will get along. So, send your children and I will do my best to take care of them.



First School Announcement

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SACRED HEART CATHOLIC SCHOOL

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In those days, Father Fintan, another resident priest, acted as pastor, schoolteacher and cook. Under the Franciscan leadership, the school grew and prospered so much that Father Fintan made arrangements with the Ursuline Sisters of Maple Mount, Kentucky to send sisters into the San Juan Basin for the education of the youth in the small Catholic school. The “Red Apple” train from Durango to Farmington brought the nine travel-weary Sisters to the little town. The newcomers were not too favorably impressed. Driving away from the station, in company with Father Fintan and Gonzaga Wethington, a pioneer in Farmington who met them, the Sisters had their first view of the town. It was a town of less than 800 people at that time. And even then, the town was as diverse as it is today, with Navajo, Spanish Americans and Anglos from every state.

Sister Mary Michael wrote in 1949, the combination frame church, rectory and school “were not the imposing edifices which were a credit to Farmington now. ... On the contrary both church and school were extremely humble in their exterior appearance, as well as modestly frugal in their interior furnishings. Just about what one

would expect to find in a small Western town where there were very few Catholics, all makings of a brave struggle to get started in life amidst pioneer surroundings.”

Of the first Ursuline sisters in Farmington was Sister Margaret Mary who was to teach in the school. Nine students assembled for classes in September 1919, but within a short period of time, Sister Mary Michael wrote that “classes soon reached such proportions as to render the small school building really inadequate. Not only did the Catholics of Farmington patronize the Sisters’ school, but many non-Catholic children came also.”

It was not but a year later that Father Fintan bought some property on the north side of Farmington, on a hill overlooking the town. This is the current location of the church and school which was then outside city limits. St. Thomas School was complete and dedicated in 1928. The school was so named because a benefactor from the Extension Society gave a large donation only if the school would be named St. Thomas in honor of her deceased husband.

The new school offered well-equipped classrooms and also included facilities for the limited number of boarding pupils. There was an auditorium for school activities and a spacious playground. This building still stands and is now used as the Parish Center for Sacred Heart Catholic Church. Its students are the grandparents of those who are attending Sacred Heart Catholic School today.

In 1929, after St. Thomas opened, the Sisters began a new tradition at the first Christmas program. The night before the Christmas program, Sister Margaret Mary, Sister Dorothy and Clara Zumbahlen filled paper sacks with hard candy plus an orange as an added treat. These were given at the end of the program to every child present by Santa Claus himself. Then, on the Feast of the Epiphany, Father Fintan would give each child in the school a small sack of hard candy on the Feast which is also known as “Little Christmas.”

St. Thomas served as the school for many years. Then in 1956, Father Theophil began discussing a new school building with Bishop Espelage who was reluctant for the parish to go into debt. The Men’s Club of the parish stepped in. They had the idea of a pledge drive to get the money together before the school would be built.

In the summer of 1956 the Men’s Club started the drive to see how much money they could get together for the new school. At first they thought they would not build any more than they could pay for. But the needs of the growing community and school made them decide that they had to go out on a limb and build what was



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needed. In the Fall of 1956, the Building and Planning Committee (Oscar Thomas, I.J. Coury, Dr. Reilly, Angelo Turano, Frank Sattler and Frank Deiterman) met with the bishop.

Bishop Espelage made it clear that if the pledge drive was not successful that the construction of the school would stop. Besides the pledge drive, a series of bingo parties were held in the basement of St. Thomas School. By winter of 1957, plans were approved for the building and a bid was received from Hesselden Construction Company for \$135,000.

How much did the Men's Club raise? The pledge drive made \$40,000, with \$8000 coming a little later. The difference for the cost was made up with a \$30,000 loan, a \$10,000 savings account and \$7,000 in a general account. If you add that up, the Men's Club was short \$95,000 for which Bishop Espelage would not sign the loan for. They didn't let this get them down. Instead they met and came up with an idea: the money would be borrowed in the name of the parish, but in case of default, each of the men would sign the note and be responsible for up to \$2,000 each.

Construction began in the Fall of 1957. The old St. Thomas school served the students until the new school could be built. In January 1958, some of the classes were able to move into the still unfinished school. During the summer of 1958, Venetian blinds were installed and the floor of the gym was painted.



On September 2, 1958, all classes moved to the new school and on Sunday, September 7, 1958, the school was formally dedicated by Bishop Espelage. On February 1, 1960, the note was paid off for the new school. The large debt was paid off in three years due to the hard work, sacrifice and dedication of the parishioners.

By February 1960, permission was granted to add four more classrooms to the lower level of the school because of the sudden growth in student enrollment. By August 28, 1961, there were 510 children in the school from grades one to eight.



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