

OUR MOTHER OF SORROWS SCHOOL

In the fifty-eight year history of Our Mother of Sorrows School, many changes have occurred. The first building, which opened on September 4, 1946, was an old farmhouse (the Bemish-McKenzie Home) at 2135 Latta Road. Classrooms were on the lower floor and the Sisters lived upstairs.

In January 1947, the school building was a pre-fabricated, all steel structure established at 4900 Mt. Read Blvd. The "Quonset Hut", as it was called, was truly a multi-purpose building. It contained six classrooms and a seventh classroom was added to accommodate more than 200 students. When no longer used as a school, the Quonset Hut hosted Friday night dances and Saturday movie nights that were enjoyed by all. In the 1960s, Sunday masses were said in the Quonset Hut and in the little Church on the hill. The Quonset Hut is still in use today - as a storage facility for Town of Greece maintenance equipment.

In September 1953, the present brick building was opened. It has seventeen classrooms, faculty room, and offices for the nurse, secretary and principal.

The first faculty was comprised of three Sisters of St. Joseph: Sister Agnes Cecelia Troy, Sister Teresina Curran, and Sister Joseph Gilmary Russell. There was also one lay teacher, a parishioner named Miss Margurite McShea. Ms. McShea remained an active teacher at Mother of Sorrows until the early 1970s. The many students she taught and her co-workers remember her fondly. She is buried in the Mother of Sorrows Cemetery.

For many years, the principal of the school and most of the faculty were sisters of St. Joseph. In 1990, the first lay principal, Mr. Thomas Bahr, was hired. As the 1994 yearbook dedication reads, "Mr. Bahr teaches, motivates, inspires and is concerned with everyone."

From September 1994 thru June 1995, Mrs. Rebecca Maloney served as school principal, followed by Miss Laurie Leone. Beginning in February 1997 and ending in June of 2000, Sister Sheila Luber, S.S.J. guided our school. Sister remembers preparing the first school in 1947 and was delighted to return to the "school on the hill." Since September 2000 the school is entirely staffed by highly dedicated, hardworking lay professionals.

When Our Mother of Sorrows School first opened, the principal and all teachers taught two grades. As late as 1956, Sister Jane Joseph Deshayes, S.S.J. was principal and taught grades seven and eight. That practice ended in the 1960s. Class sizes have varied greatly through the years. The first graduating class had nine members. In 1953, there were seventy-two students in Sister Francis Camilla's first grade. In 1955, Miss Estergaurd (now Mrs. Kirsch) had 120 kindergarten students - 60 in the morning and 60 in the afternoon, with no aide to help. Class sizes remained large (40-50 students per classroom) during the 1960s, and then began to taper down. In the late 1990s until the early 2000s the class size has remained in the low 20s per classroom.

Students who attended Our Mother of Sorrows School from its beginning until the early 1960s will never forget the pastor, Father Daniel O'Rourke. He made six trips a day to bring the first students to school. He picked up teachers at the corner of Latta Road and Stutson Street and brought them to school and returned them to their bus stop at the end of their teaching day. Children, outside for recess, loved to see him coming because it meant he had a treat for everyone! Ice cream or Popsicles in warm weather and candy when the weather got colder were handed out to all students. All enjoyed Father O'Rourke's visits to the classrooms. Students would gladly set their studies aside and eagerly listen to Father's stories for many minutes, while their teacher would sit back and wonder how they were going to have enough time to finish the day's lessons.

Many other good priests of our diocese gave generously of their time to share themselves and their love of God with Mother of Sorrows students: Fathers Morgan, John Hayes, Eugene Weiss, George Wood, John Gagnier, Stan Kaprazak, David Farrone, Thomas R. Statt - to name a few. Their influence on the faith lives of the students can never be measured.

The looks of the faculty have changed greatly. From September 1946 until the early 1960s, the Sisters of St. Joseph wore the full habit. Children saw only their faces and hands and would wonder if they had legs! Seeing a sister leave the lavatory was always a surprise! In the mid 1960s the headpiece changed and the sister's hair could be seen! Still later, the habit was shortened and the children could see that sister had legs, like everyone else. Meanwhile, lay teachers were required to wear dresses or suits with stockings and dress shoes. It was in the mid 1970s that the pastor, Father Wood, permitted the lay teachers to wear pant suits and only if the jacket was long enough to cover their hips. Mother of Sorrows School was one of the last parishes in the Diocese to allow this privilege, and it was one that pleased the faculty immensely. Since the 1980s Sisters and lay teachers are all required to dress professionally and it was sometimes difficult to identify the sisters.

The area surrounding the school has changed from farmland to blacktop. Squirrels and mice were frequent visitors in the 1946 building. Deer, cows, and horses were visible from the windows of the Quonset hut, where once, on a very hot day, students tried to fry an egg on the roof. In December 2003, new windows and screens were installed in the 1777 Latta Road building; now students will no longer have to flee the bees!

Lunchtime recess once meant playing in grass, but since 1947 children played on blacktop. They enjoyed twirling on a merry-go-round (of sorts) or swinging on swings with the teachers doing the pushing, or shooting hoops sometimes with one of the priests in the game. It was a busy day in 1987, when after months of fundraising; a modern playground was built with the sweat equity of many dedicated parents, grandparents and students. Two special parents, Mrs. Sue Oleksyn and Mrs. Sue Wyant, were overjoyed because they spearheaded the whole idea.

School activities have also changed greatly since 1947. As in most other Catholic Schools in the 1950s, Mother of Sorrows students would do anything to help the Sisters and/or the Priests. Some of the tasks remembered by former students are: sweeping the Quonset hut, digging graves, cleaning the altar

at church, and helping the sisters clean the convent. Parents often marveled at the children's zeal and wondered why it did not exist at home. Teachers also had playground duty. Since the early 1980s, the students have had the opportunity to participate in many after school activities: Student Council, Yearbook, Drama Club, Safety Patrol, Chess Club, Ceramics Club, German and French Clubs, Ski and Golf Clubs, School Newspaper, Ice Skating, Chorus, and SAVE (Students Against Violence Everywhere). Of course, Mother of Sorrows has for years been known for their CYO Sports Teams. With the help of many dedicated parents, boys and girls in grades 3-8 can participate in soccer, basketball, cheerleading and softball. In fact, in the 1970s Mother of Sorrows changed CYO history by getting permission for a girl to play on a boys' team. Mary Ellen Hart-Predmore and her father, Jim Hart, pursued this issue through the courts and the policy was changed.

The looks of the students have changed from no required uniform to golf shirts and blouses of various colors, blue or khaki slacks, sneakers, and walking shorts. 1955 was the first year for uniforms. The girls wore green gabardine belted jumpers with tan blouses; the boys wore dress slacks, tan shirts and green ties. In 1967, the girls' jumpers were changed to plaid, and the 7th and 8th grade girls, with a yellow blouse, wore plaid skirts. The golf shirt was introduced in the 1986-1987 school year. Students also wear a special uniform for physical education classes - navy sweatpants with a MOS logo navy t-shirt or sweatshirt.

In the early days there was one teacher for two grades. As class sizes increased in the 1950s, a teacher taught only one grade level, but she taught ALL subjects. Gradually principals began to hire teachers certified to teach music, art and physical education. In the early 1990s, Mr. Bahr hired a teacher to teach Spanish in grades 2-8. Since the mid 1990s, 8th graders have taken the New York State Spanish Proficiency Exam and most enter high school having completed one year of Spanish.

It was interesting to learn that the Sisters who taught from 1947-1957 lived in local farmhouses. Principal Sr. Jane Joseph Deshays remembered living in one of the Whelehan farmhouses. In 1955, there was not enough room in the house, so two of the sisters slept in the school nurse's room. The next year they had bedrooms at St. Joseph's Villa and commuted to school each day.

In 1966 tuition charged was \$1.00 a week. As the number of teaching sisters declined and the number of lay teachers increased, tuition steadily increased. In the 1990s, book prices rose rapidly as well as the cost of utilities, so tuition continued to increase. Parents pay approximately 70% of the total cost of educating a child. Every parish in the diocese contributes to the cost of educating a student in a Catholic School. Financial Aid is offered based on income and need.

Students recalled memorable moments of their time at Mother of Sorrows School. In the 1940s and 1950s, students remember air raid drills and sitting along the walls in the hallways or under their desks. Several times in the 1970s, the student body was escorted to the Church Hall because a bomb threat had been received.

Leaving the old church in 1968 was a sad day for many, but, by the grace of God, the building is now a historical landmark, so the original stained glass windows can still be viewed and enjoyed by all. The Greece School District now uses the building for Community Education.

1968 was also the year that sex education was introduced into the curriculum. It took students and teachers some time to become comfortable with these lessons, but it was and continues to be necessary to educate children with the proper Christian values regarding their sexuality.

February 1977 was the year of the great snowstorm! Students who lived near Lake Ontario were stranded at school and slept in the convent that Friday night. Thankfully, "King Kong" was on television that evening, so the children were occupied until bedtime - what a pajama party! Tom Banaszewski, a parishioner and parent of stranded girls, was not able to get home, so he too, stayed at the convent and willingly filled in as guardian for the boys.

When talking with former students, funny and fond memories emerge: skateboarding with Sister Jerome, and Mr. Bonkowski jumping off the top of his desk.

September 13-14, 1986 was the weekend of the 40th Reunion of Mother of Sorrows students and it was truly a memorable event.

Those who were part of the Mother of Sorrows School Family in 1978-1979 remember our big production commemorating the 150th Anniversary of Mother of Sorrows Church. Director, Tris Tandoi, led teachers, students and parents through months of writing, rewriting and practice. Performance night made that all worthwhile. It was a great show called, "The Little Church In The Woods." To this day, every Mother of Sorrows Graduate receives a diploma with a seal that says, "The Little Church In The Woods."

In the early 1980s, a group of students and teachers marched in the St. Patrick's Day Parade. We had a small float with an authentically dressed St. Patrick riding next to a thatched roof cottage.

Beginning in the 1990s students in fifth grade enjoyed weekly visits from a Greece Police Officer who led them through the DARE Program. This program continues to flourish today. Our fifth graders also presented the Living Stations of the Cross each Lent for the entire student body. This was always a Lenten tradition that allowed our students and faculty to visually experience Christ's suffering.

Former teachers remember Mother of Sorrows as a Christ centered school that promoted academic excellence and an awareness of social justice. That tradition continues as the present principal, Mr. Samuel Zalacca, frequently mentions that Mother of Sorrows is a school that is authentically Catholic and academically excellent. Supportive parents, wonderful children, caring faculty and staff blend together to provide a nurturing and welcoming atmosphere. Many teachers, both former and present, have expressed the feeling that they consider the Mother of Sorrows School Family an extended family.

While good teachers are essential for the success of a school, the leadership of the principal has an extremely positive effect on the atmosphere and goals of the school. The principal is often responsible for initiating and/or revising policies and procedures within the school. The first principal, Sister Agnes Cecelia Troy, served Mother of Sorrows School from 1946-1952 and laid the foundation of a great school. Sister Jane Joseph Deshayes was principal from 1952-1956. She had the major task of opening the current brick school building at 1777 Latta Road and the construction of the convent to house the teaching Sisters. She also taught grades 7&8. It is difficult to imagine the number of hours she willingly gave to see these major tasks to completion. It has been difficult to get information about the years from 1956-1964. Sister Mary Anne and Sister Johanna Marie both served as principal during that period, and were kept very busy with the increasing student enrollment.

Sister Laura, S.S.J. (now Pat Cushing) was principal from 1964-1968. She was an excellent motivator and introduced many new teaching methods such as team teaching and pupil-team learning. Most of the faculty spent one of the scheduled conference days at a Hilton School to observe the team teaching method. She also started the School Board and expanded the audio-visual materials. The faculty gained great respect for each other as Sister established teams and teachers observed each other every few months. What a great learning experience for all!

From 1969-1974, Sister Mary Sharon Heilman led the faculty of four Sisters and twelve lay teachers. She introduced our participation in the urban-suburban program, which enabled students living in the city to attend Mother of Sorrows School. Students, families and faculty warmly embraced these students. Miss McShea would often spend her lunch hour helping the 3rd grade students with their reading and writing skills.

Sister Judith Greene, S.S.J. was principal from 1974-1977 and continued the urban-suburban program and led the staff through a self-study program.

Sister Virginia Steinwachs, S.S J. served as principal from 1977-1981. Sister was instrumental in overseeing the installation of a new heating system in the school and the upgrading of the Science Lab. She revamped the Junior High program and started the remedial and enrichment programs, which continue today. Sister remembers a school filled with faith, energy and activities.

Sister Sheila Connor, S.S.J. was principal from 1981-1989. Under her direction the school embarked on a self-study program - teachers, parents, students, and other staff closely examined what was happening in the school and then formulated a plan of action to improve on any weaknesses.

The first lay principal, Mr. Thomas Bahr, became the leader in 1989 and stayed until 1994. He, too, was a very innovative, inspiring man. He began the Spanish Program and hired a full time Reading Teacher, to make sure the Primary Students were on the right path for reading success. He took great pleasure in working with the Junior High Students on a yearly play. They would write, and direct the play, while many students would be involved with both on and off stage duties. He inspired teachers to use modern creative teaching methods and he left a lasting impact on Mother of Sorrows School.

From 1994-1996 Mrs. Rebecca Maloney was principal, followed by Miss Laurie Leone from September 1996-January 1997, when she returned to the classroom. Sister Sheila Luber, S.S.J. wanted people to "catch the MOS spark" when she was principal from February 1997-June 2000. She encouraged and gave permission for the forming of both after school clubs (ranging from chess, computer, golf, sign language and French -to mention a few) and an after school care program. Both of these initiatives continue to be used by our students today. Sister also purchased a new PA System for the school.

The present principal, Mr. Samuel Zalacca came on board in September 2000. Under his capable leadership, the school was rewired so the number of computers could be increased and technology would become an everyday teaching and learning tool for students and teachers alike. New windows have been installed throughout the school building in December 2003. Mr. Zalacca's vision for the school is to remain "Authentically Catholic and Academically Excellent" He ends each school day by joining with students and faculty in a closing prayer, and he plans many liturgical services for the student body. A favorite of students and faculty alike is the authentic St. Joseph's Day Table and lunch for all to enjoy. How appropriate that the strong tie between our school and the Sisters of St. Joseph is so prominently displayed on this special feast. Mr. Zalacca believes in the importance of Catholic education and strongly urges faculty to attend workshops to continually improve themselves both professionally and personally. The Parents Association of our school is overseeing the publication of a cookbook, and when they asked Mr. Zalacca to contribute to the book he responded with one of his favorite recipes-

Recipe For A Successful School

1 XL building
300+a dash of eager students
25+ hard working teachers
1 dedicated principal
3-6 willing support staff

Into ingredient # 1, carefully add:

300+eager students (all ages and beliefs)
stir in 1 dedicated principal (for guidance)
blend 25+ hardworking teachers (ready, willing and able to share their gifts)
sprinkle in 3-6 willing support staff

Mix ingredients #2-5 lovingly to blend their individual characteristics and enhance success.

This recipe has never been known to fail when all ingredients are blended with patience and care.

For 58 years, Our Mother of Sorrows School has been giving young people top educational opportunities. Our graduates have gone on to successful careers and have made memorable contribution to society. We look forward to taking an active role in the celebration of the 175th Anniversary of Our Mother of Sorrows Parish, as well as continuing our role as a vibrant catholic grammar school committed to helping our young people grow and succeed both spiritually and academically. Under the watchful eye of Mary, the Mother of Sorrows, we hope the school remains a beacon of Christian love to the Town of Greece and surrounding communities.

This summary was made possible because of the hard work and tireless efforts of Mrs. Kathryn Phelan, a retired Mother of Sorrows teacher. She sought input from previous principals, teachers and students, as well as drawing upon her fond memories of her many years of teaching at MOS.

I am pleased to have had a very small part in documenting these memories.

Mrs. Carol Gutmann
MOS School Secretary
March 2004