

Catholic Junior High School (Anchorage, Alaska) records

Collection Finding Aid

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OVERVIEW OF RECORDS

Repository: Providence Archives, Mother Joseph Province, Seattle, Washington

Creator: Sisters of Providence, Mother Joseph Province; Catholic Junior High School's students and staff.

Record Group Name: Catholic Junior High School, Anchorage, Alaska

Record Group Number: 198

Dates: 1960-2003, bulk 1961-1967

Scope and Content: This collection comprises primarily chronicles, correspondence, and local community records, with a small amount of supporting materials. Records date from 1960 to 1985, with the bulk from 1961 to 1967. Construction of the school and its eventual transition to an elementary school are especially well documented.

Extent: Approximately 0.5 linear feet

HISTORICAL NOTE

Open for only six years, Catholic Junior High School had a short and unsettled history. It failed not from lack of dedication or effort on the part of parents, teachers, or parish, but rather from insurmountable financial difficulties and from the changing role of Catholic education in the tumultuous decade of the 1960s.

Catholic Junior High School, the first Catholic school in Anchorage, Alaska, was established in 1961 by the Reverend G. Edgar Gallant, Pastor of Holy Family Parish, and the Reverend Robert L. Whelan, SJ, Pastor of St. Anthony Parish. Land had been purchased a decade earlier, but construction was delayed due to the difficulty in locating a religious community willing to operate the school. The Sisters of Providence, who also operated Providence Hospital in Anchorage, accepted administration of the school in 1958, and were full partners with the pastors in the design, fund-raising and construction process.

The new one-story building featured a modular design with an academic unit of twelve classrooms around a central library and chapel; an administrative unit; and a third cluster for art and music, gymnasium, and cafeteria. With capacity for 600 students and at a cost of \$1,150,000, the school was modern, flexible, and spacious.

Catholic Junior High School opened September 18, 1961, with ninety-eight seventh graders enrolled. Sister Armella, Principal/ Superior, was joined on the faculty by Sisters Mary Maurice, Esther, and Patricia Maureen. Eighth and ninth grades were added in subsequent years, and the faculty was enhanced by lay teachers and additional Sisters of Providence.

From the beginning, it was recognized that it would be difficult for a Catholic junior high to flourish without the natural partnership of either an elementary or senior high school. In January 1964, the sisters, local pastors, and school advisory board agreed to a plan to finance and build a senior high. As a temporary measure, it was decided that Catholic Junior High School would expand its program to tenth graders in the fall, with additional grades in later years. For the 1964-1965 school year, enrollment peaked at 363 students, and the community sent twelve sisters to staff the combined junior and senior high.

Before the end of the year, however, planning for a senior high was aborted, due to financial difficulties and a variety of other factors. The building was not equipped for some of the advanced classes, and the combined program was difficult to implement and unsatisfactory at both levels. After much discussion and negotiation, it was decided that the school would remain a junior high, with construction of a separate high school postponed until finances improved.

Although the sisters would have preferred the move to a senior high school, they certainly understood the financial difficulties experienced by the families and the supporting parishes. Because a convent had not been financed as part of the original school construction, the sisters lived first in a rented house, and then moved in with the sisters at Providence Hospital. At the time of the visit of the provincial superior in December 1966, the school sisters had \$.80 in their bank account, and were dependent upon the hospital for much of their support.

On April 14, 1966, the Most Reverend Joseph T. Ryan was installed as Archbishop of the new Archdiocese of Anchorage. He took an immediate interest in Catholic Junior High School and initiated a study of the financial status of the school, as well as the future of Catholic education in Anchorage. From this study, the archbishop concluded that the people would prefer and more readily support an elementary school. After consultation with the local priests, the Sisters of Providence, and the advisory board, Archbishop Ryan decided that Catholic Junior High would close at the end of the school year and reopen in the fall as a regional elementary school, beginning with grades one through three.

This decision presented a dilemma for the Sisters of Providence, who were already having difficulty staffing their other elementary schools in the province. The sisters who had been teaching at the junior high level were not prepared to transfer to the lower grades, and so the sisters asked the bishop to recruit another religious community to staff the new school. Misunderstandings on both sides ensued, with the eventual resolution that one Sister of Providence would be assigned to the new elementary school to serve as principal, and that another would continue working with the older students through an enhanced religious education program. Sister Mary Ann Meyer, Director of Elementary Education for the Sisters of Providence, traveled to Anchorage to help prepare the curriculum and organize the faculty for the elementary school.

Catholic Junior High School closed at the end of the school day, May 29, 1967. In the fall, Sister Jeanne Heintzman became principal of the new Hubbard Memorial Elementary School, and was joined on staff by several Sisters of Mercy from Albany, New York. Sister Joel, who had been at Catholic Junior High for several years, transferred to the Archdiocesan Youth Department, where she continued to work with her former students through religious education programs.

ARRANGEMENT

The records of Catholic Junior High School are arranged in six series, housed in one document box. The record series are: history, administration, personnel, local community, financial, and publications.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Restrictions: Providence Archives is a private repository. Access to some records is at the discretion of the archivist.

Preferred Citation: [Title of cited item]. [Series Name]. Catholic Junior High School, Anchorage, Alaska. Record Group 198. Providence Archives, Seattle, Washington.

Acquisition Information: Records were transferred to Providence Archives, Seattle when the school closed. Materials were also received from the Provincial Administration of Sacred Heart Province.

Related Record Groups and Other Collections: The records of the education ministry and the Education Division of Sacred Heart Province contain related correspondence, reports, and the annual "school bulletin," a detailed record of enrollment statistics, student involvement in ancillary groups

(e.g. Sodality, safety patrol), and special programs (music, vocational preparation, etc.).

Providence in Alaska: Sisters of Providence Education Ministry in Alaska, 1902-1978, published in 1999 by Sister Pauline Higgins, includes an interesting chapter on Catholic Junior High School, as well as the related education ministry of the Sisters of Providence in Anchorage.

See separate index for articles on Catholic Junior High School printed in the periodicals Caritas, Providence Sister, and The Good Work, published by the Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Province.

Some of the activities of the Sisters of Providence who continued in the "Anchorage Apostolate," teaching at Hubbard Memorial Elementary School or serving in the Archdiocesan Youth Department, are documented in the Apostolate collection. Circumstances leading to the closure of Hubbard Memorial in 1969 are also mentioned.

A small number of photographs are stored and inventoried separately.

Processing Information: Records arranged and described by Terri Mitchell, Assistant Archivist, October 13, 2000.

BOX AND FOLDER LIST

History

This series features two complete sets of chronicles, 1961-1967, which provide an interesting but brief summary of school life from construction to closure. The chronicles focus on annual and special events, such as graduation or the installation of the archbishop, with only an occasional mention of administrative discussions or decisions. The impact of the 1964 Good Friday earthquake is noted briefly.

In addition to the chronicles, there are three history folders. The first contains the 1966 parish questionnaire (with tabulated results) that the archbishop initiated as part of his study on the future of the school. The second folder includes the Provincial Council Act of Council regarding closure (1967) and supplementary material on the closure. The third folder contains a few newsclippings of historical interest, dated 1961-1967.

Box	Folder	Title
1	1-2	Chronicles, 1961-1967 (2 sets)
1	3	Questionnaire re: Parishoners' Support, 1966
1	4	Closure/Transfer to Elementary School, 1967
1	5-6	News clippings, 1961-1967

Administration

The Administration series forms the bulk of the collection. There are five correspondence folders, accessioned into the archives from both the school and the Provincial Administration of Sacred Heart Province. For ease of reference, duplicates were discarded and the correspondence arranged in chronological order. Three folders--construction (1960-1961), proposed transition to senior high school (1965), and closure/transfer to elementary school (1967)--include significant details not found in the chronicles. Key correspondents include the Most Reverend Michael J. Ryan, Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Seattle; Sister Cecilia Abhold, Provincial Superior; and Sister Jeanne Marie, Director of Schools, Sacred Heart Province.

The Policies/Curriculum folder contains a variety of documents focusing on the physical layout of the school, textbooks, classroom assignments, and policies and procedures, including the introductory Handbook for Parents and Students.

Box	Folder	Title
1	7	Correspondence, Construction, 1960-1961
1	8	Correspondence, General, 1961-1964
1	9	Correspondence, Proposed Transfer to Senior High School, 1965
1	10	Correspondence, General, 1966-1967
1	11	Correspondence, Closure/Transfer to Elementary School, 1967
1	12	Policies/Curriculum

Personnel

This series contains summaries of the education and work experience of lay faculty members, 1964-1967 and 2003. The student/ alumni folder contains a list of students registered for the 1966-1967 school year, and alumni profiles prepared for an all-school reunion in 1985. There are no official student records in the collection.

Box	Folder	Title
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1	13	Lay Faculty, 1964-1967
1	14	Students/Alumni, 1966-1967, 1985
1	15	Clergy, 2003, [restricted]

Local Community

Local community records, which concern the governance and administration of the convent (local community), include minutes of the annual visits of the provincial superior (proces verbal); the trimestrial reports on community life, required by the religious community; and the sisters' daily schedule (horarium).

Box	Folder	Title
1	16	Proces Verbal, 1963-1967
1	17	Trimestrial Report, 1964-1967
1	18	Horarium, 1963-1967

Financial

The only financial records are a possibly incomplete set of the provincial and local council Acts of Council regarding loans and purchases.

Box	Folder	Title
1	19	Local Acts of Council

Publications

This series contains only one item, an incomplete issue of *News Cache*, a newsletter prepared by the students. The issue features profiles of two teachers, Mrs. Shultz and Sister Mary Eugenius, and an article on the installation of the Most Reverend Joseph T. Ryan as Archbishop of the new Archdiocese of Anchorage. It is the only sample of the students' work in the collection.

Box	Folder	Title
1	20	<i>News Cache</i> , June 1, 1966