



El Colegio San Joaquin in Adjuntas, Puerto Rico, the fourth IHM mission on the island, opened in 1954 for grades one and two. With just 50 students, it was the smallest school the IHM Sisters staffed.

That first year, the convent chronicler noted that “Sisters in this area are quite a novelty, and for some time after our arrival, we were stared at and followed by crowds of little ones.” She found her students to be “darling.”

Parish plans called for one additional grade each year, and as enrollment grew, so too did the need for more space. With grades one through seven established by 1959, the parish’s club house was converted to classrooms.

Students learned in both English and Spanish. Although many were from economically disadvantaged families, they rallied round each other and held food drives to help those in need. They also participated in church, civic and educational activities.



1961 saw the beginning of the high school as a ninth grade was added. Construction of a new school building began in early 1962, and students were an integral part of the fundraising, raising more than \$2,500!

Extra-curricular activities abounded during the 1962-63 school year. Options included participating in the forensic league, girls’ volleyball and boys’ basketball or volleyball. And the fundraising efforts of the children continued – they contributed toward the purchase of teachers’ desks in their new school.



Finally, “the day of all days” arrived: April 23, 1963 was moving day, and with the help of many, teachers and students settled into their new building.

The following year, 233 students were enrolled in kindergarten through grade 12. The high school received accreditation shortly before Christmas, and a double basketball court – “cancha” – was built behind the school building. Machines for the

construction were loaned, and most of the labor was voluntary. The first game on the new cancha was with Academia Santa Maria – San Joaquin won, 60-53.

The first student-prepared school newspaper, *Ecos Estudiantiles*, was published in 1967, and the basketball team won a trophy at the public school carnival.

But sadly, the decision to close the high school came just a year later because of low enrollment. The decision was further expanded when only 35 children were enrolled in grades seven through nine.

During the 1969-70 school year, the school had 114 children in grades one through six. Just after Christmas, the pastor told the sisters that the school was running an \$800 per month deficit. Priests, faculty and parents worked tirelessly to increase the enrollment, but by March, with only 91 students enrolled for the following year, “and only half had paid the matriculation fee,”<sup>1</sup> the decision was made to close El Colegio San Joaquin at the end of the school year.

<sup>1</sup> Mary Joseph Maher, IHM, *A Compelling Vision: History of IHM Overseas Missions*, Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe, Michigan, 2000, p. 57