

Colegio de la Merced – Cayey, Puerto Rico



Although the IHM Sisters had opened schools throughout the United States since 1946, it wasn't until 1948 that they began to minister outside the continental U.S., traveling to Cayey, Puerto Rico to teach at Colegio de la Merced.

"Our little school is very poor," the chronicler notes. "No books, only a few pieces of chalk and a little paper." That first year, 110 children, in kindergarten through grade

four, enrolled. "How we can ever get them to understand us is a mystery to all of us right now," says the chronicler.

Kindergarten was dropped the second year, and fifth and sixth grades were added. Noting the lack of a Catholic high school or activities for teenagers, the sisters started a glee club and choir for students in the local public high school; organized retreats for them; and began a lending library with Christian books and magazines in Spanish.



By 1952, Colegio de la Merced had 265 students in grades one through eight. The school needed an additional classroom to accommodate them all. That year, the local bishop came to the school for a short program. The chronicler reports that "The children were particularly well-behaved (we had petitioned practically all the saints and angels)..."

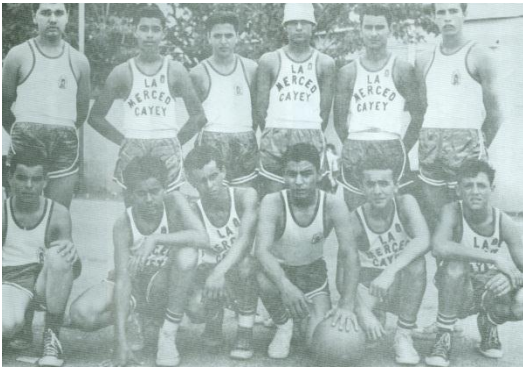
A ninth grade was added in 1952, and the kindergarten was reinstated in 1956 – the year fundraising efforts for a high school began. A 10th grade opened in 1958, and nearly 600 children were enrolled. Apparently the year was a bit "challenging" for the faculty; the chronicler describes the end of the year as "Blessed day! School closed..."

Colegio de la Merced continued to grow; the first high school graduation took place in 1961, our **Featured Class Year**. It was the first year ashes were distributed for Lent: "This is not a custom in Puerto Rico and caused quite a sensation." That school year, a canned goods raffle raised money for blacktopping; other fundraising efforts helped equip the chemistry lab; and the school held its first science exhibit.



Graduation day for the first senior class was Sunday, May 21. The day began with 9 a.m. Mass in the Chapel Auditorium that had been decorated with white lilies, "set off by greens tinted with silver and blue." At 4 p.m., the 16 seniors graduated; eight of them received honor pins for outstanding scholarship during their four years of high school. **Enid Zayas** received both religion and scholastic honors.

Among the many wonderful traditions at Colegio de la Merced was the Mothers' Day celebration, during which moms were honored with medals presented by their oldest child in school. Field Days, art and



science exhibits, Mardi Gras; graduation ceremonies for kindergarteners, as well as first- and eighth-graders, talent shows, dances and parties all contributed to the life of the school. Athletics began in the mid-1960s, and “victories were so thrilling” because the teams “had no coach.”

The IHM Sisters left the school in the mid-1980s, however, it remains open and active for pre-kindergarten through grade nine.

In 1961

- The United States broke diplomatic relations with Cuba. The first U.S. astronaut, Navy Cmdr. Alan B. Shepard Jr., rocketed 116.5 miles up in 302-mile trip. A first-class stamp cost four cents.



- The Vietnam War officially began, as the first American helicopters arrive in Saigon along with 400 U.S. personnel.
- John F. Kennedy delivered the first live presidential news conference. He also established the Peace Corps that year.



- Baseball player Roger Maris of the New York Yankees hit his 61st home run in the last game of the season, against the Boston Red Sox, beating the 34-year-old record held by Babe Ruth.
 - The New York Yankees won the World Series in five games with the Cincinnati Reds. The Boston Celtics were NBA Champions when they beat the St. Louis Hawks in five games. The Stanley Cup went to the Chicago Black Hawks after they defeated the Detroit Red Wings in six games.
- Raymond Burr won an Emmy Award for Outstanding Performance by an Actor in a Series (Lead) for his role in *Perry Mason*. Barbara Stanwyck, of the *Barbara Stanwyck Show*, received the Emmy for Outstanding Performance by an Actress in a Series (Lead). The Outstanding Program Achievement in the Field of Humor award went to the *Jack Benny Show*.



- The *Fantastic Four* #1 debuted, launching the Marvel Universe and revolutionizing the American comic book industry.
- "Barbie" got a boyfriend when the "Ken" doll was introduced
- Joseph Heller's *Catch—22*, Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and J. D. Salinger's *Franny and Zooey* were published.