

La Academia Santa Teresita – Santurce, Puerto Rico



La Academia Santa Teresita was only the second mission for the IHM Sisters in Puerto Rico. It had opened as a small parish school in 1944 – 80 children in kindergarten and first grade.

An additional grade was added each year. The bishop of San Juan invited the IHMs to teach at the school, beginning in 1949; by then enrollment had reached 540 for kindergarten through sixth grade.

The language was initially a problem; the convent chronicler notes that, “It is a terrible thing to stand in front of a class of children and not be able to say anything intelligently...Since the Sisters were not able to teach Religion and Spanish with any degree of assurance, the Mission Helpers of the Sacred Heart came to prepare the children” for their First Communion.

The school added additional grades each year. The first eighth-grade graduation took place in 1952, and in 1956, 23 seniors were the first high school graduates. “An informal reception was held in the Lobby of the Academia following Mass,” the chronicler reports. “From there, the Seniors and their parents went to the Swiss Chalet for dinner.”



As enrollment climbed, the pastor, Padre Sanchez, had a four-story high school built to accommodate more than 1,000 students. On a Saturday in February 1958, the chronicler records that “The entire high school moved over to the new...building...The children came in work clothes in the afternoon and helped.” And just a few days later, “classes began in the new building. It was so peaceful!” The view of the ocean from rooms on the third and fourth floors was magnificent.



Santa Teresita students, in both the grade school and the high school were active. In addition to their academics, they participated in outreach programs for those in need and had numerous successes in science exhibits, poetry competitions, athletics (especially baseball, volleyball and swimming) and forensics tournaments.

The students were also committed to helping their school prosper, raising \$16,000 to help defray the expenses of a new cafeteria. They also started a high school newspaper, *Teresina* in 1963, the same school year the Dramatic Club “produced their first major production, *I Remember Mama*.”

By 1973, with many IHMs working in outreach efforts throughout Latin America, the number of sisters teaching at Santa Teresita fell to just three. Mrs. Flor Caraballo became the principal.

The school remained open until June 2013. On Sept. 1, 2013, students, teachers, friends and family gathered in Santurce for a special Mass and ceremony to commemorate Academia Santa Teresita. Organizers made sure to include their former IHM teachers, saying “you were a very special part of our education and an example of what we are today as grownups.” Several sisters attended.

