

St. Boniface School – Detroit



In November 1872, three IHM Sisters “left Monroe to open a new mission for girls and small boys in St. Boniface Parish Detroit,” the convent chronicler relates.

Initially, about 100 children attended the tuition-free school. Even after the parish instituted a fee of \$1 in 1919, nearly 600 children were enrolled at St. Boniface Elementary School.

Enrollment fell precipitously during the Great Depression. A parish Harvest Party raised money to help parents, and when the financial picture improved, more parents were able to send their children to St. Boniface. By the mid-1940s, there were 417 students in grades one through eight; the school had established boys’ football and baseball teams and Boy Scout troops were organized.



St. Boniface looked for ways to enhance students’ education, such as improving the school library – the “big project of the year” in 1955, according to the chronicler. More books, new shelves, furniture and drapes, “...trophies, boats, jet planes, etc. made the library a favorite spot for the children.”

Enrollment declined again in the early 1960s, and St. Boniface and St. Vincent elementary schools were combined in 1962. (St. Vincent also had a high school.) The combined elementary school – still called St. Boniface – had an initial enrollment of 385. When that began to fall off, a day-care center/nursery school opened in the fall of 1964.

During 1965, our **Featured Class Year, Ann Marie Tabone** crowned the Blessed Mother in May; she was attended by

Freda Vella and **Doreen Caruana**. **Vincent Cutajar** and **Juanita Munos** received scholarships for high school. The school choir made a record of Christmas songs, and the choral group sang for the mayor. “The people were so impressed with the voice of **John Pritchard** and **Gregory Davis** that they want to further their musical study,” the chronicler notes proudly. The 41 eighth-graders graduated June 8.



St. Boniface School played a pivotal role during Detroit’s 1967 civil disturbance; it was set up as a distribution center for those in need. For days, IHM Sisters and other relief workers handed out food and clothing.

A kindergarten opened September 1967, and the school closed the day care center so the kindergarten could expand. Sister Josephine (Mary Dominic) Sferrella began her years as principal.

The parish had a long-standing fundraising event: it operated a parking lot for those attending games at nearby Tiger Stadium. For the 1968 World Series, “Sister Mary Dominic encouraged parking facilities...by good-naturedly allowing the *Detroit Free Press* to photograph and interview her...”

St. Boniface held a “...school crisis meeting...to alert parents to our difficult financial straits” in March 1969. In spite of those straits, however, students had the opportunity to participate in programs such as Great Cities – with art, remedial reading, math, Spanish, cooking and sewing classes – and Operation Go – a program to

guide junior high school students emotionally, socially and educationally.

In the fall of 1969, St. Boniface joined forces with St. Anne and Holy Trinity parishes for a "Tigertown Festival" to raise money for the parish schools; each netted \$9,500. Three Bingo nights raised \$9,000, however plans for a tri-parish school consolidation began.

With archdiocesan approval, Holy Trinity and St. Anne would house grades one through six; St. Boniface, grades seven through nine; and St. Vincent, grades 10-12, beginning September 1970.

St. Boniface School closed in January 1972, and the students were shifted to St. Vincent High School. The church was torn down in 1996.

In 1965

United States President Lyndon Johnson signed the Social Security Act of 1965 into law, establishing Medicare and Medicaid. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and more than 2,600 others were arrested in Selma, Ala., during demonstrations against voter-registration rules.

Malcolm X was assassinated on the first day of National Brotherhood Week, at the Audubon Ballroom in New York City.

Cosmonaut Aleksei Leonov left his spacecraft for 12 minutes, becoming the first person to walk in space. U.S. Astronaut Edward Higgins White walked in space a few months later.

Bob Dylan elicited controversy among folk purists by "going electric" at the Newport Folk Festival.

The Murder (Abolition of the Death Penalty) Act 1965 was given Royal Assent, formally abolishing the death penalty in the United Kingdom.

Marilyn Horne was named Most Promising New Recording Artist at the 1965 Grammy Awards. "Downtown," by Petula Clark, was named Best Rock and Roll Performance. It was a big year for Bill Cosby. His "I Started Out as a Child" won a Grammy for Best Comedy Performance, and he became the first African American to headline a television show, starring in *I Spy*.

ABC paid an unprecedented \$32 million for a four-year contract with the NCAA to broadcast football games on Saturday afternoons.

Winston Churchill, Nat King Cole, T.S. Eliot and Gloria Morgan-Vanderbilt died. Sarah Jessica Parker, Robert Downey Jr., Brooke Shields and J. K. Rowling were born.