

History of Our Parish School and the Benedictine Sisters

debt free. The Sisters, of course, were equally grateful that decisive steps were being formulated for definite action regarding the Convent building. The second semester roll call at Clarion State College added two more O.S.B. names to its list: Sister Anthony and Sister Adrian who enrolled in a Visual Aids Class offered as an evening course. March 28, 1962 was the day Sister Charles and her staff of "super salesmen" launched into the \$5000 subscription contest sponsored by The Clarion Newspapers. The drive ultimately led to the winning of a 1962 Chevrolet Biscayne for the Clarion Convent. All hands were on deck to promote the cause for happy motoring with Sister Mary William acting as Co-captain of the drive. On May 25, 1962 the Junior-Senior Prom was held. The theme was "The Fantasy of the Sea" with a marine motif and the gala affair was moderated by Sister Mary, Junior Class advisor.

When the Sisters began the school term of 1962-1963, they were greeted by the old convent on a new site. A variegated ply board support substituted for the previous foundation. The absence of the front porch and back porch was noticed immediately, but in their place stood improvised boardwalks, steps, and small porches. As they glanced at the surrounding terrain they were mildly amused at the sight provided by the previous basement. It appeared as a shell-shocked dug out of by gone World War days and in the middle of all the rubble stood Old Faithful, their basement work table. The initial shock of the drastic change was alleviated the minute they stepped into the Convent. Practically everything was as they had left it! The parlor had become an all purpose room, a slight tilting of the floor was noticeable upon ascending to the second floor, and a few door latches just wouldn't catch. The Sisters were delighted to realize that the transfer was so well manipulated and all facilities were in excellent running order at the time of their return.

A drizzly, foggy rain on September 4, 1962, the

first day of school, did not hinder an anxious workman's eagerness to start construction on the new Convent. He was noticed greasing all the machinery which had been tantalizing the Sister's curiosity for a few days. Then on September 5 the ground breaking and removal of the rocks of the original foundation happened. September 13 saw the first pouring of cement into the wooden frames which would support the steel beams of the new foundation. The Sisters moved into their new home on October 14, 1963. They said, "It is a beautiful home, we must make it a Benedictine home."

In October, 1962 the annals of the high school record the fourth place winner in the state wide Columbus Day Essay Contest as junior Thomas Hartle, nine years later to be ordained a priest in the diocese. He traveled to Harrisburg with his mother where he was presented with a portable typewriter by Governor D.L. Lawrence.

For a number of years high school enrollment came upon hard times. The decision to close the school was difficult to face, but it had to be made. In 1964-1965 there were only sixty seven students in the high school. In 1965 seventeen students graduated from the last Immaculate Conception senior class. Sister Bernadine Goebel, principal at the time stated that closing the high school was the most difficult task she ever experienced. The last 12 year graduating class members at I.C. were: Carol Banner, Charlotte Beary, Darlene



*Immaculate Conception's last senior high boys varsity basketball team, 1965.
L-R: Bill Laughlin, Duane "Buster" Durante, Paul Hartle, Ray Beary, Rich Martin,
Gary Wolbert, Ron Reinsel, Bob Sloan, Mike Murphy and Coach Dave Bevevino.*

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The Rectory first built in 1962 as a Convent for the Benedictine Sisters. Later converted to the Rectory in May 1977.

Bernard, Kathy Bauer, Anna Jo Montana, Donna Griffin, Janet Ohler, Mary Lorenz, Ronald Reinsel, David Lorenz, William Laughlin, Robert Sloan, Paul Hartle, Richard Martin, Ray Beary, Joseph Zacherl and Stephen Mason.

With the closing of the high school in 1965, the Sisters who staffed it moved on to other places with some remaining at the grade school. By 1973, three Sisters were teaching here, and by the fall term of 1974, only one Benedictine Sister, Marie Patrice McGrath, remained as principal of the grade school. In July, 1975, the parish purchased the house adjoining the convent, and in September Sister Marie Patrice moved in. Renovation of the former convent was begun in the spring of 1977, and it became the new rectory shortly before Memorial Day, 1977.

Sister Marie Patrice McGrath was transferred to Sharon, Pa. in June, 1977, and the parish received the announcement of the arrival of Sister Audrey Steff and Sister Karen Kosin that same month. Sister Audrey Steff assumed the position of principal of our school, with Sister Karen Kosin on the faculty.

Our Parish Council selected October 23, 1977 as the day to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the Benedictine Sisters in Clarion (officially September 5). A festival of thanksgiving was observed to commemorate the inestimable contribution of the 157 Benedictine Sisters who had served Immaculate Conception during the past one hundred years. At that time fifty five were still serving the People of God in various places and callings. Praise and thanksgiving was given to the Benedictines for the blessing of their presence.

In 1990 a preschool class was added. Today The Immaculate Conception Elementary and Middle School is a treasure in the Diocese of Erie Catholic School System. The 130 students enrolled for the 2004-2005 school year will reap the benefits of a first rate education. At I.C. all of the basics are taught as well as Art, Spanish, Music, Guidance and Computer in a "state of the art" lab. The masterfully outfitted lab is a direct result of an endowment generously given to the school by Mr. H. Ray Selker. For the first time since the endowment's inception the entire seventh grade class has been provided with laptop computers for academic support purposes.

The teachers at Immaculate Conception are also first rate, with 90% of the faculty carrying an M.A. or above. The middle school is Middle States Accredited and all of the teachers are always prepared to go the extra mile and often do. The math and science students, under the tutelage of their teachers, participate in demanding academic contests in which they spend the latter half of the school year preparing. One such contest is P.J.A.S. for the junior scientists. This contest is generally held at Penn State University's main campus. The I.C. students travel to the university, along with I.C.'s own Amy Mechling, to present and defend their scientific hypotheses. The students often endure in-depth questions from the judges. Most of the students consistently earn first and second place awards.

For the student interested in Math there's Math Counts, another state-wide contest for middle school students. Again, participants spend many hours, often after school, preparing. The students compete, with their teacher for support, as a group and individually. The I.C. students take top awards, singly and collectively, year after year.

All of these accolades are a direct result of the teaching staff under the direction of our present principal Donna Gaydash. From the time children start preschool at Immaculate Conception School they are gently eased into an accelerated curriculum. By the time the students finish eighth grade they are generally testing in the middle of ninth grade level. The staff and teachers at I.C. believe that by advancing the curriculum they are giving all of the students an edge that will help them be successful in their academic career.

But, academics are not the only thing Immaculate Conception has to offer. All of the children receive the benefit of having Christ in their life daily. Whether the student is of the Catholic faith or another they are freely allowed and encouraged to think about, talk

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about, and live their life according to Christ's teachings. Students in grades 1-8 attend Mass weekly with the Pastor, Msgr. Joseph J. Riccardo. The teachers divide up the masses within the current school year and each class takes a turn with the readings, petitions, and gift presentation. The middle school choir members contribute musically, as a group, and in the position of cantor. The altar servers are also members of the student body and occasionally the principal and teachers will serve as Eucharistic ministers.

The Immaculate Conception School students also get to do many fun extra curricular activities. During Catholic Schools Week the elementary grades go bowling while the middle school grades spend the day skiing at Holiday Valley. Every three years the middle school students journey to Gettysburg to examine the battle site and reenact encampment. All of the students get to take an exciting, end-of-year, field trip to a destination of their teacher's choosing. Some destinations that they have traveled to in the past are: Erie Zoo, PNC Park, Carnegie Science Center, Gateway Clipper, Emsworth Lock & Dam, Pittsburgh Play-

house, and the list goes on. The eighth graders travel to New York City for three fun-filled days of touring, which includes a Broadway musical and a trip to the Today show.

The Immaculate Conception School still has a full-service cafeteria which serves two hot lunch choices daily. All of this is accomplished with two part-time employees and parent volunteers.

For the past three years many Immaculate Conception School families have benefited from a scholarship program sanctioned by the state. This is the Educational Improved Tax Credit. Local businesses pledge a donation of their choosing, and commit that amount to the scholarship fund for two years. The businesses then receive a generous tax credit on their donated amount. The scholarship fund distributes the donated money to pay tuitions of families who qualify. Since its inception over \$1,000,000 has been raised.

To this date the Immaculate Conception School is one in which all of us can take great pride.

Immaculate Conception Principals

<u>Grade School</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Grade School</u>	<u>Date</u>
S. Eleanor Kelch	1946-1952	S. Evelyn Hynes	1964-1965
S. Mary Marcia Monighan	1952-1955	S. Mary Therese (Richarda) Egan	1965-1973
S. Ignatia De Puydt	1955-1956	S. Marie Patrice McGrath	1973-1976
S. Evelyn Hynes	1956-1958	S. Audrey Steff	1976-1986
S. Mary Magdalen Fessler	1958-1959	Dr. Robert Kerr	1987-1993
S. Mary Marcia Monighan	1959-1961	Karen Pesek	1993-1997
S. Mary Maragret Kraus	1961-1964	Donna Gaydash	1997-Present

<u>High School</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>High School</u>	<u>Date</u>
S. Kathleen Cribbins	1946-1950	S. Mary Hubert Buckel	1958-1959
S. Mary Regina Flanagan	1950-1952	S. Marie Celine Bucholz	1959-1961
S. Bonaventure Martin	1952-1956	S. Mary Esther Zimmer	1961-1964
S. Delores (Mary Jude) Sarafinski	1956-1958	S. Bernadine Goebel	1964-1966

Benedictine Sisters From Immaculate Conception Parish

S. Henrietta Meisinger, S. Sabrina Rapp, S. Caroline Hartle, S. Bibiana Meisinger,
 S. Perpetua Heinrich, S. Marcella Meisinger, S. Bernardine Goebel, S. Genevieve Heinrich,
 S. Alice Schierberl, S. Carolyn Reinsel, S. Cindy Hoover

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