

IHM Sisters Centennial 1923-2023

After 21 years of faithful service as Pastor, Father “Van” retired and Father Edward V. Mullarkey became the fourth pastor of Saint James in June of 1931. At the time of his arrival, the parish had 85 families and 85 children enrolled in our parish school. This section covers the depression years, which were extremely difficult for the parish and the school. The following is an excerpt from Marge Castorina’s book on *St. James School 1906 to 1981*, p. 13-14.

The Depression Years...

Despite outward appearances the small Community faced growing financial concerns. The large convent demanded repairs and renovations which could not be met by the small tuition, still \$1.00 a month. Falls Church was not spared as the shadow of the Depression fell across the country, and as debts mounted the enrollment dropped to as low as seventy students. Reluctantly the Sisters had to turn to the Motherhouse to provide even the necessities of existence. That time is recalled in their Annals:

“For a while it seemed that the best thing to do would be to close this Southern mission which was weighing heavily on the already overburdened finances of the Community. But the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary are not easily daunted, and having labored in this section of Virginia, they knew the great and fertile field for Catholic education lay here if they could only struggle through these difficult years.”

In 1930 Mother Selesia, one of the original pioneer band, was reassigned to Virginia as Superior. To help meet expenses and make some of the most pressing repairs, she decided to take a few boarders at the convent. With one boarder at first, soon followed by several more, Villa Maria Academy, a boarding school for girls from kindergarten to eighth grade was established – the turning point in their struggle to maintain the mission at St. James.



“Marianita” of the Villa Maria Academy, located on Broad Street behind the old convent where the playground is located today.

The famed Mother Clotildis succeeded Mother Selesia as Superior in 1934. When the number of boarders increased to forty she decided to expand by opening “Marianita” for 1st and 2nd grade boarders in the little white house. The war years brought thousands of families to the Washington area. Many who came with children could find no housing and Villa Maria and “Marianita” were soon filled to over-flowing. Mother Clotildis negotiated the rental of the old Von Herbulis home (present site of St. Joseph’s School) and converted it to a school, “Villa Madonna” for 7th and 8th grade boarders...

...During these busy years the Sisters also labored to carry the seed of Catholic education beyond St. James... to St. Ann’s, St. Agnes, St. Charles and St. Thomas More in Arlington; St. John’s, McLean; St. Rita’s, Alexandria, Herndon and Front Royal. All these have been and many still are, mission projects of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of St. James Parish.”

SAVE THE DATE: SEPTEMBER 17, 2023
12:00pm-4:00pm
IHM Sisters Centennial Celebration

See our website under the *News* menu, <https://bit.ly/43wzdjo>, for further details on this celebration, including how to RSVP for the event or scan the QR code to the right.

