

A Long Tradition of Teaching

As mandated by the *Constitutions*, “the chief end of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary is the instruction and Christian education of children and young girls.” For well over a century, sisters devoted themselves almost exclusively to the ministry of education. From the time she founded the community, Mother Marie-Rose emphasized the importance of quality instruction. In Quebec, Holy Names sisters quickly earned a reputation as exceptional educators. In 1859, in response to Archbishop Francis Norbert Blanchet’s plea for a teaching order to provide religious education for the children of the Oregon diocese, twelve Holy Names sisters left Montreal for Portland, Oregon. A mere two weeks after their arrival, the sisters opened St. Mary’s Academy. Eventually, Holy Names sisters opened schools in Washington, California, New York, Maryland, Florida, and Ontario, Canada. They also educated thousands of children in parish schools. Committed to providing their students with a well-rounded education, Holy Names sisters emphasized arts and culture through music and art lessons.

We were assigned to teach right out of the Novitiate. We really learned teaching on the job, but we had the best master teachers in the world to help us. I really learned so much from the sisters, much more than I did from college, I think. — S. Magdalen Basick

As they branched out into new communities, Holy Names sisters agreed to shoulder a remarkable teaching load. With classroom teachers in high demand, young sisters—some still in their teens—were assigned large classes. Many



Two Maryrose Academy students ponder their chemistry lesson with the encouragement of Sister Francis Henry Christianice, Albany, c.1964

began teaching as soon as they finished the novitiate, with only a few college or normal school courses behind them. Older sisters with many years of classroom experience served as mentors for younger community members who were new to teaching. Some sisters considered the training they received from their mentor teachers even more valuable than their college education. Despite the challenges of large classes and their own delayed education, generations

of sisters remember their teaching days with great fondness.

In those days we started teaching with no teacher preparation, no training. I recall doing things where I should have said no, but the answer seemed to be yes, that somehow this is part of God’s plan. I got enormous help from my other sisters. — S. Rose Gallagher

In addition to classroom responsibilities, Holy Names sisters devoted countless hours to their students as librarians, coaches, club advisors, infirmarians, and counselors. Other sisters supervised boarding students. Sisters were often asked to lend a sympathetic ear to a worried student, assist with a research

assignment, or conduct a rehearsal for an upcoming recital or play. Sisters were also expected to direct and support their students’ spiritual growth. They prepared generations of students for their first confession and first communion.

I said “Teach? Am I going to teach?” When I entered I never gave a thought that I would teach. The Mistress of Novices said, “Why did you enter?” I said, “Well, I just love God! I had to [enter].”

— S. Rae Skinner



Young ladies from the Academy of the Holy Names practice their instruments under the sister’s watchful eye, West Tampa, Florida, c.1900

Religion, we can truthfully say, is the most important class at Holy Names, not only because the teachers are religious, but also religion will play the most important role in molding our future lives.

— Manakata, Holy Names Academy—Spokane yearbook, 1960

The dual life of an educator and a religious was demanding and consuming. The thousands of students who received a Holy Names education and the high esteem in which they hold the congregation illustrate that the sisters were more than equal to the task.

Youthful scholars eager to learn fix their gaze upon the teacher, expectantly awaiting the words that shall fall from her lips. — Book of Customs, 1939



Sister Margaret Ball supervises cookie making at Blessed Martin Nursery School, Portland, 1960



Sister Gertrude Schaefer teaches eager youngsters at St. Paul Miki’s School, Portland, c.1940

Young artists enjoy their lessons at the Ramona Convent Garden School summer preschool, Alhambra, California, 1951
Courtesy Bob Harold

