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## History

Mercyhurst Seminary/Preparatory School traces its heritage to the foundress of the Sister of Mercy, Catherine McAuley. Catherine was born in 1778 into a financially secure family. Her father James, a devout Catholic, taught the fundamentals of faith by his good example of reaching out to the poor. Catherine's comfortable life changed drastically after the death of her parents. She was sent to live with a Protestant family where she experienced poverty firsthand. She was able to retain her strong Catholic beliefs through her own strong will and the role modeling of her father.

As chance would have it, Catherine accepted a position to serve as nurse companion to Mrs. Catherine Callaghan. The Callaghan's were Quakers and encouraged service to the poor. Catherine was free to practice her faith, thus fertilizing the seeds planted by her father. The Callaghan's adopted Catherine as their daughter and eventually converted to Catholicism. Upon their death, she inherited the equivalent of \$1,000,000.

Catherine continued her service to the needy while studying educational methods. She opened the House of Mercy on Baggot Street in Dublin, Ireland in 1831 with the goals of spiritual advancement, and service to the poor, sick and uneducated. Two hundred girls were enrolled in the school its first year with 12 women living and working in the building. The women began to call each other "sister" and were encouraged to begin a religious order. Catherine began her novitiate at the age of 52. In 1831, three novices professed their vows, thus giving birth to the Sisters of Mercy.

Within the 10 years of beginning her order and her death, Catherine McAuley established a total of nine convents in Ireland and England. She died in 1841 and was laid to rest in the ground with the poor.

Sisters of Mercy came to the United States in 1842 at the request of Bishop Michael O'Connor of Pittsburgh. While the sisters were en route from Ireland to the United States, they met Tobias Mullen, a seminarian. This chance meeting affected the education of young women years later. Tobias Mullen was later named Bishop and invited the Sisters of Mercy to the Erie Diocese in 1870 since he saw a need for Catholic education. In 1871, they opened Saint Joseph Academy, a private school for girls in Titusville, Pennsylvania. By the 1920's, the order and the school were growing rapidly, so the sisters set their sights on opening a school in Erie.

Bishop John Mark Gannon suggested to Mother M. Borgia Egan, the Superior of the Sisters of Mercy in Titusville, that she raise \$150,000 and come to Erie to found a school in 1921. Mother Borgia purchased 75 acres of farmland in remote southeast Erie. Mercyhurst Seminary, an educational institution for college, high school, and grade school women

opened in 1926. Hurst is old English for wooded hilltop and seminary in Latin means a place where seeds are planted to grow. The Seminary was located on the first floor of Egan Hall giving some 50 students total access to the facility. One lower grade was dropped each year until all students were graduated from eighth grade, leaving the seminary a high school and college institution.

When the Seminary was only three years old, the Great Depression hit the country. The school needed a fundraising project. According to Margaret McMahon, a 1933 Mercyhurst Seminary graduate, "The nuns produced and directed three musical comedies with college girls taking the main speaking and singing parts and the rest of the girls dancing and singing. The plays were three nights each year at a different theatre. I believe the Erie people were tired of all the sadness and enjoyed the live theatre."

Although Mercyhurst Seminary and Mercyhurst College originally shared the same facilities, plans for a separate building were set in motion in 1952. The Sisters, acting on a Middle States Association recommendation, broke ground on East Grandview Boulevard. The new building, now called Mercyhurst Preparatory School, opened its doors in 1963 to 170 women.

In 1974 Mercyhurst became coed, providing a private school alternative that had not been previously available to young people in Erie. In 1993 a building expansion program was begun, resulting in the addition of a new wing, including athletic facilities, offices, and a new auditorium. As the building expanded, so did Mercyhurst's eye toward innovation with several new programs.

The U.S. Department of Education awarded MPS the Blue Ribbon School of Excellence Award in 1993 and again in 1998.

1778

Catherine McAuley was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1778. Her compassion for the poor and strong conviction in the Catholic faith guided her to use her inheritance money to help poor women and children. She leased property on Baggot Street in Dublin and opened the House of Mercy on September 24, 1827, on the feast of Our Lady of Mercy.

1831

The Archbishop of Dublin along with friends of Catherine encouraged the women of the House of Mercy to establish a religious congregation. Three novices professed their vows on December 12, 1831, thus giving birth to the Sisters of Mercy. Their principal aims were to "educate poor girls, to lodge and maintain poor young women who are in danger and to visit the sick poor." Catherine was 52 years old at the time.

1831-1842

In the ten years between founding the order and her death, Catherine established nine Convents of Mercy.

After 1841

Foundations were soon established in Newfoundland, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Perth, and Auckland, where the sisters worked with both the immigrant and native people, educating and helping the needy.

1921

Bishop John Mark Gannon suggests to Mother M. Borgia Egan, the Superior of the Sisters of Mercy in Titusville, that she "raise \$150,000 and come to Erie to found a school."

1871-1926

St. Joseph private girls' academy, conducted by the Sisters of Mercy in Titusville, Pennsylvania, was one of the first Catholic private academies approved by the Department of Public Instruction in Harrisburg.

1926

Under the name of Mercyhurst Seminary, the girls' academy moved to Erie, occupying the first floor of Mercyhurst College building, located on East 38th Street in Glenwood Hills

1927

This college preparatory school for girls was accredited by the Department of Public Instruction of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

1928

The Hurst Howl, the first student newspaper, was initiated. Because the name was considered to radical by the faculty, it was soon changed to Hurst Hum.

1932

Mercyhurst Seminary received initial accreditation from the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.

1942

Enrollment became stable at 100 girls. Field hockey was a popular sport. School colors and uniforms were blue and white.

1952

Middle States recommended a separate building for the high school since facilities at Mercyhurst College were inadequate for the growing Seminary.

1961

Sisters of Mercy decided to construct a college preparatory school on East Grandview Boulevard.

1963

In the fall, Mercyhurst Preparatory School for girls on East Grandview Boulevard opened its doors to a record enrollment of 170 students.

1964

On May 3, dedication ceremonies for the new high school were held by Auxiliary Bishop Edward P. McManaman of the Erie diocese.

1971

Sisters of Mercy celebrated their 100 years in education in northwestern Pennsylvania by initiating an innovative modular system at Mercyhurst Prep.

1974

Mercyhurst Prep became coeducational.

1979

Beginning of crew at MPS.

1982

Reaccredited by the Middle Atlantic States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.

1984

MPS celebrated its tenth year of coeducation.

1985

Enrollment reaches an all-time record high of 700 students.

1986

Girls' basketball team captured Pennsylvania AAA championship crown (a first for any Erie's girls' team). School celebrated 60th anniversary.

1987

Administrative structure changed to include president and principal. Sister JoAnne Courneen named first MPS president.

1991

Both girls' and boys' basketball teams won PIAA championships.

1992

MPS initiated innovative "8 block" schedule with 90-minute class sessions. Reaccreditation was awarded with a glowing report by the Middle States Association.

1993

MPS awarded prestigious Blue Ribbon School award from the U.S. Department of Education. \$3.5 million building project and renovation project completed. Enrollment at 780.

1994

Enrollment reached 800. IBM computer lab opened. Girls' basketball team claimed Metro and District 10 AAAA championships.

1995

Production of "Nunsense" awarded a national championship. School began participation in the Academic Sports League. Girls' tennis team became D-10 champs.

1996

Georgia Johnson became president. School began with a record enrollment of 846 students. School celebrated 70 years of education in the tradition of Mercy.

1997

MPS awarded its second Blue Ribbon School award from the U.S. Department of Education. MPS implements technology plan adding 150 new computers in the school.

1998

Mercyhurst Prep reaccredited by Middle States Association. Margaret Aste named new principal.

1999

Angie Potthoff, '92 named Erie's top athlete, Bill Bengel named highest rated coach of female teams of the century in the Erie Times-News "Best of the Century" series.

2000

Our Lady of Mercy Chapel was redesigned and redecorated.

2001

Mercyhurst Seminary and Preparatory School celebrates its 75th anniversary. Today there are a total of 41 Mercy schools, 33 in the United States and seven in the Philippines, Argentina, Guam, Honduras, Jamaica, and Belize.

2002

2003

2004

Girls Basketball Team captured the PIAA AAAA State Title