

Catholic Education in The Pas

Catholic education in The Pas was organized as early as January 1912 before the northern extension of the Manitoba boundary to the 60th parallel. The Grey Nuns operated it in what was formerly the residence of Bishop Ovide Charlebois. In December, 1914, forty-six ratepayers petitioned the public school board for a Roman Catholic bilingual teacher, as allowed for in the Manitoba Public School Act. This request was granted and for over a year the arrangement continued. The next year, however, in a disagreement with the public school principal, the Catholics withdrew their children and began the Sacred Heart School.

The permanent school structure was built in 1916 as a four-room frame and stucco building. The school cost \$30,000 to build, financed by the diocese and operated by the Our Lady of the Sacred Heart parish as no government funding was received. In 1928 the school's increasing enrolment was becoming a problem with over 200 students. It was enlarged to eight classrooms in 1929. Initially the school was conducted by six Sisters of the Presentation of Mary and this order provided the teachers for decades, but gradually were mostly replaced by lay teachers in the 1960s.

In 1934-35 there were 182 pupils enrolled in Grades 1-8, and another 17 pupils enrolled in the school's commercial course. The provincial elementary curriculum as well as religion was taught. In the Commercial Course the students were taught bookkeeping, shorthand, typewriting, commercial arithmetic, commercial law, business English and spelling. It was the only Commercial Course offered in northern Manitoba and by 1935 about 60 students had completed it. From the earliest days there had been a very tolerant feeling in The Pas toward the "Separate School." Students from Sacred Heart School would transfer to the public high school to obtain their matriculation standing. On the other hand, some public school students would attend Sacred Heart School for the Commercial Course program so they could find employment locally.

Hundreds of students were educated at Sacred Heart School in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, and in its later years the school offered Kindergarten to Grade 12. In September 1966, the school began operating under the auspices of the public Kelsey School Division due to the difficulty for the parish to finance a school. A three year contract was signed between the School Division and the Archdiocese. In 1969 the Sisters decided to close their mission in The Pas and for the next three years the Kelsey School Division continued to operate the school.

Due to a significant increase in student population triggered by the building of a pulp and paper complex in The Pas in 1969, the public school system facilities were greatly enlarged and in the 1973-74 school year the 250 Sacred Heart Students were integrated into the public school system's new Mary Duncan Elementary. The Sacred Heart School building sat empty for a year and was torn down in 1974, but on its foundation was built the current diocesan office.