

History of Our Lady Star of the Sea School
15 N. California Avenue
Atlantic City, NJ 08401

Our Lady Star of the Sea Parish began in 1894, with the appointment of its first pastor, Reverend, P.J. Petri. Fourteen years later, in 1908, having arranged for the Sisters of Mercy to work in the ministry of education, Father Petri opened Our Lady Star of the Sea School, with eighty students who were primarily Irish American Catholics.

The parish school continued under the leadership of the Sisters of Mercy through World War I, the Depression, and World War II. Eventually there were two classes of each grade. In 1949 local iron workers donated their services to build the school gymnasium in record time, an event often compared to a “barn raising”. The building, named Memorial Hall, was dedicated to the memory of those who had served the country in World War II. During this same time period, an extension was built onto the original school building, adding space for a library, resource room, and business office.

By the 1970’s, because Atlantic City had gone through a major decline in population, school enrollment dropped, resulting in one class of each grade. This was also when the school community, previously comprised of a nearly all Irish Catholic population, began to include students who were ethnically diverse and non-Catholic. In 1976 the Kindergarten opened and followed the next year with the addition of two Special Education classes, sponsored by the Diocese of Camden.

During the 1980’s the development of Atlantic City as a Casino Resort was moving at full speed. This brought tremendous employment opportunities for the many immigrants arriving from Asia, Central and South America, the Pacific Islands, and the Caribbean resulting in the community of Our Lady Star of the Sea becoming multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-denominational.

During the 1990’s the influx of immigrants continued as other changes occurred. A modular building was purchased to provide space for a full-time guidance counselor, a Pre-Kindergarten class was established, and in 1997 the school became regionalized, with four parishes in Atlantic City accepting a role in the decision-making and financial support of the school.

In subsequent years OLSS School received and maintained its Middle States Accreditation and implemented and continued to increase the use of technology tools for instruction. The Special Education Program ceased to be funded by the diocese but remains a vital part of the school serving students with Individual Educational Programs.

Presently Our Lady Star of the Sea is enjoying both the changes and the constants, and the treasure of a cultural mix. Recovering from the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy and the closure of so many casinos, which provided employment to our families, presents another set of challenges. However, Our Lady Star of the Sea Regional School continues to shine brightly and to celebrate a rich tradition of providing a safe, nurturing, academically strong education for the children of Atlantic City and neighboring towns. The school’s population is approximately one third Latino, one third Vietnamese/Asian, and one third African American speaking copious native languages. 111 years later, the school celebrates its rich diversity with a dedicated principal, faculty and staff who educate all students facilitating a student-centered blended learning approach within a Catholic faith community to help them reach their God-given potential.