

## History of St. Mary-Basha Catholic School

St. Mary-Basha Catholic School opened 74 years ago in south Chandler to provide primarily Hispanic children opportunities for a solid Catholic education that was not being met by the segregated public schools. From both its previous location and its present site in central Chandler, the school has continued to serve the East Valley.

The Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill, Greensburg, Pennsylvania, have been associated with the school since its inception. In the fall of 1944, St. Mary's Grammar School was opened at the Williams Field Road site. Sister Mary Felix was the first principal.

Father Joseph Patterson, who was appointed Pastor in 1938 of St. Mary's Catholic Church, was responsible for the spiritual needs of Chandler, Gilbert, Queen Creek, and Goodyear (now called Ocotillo). For three summers, the Sisters of Charity staffed his summer religion vacation school. Father Patterson's great interest in Chandler was to help Hispanic children. Father Patterson and parishioner Joe Martinez built the first four classrooms next to the Church. There were 123 students the first year.

In 1963, the parish realized that the grade school required extensive repairs. This prompted Mr. Ed Basha, Sr. to promise to build an entirely new school on a 14-1/2 acre site which he secured on West Galveston Street. The new school opened in the fall of 1964 as Basha Elementary School. Mr. Adolph Weinberg financed the construction of a well-equipped convent on the grounds adjacent to the school.

The stories of the Sisters of Charity teaching catechism during the summer months in Chandler fired the imagination and zeal of many of the Sisters in Pennsylvania, with many eager to come. Since the school was established, the Sisters have been a vital part of the community. They have been instrumental in the spiritual development of 70 years of Catholic education. The growth of the school from the original four grades to the present two classes per grade, Kindergarten through Eighth, is a direct benefit from having the Sisters in the community.

Sister Mary Norbert Long served as Principal of St. Mary-Basha Catholic School from 1984 to 2012, and initiated many positive changes. The stability of the talented and caring teaching staff has been one of the positive results of her leadership. The teachers are certified, experienced, and dedicated to Catholic education. In 1994, St. Mary-Basha Catholic School was selected to receive the prestigious "Blue Ribbon School" Award by the U.S. Department of Education. An "Excellence in Education" Award is the nation's highest honor presented to elementary schools. A total of 38 Catholic Schools received the award in 1994, and St. Mary-Basha was the only Catholic school from Arizona.