The History of San Francisco de Asís Catholic School

A Heritage of Faith Since 1895

Founded in **1895**, San Francisco de Asís Catholic School is the oldest continuously operating private school in Flagstaff, Arizona. For more than 130 years, our Catholic school has partnered with families to educate children in the Catholic faith while pursuing academic excellence and developing servant leaders rooted in Christ.

Although our school's name, parish affiliation, and campus have evolved over the decades, our mission has remained unchanged: to form the whole child in faith, knowledge, and service.

Our School Through the Years

Years	School Name	Parish
1895-1899	**The Catholic School**	Nativity Parish
1899-1954	**St. Anthony's School**	Nativity Parish
1953-1976	**Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic School**	Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish
1954-1976	**Nativity (of the Blessed Virgin Mary) Catholic School**	Nativity Parish, Our Lady of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church
1976-2007	**St. Mary's Regional Catholic School**	Nativity Parish and Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish (1976-1997); San Francisco de Asís Parish (1997-2007)
2007-Present	**San Francisco de Asís Catholic School**	San Francisco de Asís Parish

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A Foundation of Faith (1888–1899)

Catholic education in Flagstaff has a rich and enduring history that began even before the school itself. On Christmas Eve in **1888**, Flagstaff’s first Catholic church opened on Brannen and Elden Avenues. The building was named Church of the Nativity.

In **1895**, the first Catholic school opened in a one-room cabin at the corner of Cherry and Beaver Streets. Guided by faith, Alice Metz (sister-in-law of Timothy Riordan) was the school's first teacher.

In **1896,** a “proper” one-room schoolhouse was built under the leadership of Schoolmaster Thomas Flynn. In **1897,** through the generosity of G.W. Verkamp and the leadership of local Catholic pioneers David Babbitt, M.J. Riordan, and Rev. Joseph Freri, a permanent two-room schoolhouse was constructed.

In **1899**, the Sisters of Loretto at the Foot of the Cross arrived from Kentucky to lead the school. The addition of the sisters was an answer to intercessory prayers to St. Anthony. The school was renamed **St. Anthony's School**. The academic year started with twenty-four pupils and ended with fifty-six.

The Growth of St. Anthony's School (1899-1954)

Over the next several decades, St. Anthony's School grew alongside the Church of the Nativity. In **1902,** two more classrooms were added. In **1911,** a new multistory structure was built for St. Anthony’s. This building served as the school, provided housing for the sisters, and, from 1911-1930, the school hall served as “Church of the Nativity.” The building was located on the corner of Cherry and Beaver in downtown Flagstaff. In December 1930, Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church was dedicated.

One Mission, One Catholic School (1953-1997)

In **1953**, Our Lady of Guadalupe parish opened a Catholic school to serve its parishioners. OLG Catholic School was located on W. Clay Avenue. The land for the school was donated by Joseph Dolan.

During the same time, a new school building was constructed at the corner of Humphreys Street and Dale Avenue, and in **1954,** St. Anthony’s was renamed Nativity (of the Blessed Virgin Mary) School, reflecting its close relationship with the parish church across the street.

Religious sisters faithfully served Catholic generations of Catholic students in Flagstaff. Several congregations helped serve our Flagstaff Catholic schools. This included the Sisters of Loretto (1899-1966), the Adrian Dominican Sisters (1966-1980), the Loreto Sisters of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1954-2000’s) and the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart. Today, the school is led and staffed by lay administrators, faculty, and staff who continue its mission of Catholic faith formation, academic excellence, and service.

In **1976**, Our Lady of Guadalupe School closed for economic reasons. Nativity School and Our Lady of Guadalupe School consolidated into one school on the Humphreys Street

campus and became St. Mary's Catholic Regional School. The name was chosen from a contest within the school community. This unification strengthened Catholic education in Flagstaff, ensuring a Catholic school would continue to serve the city's Catholic community.

In **1995**, St. Mary's Catholic School celebrated **one hundred years of Catholic education in Flagstaff**, honoring the vision, sacrifices, and dedication of the families, clergy, religious sisters, and educators who built the school's continuing legacy.

Two years later, in **1997**, three Flagstaff parishes-Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and St. Pius X-together with Holy Trinity Newman Center, were consolidated into a single parish now known as San Francisco de Asís Parish.

Becoming San Francisco de Asís Catholic School (1997-2013)

Reflecting the unity of the newly formed parish, St. Mary's Catholic School was renamed San Francisco de Asís Catholic School in **2007**. While the school's name changed, its mission remained steadfast: to provide an outstanding Catholic education centered on faith, academic excellence, and service to others.

A New Campus for a New Generation (2013-Present)

A new chapter began on February 2, **2013,** when San Francisco de Asís Parish dedicated its new church on McMillan Mesa. That same year, Holy Trinity Newman Center became separately incorporated as its own parish.

The new school campus adjacent to the church opened in phases during the **2016-2017 school year**, bringing students in preschool through eighth grade together on one campus designed to support academic excellence and the needs of today's students while remaining firmly rooted in Catholic tradition.

Today, the campus includes preschool and prekindergarten classrooms, kindergarten through eighth grade, a library and media center, science laboratory, dedicated art and music classrooms, a commercial kitchen, and a full-sized gymnasium. Positioned directly across from the parish church, the campus reflects the enduring partnership between parish, school, and family in forming young disciples of Christ.

Continuing Legacy

From the first one-room cabin to our vibrant campus on McMillan Mesa, generations of students have been formed in faith, academic excellence, and service. Throughout every chapter of our history, one truth has remained constant: Catholic education in Flagstaff

has endured because of the commitment of families, parishioners, clergy, and religious sisters who believed in the transformative power of a Christ-centered education.

Today, San Francisco de Asís Catholic School proudly continues that legacy as the oldest continuously operating private school in Flagstaff. We are honored to build upon the vision and sacrifices of those who came before us while preparing today's students to become faithful disciples, lifelong learners, and compassionate servant leaders.

As we look toward celebrating **150 years of Catholic education in Flagstaff in 2045**, we give thanks for our rich history, embrace the opportunities of the present, and look forward with hope to the future God has prepared for our school community.