

History of the Diocesan Special Education Department

Written in 1983 by Sr. Helen T. Santay, CDP

Edited by Kathleen M. Washy

Sister Helen T. Santay, CDP (1918-2008) was associated with the Diocesan Special Education Program from its inception until its termination. For 20 years (1961-81), Sister Helen ministered at the Quigley Center in the West End, administering psychological testing to parochial school students. To express her appreciation of the program, Sr. Helen wrote this history in 1983.



Sister Helen T. Santay

BEGINNINGS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

With the sanction of Bishop John F. Dearden, the Diocese of Pittsburgh's Catholic Schools Office established the Department of Special Education in 1953. The need for a specific school program for slow learners and mentally retarded children had long been recognized. Monsignor Thomas J. Quigley, Superintendent of Diocesan Schools, initiated the program, appointing Fr. John B. McDowell, Assistant Superintendent of Diocesan Schools, as head of this new department. In May 1953, a testing center opened at Divine Providence Academy in East Liberty, with Sister Mary Bertran Oeler, CDP, a certified school psychologist, screening applicants there.

Concurrently, twenty teachers representing eight religious communities of women in the diocese were attending classes at St. Coletta's School for Exceptional Children in Jefferson, Wisconsin; this was in direct response to the Bishop's plea to have properly trained teachers. Subsequent summers found these same teachers, along with others, in pursuit of state certification/master's degree in special education. Since the classes at St. Coletta School were extension courses of Cardinal Stritch College in Milwaukee, some of the teachers went on to Cardinal Stritch College, while others attended St. Louis University, Catholic University, Duquesne University, and Mount Mercy [Carlow] College.

SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSES

While children were being screened and teachers were being trained, the Pittsburgh Diocese sought suitable facilities for the classes. Pastors throughout the diocese were asked if such space was available in their respective parish schools. Fortunately, the response was gratifying and by September 1953, six special day classes scattered throughout the diocese along with St. Anthony School for Exceptional Children were available.

Oakmont's St. Anthony School, originally staffed by the Missionary Zelatrices of the Sacred Heart, was a weekday residential school for those children who were unable to commute. Generally, the children enrolled at St. Anthony functioned lower than the students enrolled in the special day classes. At St. Anthony School, most of the students had been diagnosed as mainly trainable although some were educable. Once enrolled, a student would continue in the program from age five to twenty-one, with residency discontinuing at age eighteen. The program provided training in self-help skills, social development, some academic learning, spiritual enrichment, and vocational training for the older students; however, the program did not provide for mainstreaming. St. Anthony School accepted any child living within the diocesan limits, regardless of creed, color, or race. Until 1974, the admission process for applicants was initiated through the Diocesan Child Center; after 1974, a social worker was added to the staff at St. Anthony's to complete the admission process.

While St. Anthony was a school dedicated to special education, the other programs were located in regular diocesan schools. In September 1953, six special day classes began their programs: Epiphany (Pittsburgh), Sacred Heart (East End), St. Ann (Homestead), St. Paul Orphanage (Crafton), St. Peter (South Side), and St. Richard (Pittsburgh). In these classes, core subjects were taught in addition to religion, music, social studies, and arts and crafts. Also, the program provided development of perceptual skills and muscular coordination. Each student had an individualized schedule to meet specific needs, with mainstreaming available for any subject that an individual student could cope with on the appropriate peer level. When students were mainstreamed, they were not obligated to take any written test in the class because of their low functioning level.

The Diocesan Special Education Program continued to grow, with classes opening at St. Anne (Castle Shannon) in 1954, Annunciation (Pittsburgh's North Side) in 1955, St. Paul (Butler) in 1956, and St. Mary (McKeesport) in 1957. At St. Richard (Pittsburgh), the school staff discovered that most of the students enrolled throughout the school were slow; in 1956, the special class was discontinued and instead, the special education teacher was to help throughout the school instead of in a specific classroom. There were also changes at Annunciation. In 1959, the elementary school building did not meet

SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSES (continued)

the required standards for a school facility; the high school program was discontinued and the elementary school relocated to the secondary school's building. The building did not provide adequate space to include the special class, thus resulting in the termination of the class. Another special class closure was at St. Paul Orphanage; when the orphanage closed in 1965, the special class ended.

While changes were being made at Annunciation, a transition was in process at St. Anne in Castle Shannon in 1959. Upon reviewing the facts of a crowded St. Bernard School, Monsignor Thomas J. Quigley, St. Bernard's newly appointed pastor, became aware that many of the students were from other parishes and determined that these students would not continue to attend St. Bernard. Many of these students were from St. Anne and with this shift, St. Anne anticipated that more than thirty would apply for admission. To provide the needed classroom space, the special class was moved out to St. Basil in Carrick. This change of location presented a transportation problem for some of the parents as it was not until 1973 that free cab service would be provided through the local public school district. Since several of the special class children were from the Mt. Lebanon area, Monsignor Quigley was determined to open a special class in his school. No room was available in the school building itself; however, the Knights of Columbus graciously offered space in their Dormont building. A new class was formed and operated there for three years, until space became available for the special class in the St. Bernard School building. St. Bernard's special class proved to be the last to open in the Diocese. By the early 1960s, providing space for the special class at St. Basil was becoming a problem. Fortunately, St. Anne School was again able to accommodate the special class and so the special class returned there in 1963.

CHANGES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

In 1963, Congress passed Public Law 88-164, resulting in the establishment of the Division of Handicapped Children and Youth. The Division brought together under one unit all of the previous acts and units that were set up to serve handicapped children. In 1966, Public Law 89-750 Title VI was passed, helping to meet the needs of the handicapped and to provide funds for approved programs at the local school district level. In 1970, the Allegheny County Schools, later called Allegheny Intermediate Unit, established an Exceptional Children's Program and opened five special centers with two more under construction. These centers provided services in all categories of exceptionality in accord with the Public Law. In 1975, President Ford signed into law the "Education of all Handicapped Children Act" (P.L. 94-142), mandating a free appropriate education for all children with disabilities. Classes established through the Allegheny Intermediate Unit were located throughout the County. As these classes were mandated to provide for all children in need of special help, the Diocesan Special Education Program faced a diminishing number of applicants.

The new school term of 1970 was now under the leadership of Mr. John T. Cicco, the first lay Superintendent of Diocesan Schools in the United States. Mr. Cicco was sincerely interested in the Diocesan Special Education Program. Aware of declining enrollment, he also realized that the nongraded program being initiated in the diocesan elementary schools could add further to the drop in students. By 1971, the nongraded program was implemented in all the diocesan schools and was now called a Continuous Progress Program. Since this program was designed to meet the needs of each student, the child identified as a slow learner was given more individual help in the classroom. Hence, as expected, fewer students were being referred to the Child Center for placement in a special class. Eventually, only those students diagnosed as functioning within the range of mental retardation were being admitted into special education classes.

The diocesan manual of directives for the special classes stated: "When the enrollment of a special class decreases to fewer than ten students, with no one on the waiting list, serious consideration is to be given to termination of the class." Facing declining enrollment, the following classes terminated within a four year period: St. Anne (Castle Shannon) and St. Ann (Homestead) in 1972, Epiphany in 1973, and St. Bernard in 1974.

During the 1970s, the South Side consolidation caused the special class to relocate three times. The class was moved from St. Peter to St. Matthew in September 1970 and then moved to St. Josaphat in January 1971. With the termination of St. Bernard Special Class in June 1974, several of the remaining students transferred to St. Josaphat, resulting in the opening of an additional special class there. In September 1975, the two classes were again relocated, this time to St. Adalbert.

Diocesan Special Education Classes Number of Students Enrolled From 1953-1983

Annunciation (1955-1959)	66
Butler Catholic (1956-1980)	339
Epiphany (1953-1973)	318
St. Mary (McKeesport) (1953-1983)	396
St. Ann (Homestead) (1953-1972)	311
St. Anne (Castle Shannon) (1954-1971)	323
St. Bernard (1959-1974)	260
St. Paul Orphanage (1953-1965)	188
St. Raphael/Sacred Heart (1953-1980)	465
St. Richard (1953-1956)	59
South Side Catholic (1953-1983)	624
Total Students Enrolled	3,340

History of the Diocesan Special Education Department

CHANGES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION (continued)

There were also changes to the special class at Sacred Heart. With space being an issue, the special class moved to St. Raphael in 1974. The new location of the special class was in an area where more special needs children had easier access to it. Space was available for an additional special class and within a year, two classes were in operation, with students grouped according to age. However, after three years of operation, declining enrollment forced the two classes to merge into one. Gradually, the enrollment fell below ten with no prospective students and the class was terminated in June 1980. During this same school term, the special class at St. Paul in Butler faced the same end – with only seven students and no new prospects, the class was officially closed in June 1980.

With only three special classes continuing in the fall 1980, Superintendent Cicco had become quite concerned about the future. Every possible opportunity was used to make the diocese aware of the existence of the special classes: letters to pastors, talks given to parish parent groups, and open invitations for visitors. The sudden death of Mr. John Cicco on April 18, 1981, was deeply felt by the diocesan schools and, in a unique way, by the Special Education Department. On May 4, 1981, Bishop Vincent M. Leonard promoted Fr. Hugh J. Lang, M.Ed., from Assistant Superintendent to Superintendent. Father Lang revealed a genuine interest in the continuance of the special education program.

The number of special classes remained at three when the new school year opened in September 1981. Two classes were still operating at St. Adalbert and one class was still open at St. Mary (McKeesport). By June 1982, St. Adalbert's two classes merged into one and by June 1983, the inevitable happened with the closing of the two remaining classes. Thus, the Diocesan Special Class Program came to a formal close. The program had served a real need at a time when no other program existed to do so.

DIOCESAN CHILD CENTER

The Diocesan Child Center, meanwhile, experienced a similar pattern of growth and decline as did the program for the Diocesan Special Education Classes. Starting out in 1953 as an evaluative center for screening and placing applicants in the special classes and at St. Anthony School, its services gradually became more comprehensive, evaluating children for varied reasons. The most common of these included: poor scholastic achievement; difficulty with school adjustment; deviant behavior at home and in school; emotional problems; sensory defects, particularly, those involving vision and hearing; speech problems; and, evaluation for proper school placement – for both the very slow child and for the child manifesting gifted abilities.

To be able to provide these services, the Diocesan Schools Office opened a new Child Center in the lower floor of Epiphany School in May 1956. The staff included two psychologists, a speech therapist, a guidance counselor, a part-time pediatrician, and an advisory council of some twenty outstanding local physicians representing a wide range of medical specialists. This medical advisory board was used extensively by the Child Center Staff for consultation. Sister Mary Bertan, C.D.P. was appointed as director of the Child Center but still functioned in her position as one of the two psychologists.

Children between the ages of two and eighteen were referred to the school. Referrals were irrespective of color, race, or creed and were made not only through the schools but also by physicians, hospitals, social workers, pastors, and other agencies. Frequently, a request for a child's evaluation was made directly by the parents. The parents' written consent was always a prerequisite to have a child evaluated. The evaluation included the following:

1. A psychological test to determine the child's mental ability and behavioral characteristics
2. If the child was of school age, a battery of achievement tests to measure his/her classroom success
3. A social maturity test to arrive at an estimate of his/her development in self-help skills, general independence, and responsibility

While the child was being evaluated and observed, the parents completed forms concerning the child's past history of development. This information was needed for the parental interview, which followed the child's evaluation. During the interview, more information was gathered as to the family history, along with the child's peer relationship and past schooling. In light of this information, the results of the evaluation and observations made were then discussed and appropriate recommendations were decided.

In cases where a medical problem was suspected, such as inadequate vision or impaired hearing, a referral was made to the appropriate specialist. When ongoing counseling was indicated, the parents were advised of other agencies that could provide

DIOCESAN CHILD CENTER (continued)

this. In the instances where psychiatric help was indicated, specific recommendations were given. School problems often revealed a need for a special program which required a change of schools, special tutoring, or special kinds of classroom help.

When a child was evaluated at the Child Center, a minimal fee was charged for each three-hour session. The number of sessions depended on the age of the child and the nature of the problem. Since these fees barely covered the cost of testing materials, the Child Center depended on monetary gifts from friends and benefactors for its continuance; the Catholic Laymen's Educational Association was one such loyal sponsor. No grants, subsidies, state or federal funds were ever made available.

After several years of operation in the lower level of Epiphany School, more space was needed for the Child Center to function adequately. Monsignor John B. McDowell, who was now the Superintendent of the Diocesan Schools, purchased the former St. Martin's Rectory with donated money. Following a complete renovation of the building, the Diocesan School Board named the new facility the Monsignor Quigley Memorial Center, in memory of Monsignor Quigley who died unexpectedly on December 26, 1960.

In September 1962, the Child Center moved to the first floor of the Quigley Memorial Center, sharing the facility with two other Diocesan departments. One month later, Sister Jeanette Casey, C.D.P. became the new director. On January 12, 1963, His Excellency, the Most Reverend John J. Wright, S.T.D., Bishop of Pittsburgh, formally dedicated the Monsignor Quigley Memorial Center.

The Diocesan Child Center was always an integral part of the Pittsburgh Diocese's Special Education Department with regard to the administration, guidance, and supervision of the Special Classes in the schools. Every child in the program, including those attending St. Anthony, was reevaluated at least every three years to assess progress. The Special Classes were guided by the Manual of Directives that was prepared by the Special Education Department. St. Anthony School has always had its own director and school principal, who together decided their own regulations and procedures.

During the early 1960s, the waiting list for a child's initial evaluation ranged from eight to twelve months. However, as already indicated, the Allegheny Intermediate Unit's Program for Exceptional Children greatly influenced the number of children now being referred. By 1970, the waiting list dwindled to three months and staff was gradually reduced. Some of the services were no longer being requested; the services that eventually became discontinued were physical examinations, speech therapy, ongoing counseling, and private tutoring during the summer months. Most parents now preferred to have their child seen by their own family pediatrician while others took their children to health clinics. Speech therapy was now available to the diocesan schools, provided by law through the public schools. Counseling was more readily available to parents through local agencies, as well as through the schools. Summer private tutoring was the one service that remained past 1970, continuing until August 1979. Parents were finding it more convenient to provide tutoring on their own.

In June 1980, Sister Jeanette Casey, C.D.P., resigned as director of the Child Center and the already small staff was reduced to two. Sister Helen Santay, C.D.P. was appointed the director in addition to her position as the Center's psychologist; the other staff member was the secretary. During the next three years, the "writing on the wall" became quite clear and the message was not alarming since the circumstances leading to its formulation were foreseen. Now that the diocesan schools were taking full advantage of the free services provided to them by public law through the public schools, the two remaining Special Classes ended in June 1983 and the Diocesan Child Center closed its doors at the same time.

In retrospect, the history of the Special Education Department of the Diocese of Pittsburgh proudly speaks for itself. During the thirty year period of its existence, some 20,000 children and young adults benefitted from its services. More than 3,000 children were enrolled in the Special Classes.

In conclusion, it is only fitting to say that all those who had been involved in the program - at the Child Center or in the Special Classes - felt privileged and blessed to have been a part of it.

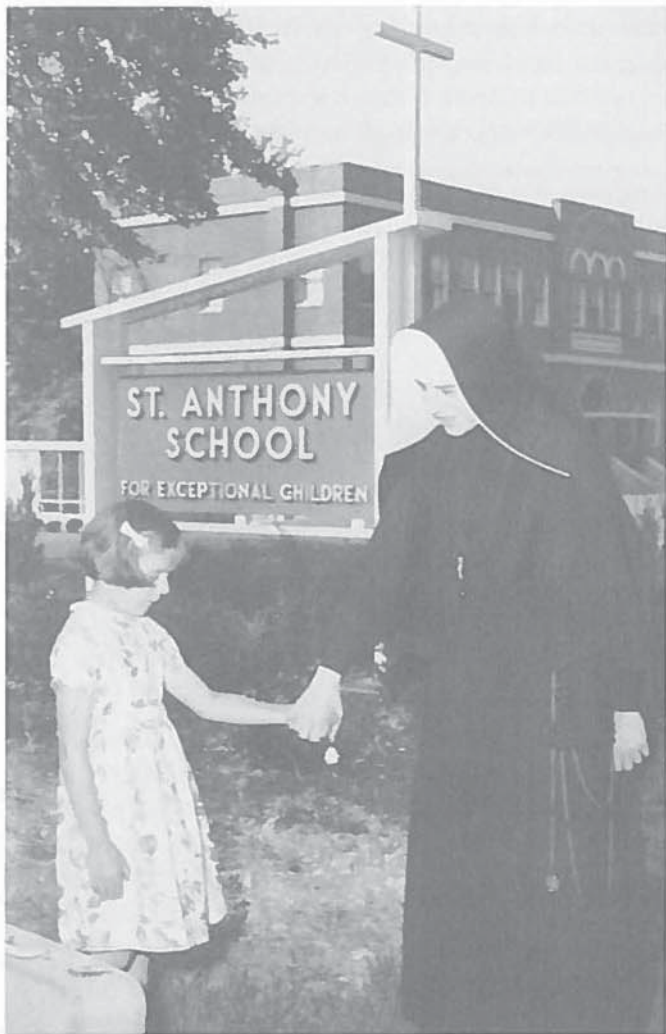
References

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2. Diocesan Child Center File: for opening & closing dates of Diocesan Special Classes
3. Diocese of Pittsburgh Manual of Directives for the Special Classes, 1977 edition
4. Nongraded Schools - Diocese of Pittsburgh, by Sr. Irene Mannella, OSF
5. Pittsburgh Catholic (4/24/1981 & 5/8/1981 editions)
6. St. Bernard Church Bulletin, January 1, 1961
7. Special Education in Transition by the American Association of School Administrators

Diocesan Child Center Numerical Estimate of Services 1953-1983

Psychological Evaluation:	*16,200
Speech Therapy:	2,025
Counseling:	1,575
Private Tutoring:	590
Total Service	20,390

History of the Diocesan Special Education Department



Monsignor Quigley, Sr. Angelica, Sr. Celine, Sr. Candida, 1956
 Courtesy of Archives and Records Center, Diocese of Pittsburgh

NAMES OF TEACHERS WHO TAUGHT THE SPECIAL CLASSES

Feliclan Sisters:	Sr. Mary William Dugan, Sr. Mary Justice Przybocki
Sisters of Charity:	Sr. Rose Francis, Sr. Julia Ann Hertozog, Sr. Marie Sullivan
Sisters of Divine Providence:	Sr. Amata Lally, Sr. Therese Ruggire, Sr. Helen Santay, Sr. Michele Sieber
Sisters of St. Francis (Mt. Alvernia):	Sr. Laurita, Sr. Thomasita, Sr. Nora Connelly, Sr. Conchetta LoPresit, Sr. Irene Mannella
Sisters of St. Joseph:	Sr. Concetta, Sr. Jeannette, Sr. Jean Michael, Sr. Devota Dietz
Sisters of Mercy (Pittsburgh):	Sr. Georgiana, Sr. Madeleine
Sisters of Mercy (Dallas, Pa):	Sr. Edward Marie, Sr. Marie Jose, Sr. Mercedes Marie, Sr. Ruth Ann, Sr. Thomasina, Sr. Helen Marie Dumm
Vincentian Sisters of Charity:	Sr. Donata; Sr. Theophane
Lay Teachers:	1. Miss Christine K. Kennedy 2. Mrs. Rose Palaschak