

History of St. Joseph School

One hundred forty-one years ago, on April 1, 1869, a small parish school of forty-two students was established in Hilo by Rev. Charles Pouzot, SS.CC., under the direction of Fr. Patrick O'Reilly, for the purpose of teaching English to the native Hawaiians. The school was named St. Joseph. Over the years, the school's enrollment increased to the point that it was necessary to build a new school on Waianuenu Avenue. This school for both boys and girls was dedicated on October 10, 1875. Ten years later, three Marianist Brothers arrived in Hilo and took over the operation of the boys' school. It was blessed on October 25, 1885. The school was called St. Mary's School. In the meantime, the Sisters of St. Francis (Syracuse, NY) arrived in 1900 to staff St. Joseph School for Girls on Kapiolani Street.

In 1948 St. Mary's and St Joseph's were consolidated into a co-educational institution which was built on the present site at the intersection of Ululani and Hualalai streets. Some nine hundred and sixty-three students were enrolled for the first year. In 1951 the Marianist Brothers were reassigned to teaching posts elsewhere. They were replaced in Hilo with a larger staff of Sisters as well as dedicated lay teachers. The opening of the new school in 1951-52 was a memorable event for it marked the beginning of St. Joseph as a complete coeducational school directly under the Pastor of St. Joseph Parish. The Franciscan Sisters withdrew from St. Joseph School in June 2009 after a 109-year history. Joining the faculty are the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians.

St. Joseph School has since expanded its program to include a Montessori-based preschool, thus providing 350-375 students a Catholic education from preschool (ages 3-5) through grade twelve. The student body is diverse in race, national origin and creed.

Panoramic aerial view of St. Joseph campus from 1952 yearbook