

THE FOURTH DECADE: 1994–2004

[Many thanks to Bernadette Perry for compiling material for the years 1994–2001 from original sources, minutes of meetings, alumni magazines and newsletters. Jack Lyons conducted subsequent research and editing].

In March 1995, the official inauguration of the Middle School wing and the art studios/gallery by Mayor and Mrs. Kubla occurred. In attendance were ambassadors from Estonia, Ethiopia, the UK and the USA. A reception followed. A student choir sang from the Middle School stairway, and the Chamber Quintet played during the viewing of the art gallery. To mark the opening of the Middle School in a tangible way, a PTA-sponsored time capsule, created by the previous year's Grade 6 students and not to be opened until 2044, was installed in the foyer of the building. It contained artefacts including newspapers, students' writings, photographs and other memorabilia, such as music tapes to provide evidence of the tastes of the average 1994 Grade 6 student.

A beautiful sculpture designed by Marcel Coenen depicting the first faithful companions of Jesus, namely the women and St. John at the foot of the cross, was placed in the Middle School foyer. In the September 1995 newsletter Sr. Barbara Hughes FCJ noted: "For a long time, I had thought that there was really nothing around the school that testified to the valiant band of women who had the vision, and the readiness to risk the unknown, when they founded St. John's 31 years ago—and to those who have given dedicated service as teachers and administrators since then."

On 20 September 1996, St. John's hosted a reunion of some graduates and associates (and some family members) of the Class of 1976, the third class to graduate. Sr. Maeve Shannon, (Sr. Mary John) FCJ, Superintendent when they were seniors, was among those present to celebrate their 20th anniversary. On 28 February 1998, the St. John's Choir, Jazz Band and Chamber Orchestra presented a concert in the new Waterloo Town Hall to benefit the mission of the FCJ sisters in Romania. The amount raised was BF402,000, of which BF32,215 came from the Grade 9 students' "hunger lunch."

Certain important changes were made to the legal status of the school in 1997. From 1964 to 1997, the legal responsibility of St. John's International School lay with "Les Religieuses Fideles Compagnes de Jesus," a nonprofit organization (a.s.b.l.). On 12 May 1997, the a.s.b.l. "St. John's International School F.C.J." was formed, which assumed the legal responsibility for education and the management of the school. A legally responsible Administrative Board, called Conseil d'Administration was formed. The properties of the school remained in the ownership of the a.s.b.l. "Les Religieuses Fideles Compagnes de Jesus." In October 1976, an Advisory Board had replaced the previously existing Advisory Committee on Finance and Development. Neither had any legal authority or responsibility, which rested in the a.s.b.l. "Les Religieuses Fideles Compagnes de Jesus," and its delegated representative, the Superintendent of the school. Now with St. John's International School having become a legal entity, an Advisory Board to the Conseil d'Administration replaced the former Advisory Board.

During school year 1997–98, the administration conducted a search for new High School and Middle School Principals. Due to the imminent departure of Mr. Dennis McCann, the High School Principal, who had been responsible for both Middle and High Schools since the departure of Mr. John Lepetit four years earlier, it was decided to revert to separate Principals for the two secondary sections. In June 1998, Sr. Barbara announced the appointment of

a.s.b.l. St. John's International School F.C.J. 300WEB-1415



ST. JOHN'S
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Drève Richelle 146, 1410 Waterloo, Belgium
Tel. 02/352 06 10
www.stjohns.be

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Dr. Joseph Doenges from Texas to the post of High School Principal. The new Middle School Principal was chosen from among the ranks of St. John's faculty. Ms. Mandy MacLeod was appointed. She was, at that time, acting Elementary Principal in Sr. Beatrice Molyneux's absence (on sabbatical in the US). Prior to that, Mandy had been Coordinator of the Support Services Department.

St. John's was officially authorized as an IB Primary Years Programme (PYP) school in December 1998. This meant that St. John's was now the only school in Belgium offering all three IB programs covering Pre-K to Grade 12. The decision was made to phase out the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE). Demand for this qualification had waned as recognition of the quality of the IB diploma by authorities in the UK had grown, and entry into UK universities was now trouble-free. At the end of that academic year, following the June 1999 IB examinations, 26 full IB diplomas were awarded out of 30 candidates, with certain students achieving high results. Despite this formal commitment to the IB, St. John's curriculum offered sufficient flexibility via other options. For many students, a St. John's diploma would meet their needs; for others, individual certificates in specific areas of the IB curriculum where they had an interest or strength could be the answer. Preparation for the Advanced Placement exams strengthened the High School curriculum, as well.

In the November 1999 newsletter, Sr. Beatrice noted, "The millennium is almost upon us. So what is new in the Elementary School? We live in exciting times! Timbertops, our new campus for Pre-primary, is fully operational. We finally moved into the Kindergarten building on 8 November, much to the delight of students and teachers." One year previously, in September 1998, the long-awaited new Pre-kindergarten had opened with 70 students. Now both stage 1 and 2 of the Pre-primary construction were completed. The facilities included a small multi-purpose hall for gym, assemblies and concerts. There was a covered playground area, a small library and an art room. As a result of a two-year fundraising campaign, the St. John's Family Tree was erected on a wall of the new facility. Engraved leaves and foundation stones reflected names and messages from the many families and corporations who supported this campaign, thus creating a fitting memento for future generations.

Just before Christmas 1999, the Commune of Waterloo ran an art competition entitled "Your Dream for 2000." St. John's and other local schools participated; the drawings were exhibited in the Maison Communale during the Christmas break. Two St. John's Grade 5 students were among the 10 winners who received prizes for the best drawings. The art studios marked the millennium with the first art show of the new century. The vernissage took place on 21 January 2000, and featured St. John's alumni—graduates and former students working from Brussels, the US, the UK and Moscow.

Sr. Barbara, having announced her retirement at the end of the academic year, wrote in the December 1999 newsletter, "I am very happy to inform you that, at their November meeting, the General Assembly of the nonprofit organization St. John's International School FCJ were unanimous and enthusiastic in their decision to offer the direction of the school to Dr. Joseph Doenges. I am even more delighted to tell you that he has accepted the position." For the first time in 36 years, the Superintendent/Director of St. John's was not to be a member of the FCJ.

A search began for a replacement for Dr. Doenges, and before the end of the year, Dr. Nick Miller, originally from England, but coming to St. John's after many years experience as a Deputy Head in Hong Kong, was named as the new High School Principal.

A school-wide concert in April 2000 marked the new millennium and honored Sr. Barbara for 20 years of devoted service, strong leadership good humor and gentle prayers. There was enormous enthusiasm from both teachers and students; the music team, Mr. Morr and Ms. Swanson, were ably supported by their colleagues in the production and staging of this very special event. At Sr. Barbara's farewell on 15 June 2000, there were speeches from Dr. Doenges, Mayor Serge Kubla, Mr. Mike Maybury the ECIS Executive Secretary, Br. Tom

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Gerrow FSC and Mlle. Nadine Tyteca. She was also presented with medals, plaques and the gift of a trip to the Holy Land.

Two more memorable events took place around this time. The Senior Math Team competed against 43 other teams from 23 European and Middle Eastern schools in the International Schools' Math Competition and won first place. A little later, the girls' tennis team placed first in the ISSTs. Worthy of mention is the fact that Family Day 2000 brought in about BF900,000 for the Scholarship fund.

The June 2000 graduating class of 59 contained 34 candidates for the full IB diploma. Grades for the class of 2000 averaged 5.35 on the 7 point scale. The worldwide average was 5.00.

The total number of graduates from St. John's during its 35-year history was now 1,013. The first class to graduate seniors, 1974, had 11 students. The largest class to date was 1998 with 63 members.

The September 2000 enrollment figures were 924 students. As the first trimester of the school year 2000–01 got under way, Dr. Rick Spradling of the American International School in Vienna and Dr. Kenneth Castle representing the Middle States Association (MSA) made a preparatory visit to explain the upcoming accreditation process to all constituents of the St. John's community and to identify at an early stage any problem areas to examine. The accreditation was planned as a joint visit of two agencies: MSA and the European Council of International Schools (ECIS). In light of the approaching accreditation, it was decided that the 1992 Strategic Plan had run its course, and a self-study document of the upcoming accreditation process would serve as a foundation for the development of a new Strategic Plan. In September 2000, the Booster Club held its first Golf Tournament, raising BF850,000 for the athletic program.

At the end of his first year as Director, Dr. Doenges noted, "St. John's International School experienced a banner year during 2000–01. With the pending expansion of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the need for international school services was greater than ever. The 994 students on roll represented 55 different nationalities from throughout the world. The graduating class of 2001 numbered 59, including 39 who earned the full IB diploma. On the competitive scene, the Senior Math Team earned second place honors out of 37 schools that were represented in Geneva. Meanwhile, the Junior Math Team, for those under the age of 16, placed second out of 40 teams represented in Milan. The varsity girls' track and field team ran off with the gold medals at the ISSTs in Brussels. The first Gold Medal winners for the International Award, also known as the Duke of Edinburgh Award, were honored by Prince Edward, the Count of Wessex, who also recognized long time St. John's teacher, Ms. Nina Timar, for meritorious service to the International Award."

In terms of leadership, it was a smooth transition from religious to lay leadership, which, in part, can be attributed to the FCJ philosophy and influence, which remained visible. Six FCJ nuns served on the a.s.b.l. During the summer of 2001, Dr. Doenges, accompanied by Sr. Beatrice Molyneux, FCJ Elementary Principal, attended a week-long conference at Stella Maris on Globalization and the Call to Justice. One of the results of this experience was the development and addition of a justice statement to the school's mission and philosophy.

During the summer of 2001, the High School wing (B and C levels) was renovated. New offices were created, while others were relocated; improved heating and lighting, and a more modern look also resulted. The Primary School playground was improved with the addition of a climbing pagoda.

In August 2001, the school began a year-long self-study as part of the accreditation process. Ms. Mandy MacLeod chaired this effort. This involved the entire staff, as well as some parents and students, who were appointed to committees to prepare reports on all aspects of the school's operation. The Board Policy Manual was also revised and approved by September 2002.

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Two weeks after the end of the summer vacation 2001 came the tragedy ("9/11") that stunned the world. Dr. Doenges wrote in the September newsletter, "The last few weeks have been difficult for all of us. Events in the United States have clearly demonstrated how interconnected our world is and how we can all suffer when something tragic happens thousands of miles away. As an international community, St. John's experiences this sense of global involvement more than most educational institutions. In the aftermath of the New York and Washington, DC terrorist attacks, the show of support and expressions of sympathy were impressive and touching. At the same time, the Belgian authorities have been fantastic in supporting our school and in working to ensure its security." For the rest of the school year, security became the number one priority. It was a rather dramatic development to see the buildings being patrolled by armed guards provided from the Belgian federal police and awoke memories among those who were faculty members at the time of the '91 Gulf War.

In September 2001, the Booster Club sponsored its second Golf Tournament, generating over BF700.000. This was followed a month later with a well-attended Oktoberfest. In March 2002, a gala cocktail reception occurred at Chateau de la Hulpe to benefit the Scholarship Fund. It was a success, with over 400 people attending, and €10,500 being raised.

Throughout this globally troubled year, the school continued to play a vital role in the international community. Faithful to its mission, it continued to attract more and more families who were looking for an English language education anchored in Christian values. During school year 2001–02, enrollment rose, reaching 995 by December and eventually topping out at 1,012—the first time in history it exceeded 1,000. The Class of 2002 numbered 74 seniors, the largest graduating class ever. Of these, 34 earned the full IB diploma, the largest number ever. Five students scored 40 or more points out of the maximum of 45. Enrollment figures in other sections of the school also reflected an increase: Pre-K rose to 83; Grade 2 had 85, while Grade 4 hit 90.

As part of campus improvement, the school continued to acquire contiguous properties (houses) as they came on the market. These properties allowed the school to plan for a pedestrian-friendly campus, adequate playing fields, proper playgrounds, walking paths and green space. The houses also served as temporary classrooms during renovation and construction and provided additional storage capacity. The building program remained on hold throughout 2001–02 due to delays in obtaining a construction permit from the Belgian authorities.

Finally, the Commune of Waterloo approved Phase I of the building program on 25 June 2002; groundbreaking ceremonies occurred the next day. Throughout the summer and school year 2002–03, construction and renovation by the firm Takenaka dominated the campus. This phase included the gutting of the 'old' gym—the one with the stage—and the creation of a new cafeteria on the ground level. The height of the gym allowed for construction of a second level for a new High School science wing of two biology labs, two chemistry labs, a physics lab, a computer lab, a prep and storage room and a faculty room. A new chapel was created on the site of the old stage. A new, larger gym (the sports arena) with an entrance foyer, fitness center, new offices, locker rooms, storage areas and lavatories were added. The soccer field was re-aligned to run east-west, and the baseball field expanded, with home plate relocated to the former left field corner. The back entrance/roadway to the courtyard was shifted eastward to allow for this. More parking was provided. By the end of the summer of 2003, D level of the High School—the previous location of the science labs—had also been renovated to provide new classrooms and a science and technology lab and computer lab.

The school Web site, which had been introduced in the spring of 1998, continued to improve as more and more of the St. John's parent and alumni communities travelled the Internet and used email. Eventually, it became the initial point of contact for almost half of the families who were coming to Brussels and chose St. John's. Its marketing, fundraising and information-sharing potential were just beginning to be realized. In September 1999,

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an additional person had been added to the IT Department, in order to accommodate the increasing workload associated with technology—staff training, maintenance of hardware, installation of software and database design.

In the midst of Phase I construction, in October 2002, the joint MSA/ECIS accreditation team arrived on campus for a week of classroom visits, discussions and interviews. The members had received the Self-Study Report and were now using it, in conjunction with their own observations, to determine whether St. John's should be accredited for another 10 years. Later in the year, St. John's received official notification of accreditation, news the staff welcomed enthusiastically.

A PLUS 40 Campaign was launched to raise money for the building program. Brochures were mailed to families, alumni and distributed to staff. In November 2002, a "High Tech, High Tea" reception and information session included a "hard hat" tour of the construction site and a virtual reality presentation of the facilities. Ongoing meetings were held on Phase II, the performing arts center, with the architects, school leadership and commune officials in an effort to secure approval for its construction. In June 2003, a revised building permit application was submitted, and public notices were posted, as required, around the campus during the summer, to allow for public comment.

As war raged, first in Afghanistan, and later in Iraq, security issues were paramount. Campus adjustments included an electronic door locking system, surveillance cameras, traffic barriers, parking restrictions and gated front entries. Staff began wearing photo IDs. Owing to the terrorist threat, the Washington Exchange Program did not occur for two years; after consultation with the President of the school, it was decided to end the program, but maintain a relationship with the school. NATO and the EU expanded, bringing more international families into Brussels. Nonetheless, enrollment had dropped from over 1,000 the previous year to just over 900 at the start of this year. By May of 2003, it recovered to 950. Owing to construction, there was no Family Day in May 2003.

From 2002–05, the workload for Middle and High School teachers was progressively increased—in minutes—to bring it in line with that of other schools. Salaries were also increased accordingly. Curriculum issues had also been under review. By the spring of 2003, Middle School was re-authorized to follow the Middle Years Program, a curricula authored by the IB Office. However, for a variety of reasons, it was decided to withdraw from the program, while following its concepts and philosophy for Grades 6–8, and adopting an IB preparation curricula for Grades 9–10. Elementary School continued to follow the Primary Years Programme, and the High School the IB Diploma program.

Ms. Johanna Bambridge, an Elementary School teacher at St. John's for five years, served as acting principal in place of Sr. Beatrice for two months in the spring 2003, while the latter had surgery and convalesced. Johanna subsequently accepted a position in Tokyo as Elementary School Principal of Seisen International School and departed in the summer. Ms. Liz Heather, who taught at St. John's for nine years, was appointed Assistant Principal in the Elementary School for the next school year. This was the first time the Elementary School had an Assistant Principal. In the High School, the Class of 2003 numbered 67 graduates.

The Class of 1993 held a well-attended 10th anniversary reunion in London in June 2003. Classmates came in from around the world; several staff also participated. In August 2003, the Class of 1983 held its 20th anniversary reunion on the school campus, as well as in Brussels. They and their families were hosted at a breakfast, given a campus tour and reunited with former staff.

In the fall of 2003, the school opened with a dramatically improved campus. A ribbon-cutting grand opening ceremony occurred on 5 September, with HRH the Princess Margaretha of Liechtenstein doing the honors; her three children had attended St. John's. Over 700 guests attended the evening reception and toured the new facilities: the cafeteria, sports arena, science labs, chapel, foyer and fitness center.

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At the ceremony, the acting mayor of Waterloo announced that Phase II, the Performing Arts Center (PAC), had been approved. With that go-ahead, preliminary clearance work began, with formal groundbreaking taking place in December 2003. Four houses—contiguous properties the school had purchased—were razed to make room for the new facility. Work also began on the underground car park (50 vehicles) beneath the PAC. The entire facility was connected to the Middle School/High School foyer via an elevated pedestrian bridge. The focal point is the 401-seat theater with stage and foyer; other features are music classrooms, dance studio, video lab, music lab, drama classrooms, make-up room, scene workshop and storage, costume shop and offices. A re-routing of buses, a new unloading/loading area and extended green space was included in the plan. Consequently, throughout school year 2003–04, the campus again was the scene of major construction, albeit less intrusive than the previous year. Family Day was able to take place in the courtyard, gyms and on the playing fields in May 2004.

The new sports arena was put to good use in March 2004 when the school hosted the varsity basketball International Schools' Sports Tournaments (ISSTs) for boys and girls. For the 2nd year in a row, St. John's boys won top honors, completing a record that started the previous season of 36 victories and no defeats. Over 1,000 people crammed into the arena for the final, exciting games.

In February 2004, following a lengthy review, bus service for students was revised. Some routes were eliminated, others modified and additional policies enacted to make the entire operation safer, more efficient, timely and self-supporting.

Preparations were also underway for celebrating the school's 40th anniversary the next school year. A special mass and a gala dinner dance were the two major events being planned. Enrollment fluctuated but reached 930 by the spring of 2004. The Class of 2004 consisted of 66 graduates from 36 countries, 3 represented for the first time—Mongolia, Sudan and Serbia/Montenegro. Schoolwide, 60 nationalities were reflected, with the USA, UK and Sweden being the top three. In that graduating class, for the first time, was a child of an alumni, a former student, who was also serving on the Advisory Board of St. John's—Mr. Rizwan Rawji, father of Sanaa Rawji '04. It was also the first time the graduation ceremony was held in the new gym (sports arena). The total number of graduates now stood at 1,279.

School year 2004–05 began with the knowledge that the community would be celebrating the 40th anniversary. A special logo had been designed for use this year. On 8 October, Cardinal Danneels celebrated mass at St. Joseph's Church in Waterloo, followed by a reception at the school. Representation from the FCJ Congregation involved 22 nuns, including Sr. Katherine Mary O'Flynn (General Superior), Sr. Maeve Shannon, Sr. Barbara Hughes, Sr. Beatrice Molyneux and some who were on the original staff of the school. Hundreds of guests, parents and alumni also attended. The Gala Dinner-Dance celebrating the 40th anniversary was held 19 March 2005, at nearby Espace del Goutte in Ophain, with almost 200 in attendance.

In November 2004, the school hosted the varsity girls' Division I Volleyball ISSTs, with the St. John's Lady Lions coming out on top.

The St. John's International Foundation awarded the school a grant of \$500,000 in the fall of 2004 toward the PLUS 40 Campaign. Construction on the PAC was completed in the spring of 2005. Some classes were begun in the facility after the Easter break. Sr. Beatrice Molyneux, FCJ, announced her retirement from St. John's effective the summer of 2005, after serving 19 years as Elementary School Principal. Her replacement was Ms. Johanna Bambridge, who had worked previously at St. John's and was now an Elementary School Principal in Tokyo. DHL, one of the major companies represented in the school, announced it would gradually move its management operations to Germany, which could impact St. John's enrollment. As school year 2004–05 was ending, the Advisory Board was planning to launch a strategic planning process to begin the following school year to map out a vision for St. John's future.

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In March 2005, the boys' varsity basketball team won its third consecutive trophy for 1st place in Division I of the ISSTs. With the final victory (against ASL) of the post-season at ACS Cobham to secure the championship, the team had won 67 consecutive games. Its last defeat had been at the hands of Athens in the March 2003 ISSTs. That same weekend, the FCJ congregation celebrated 100 years of service in Belgium at Montjoie. During the Easter break (24 March–10 April), some teachers began moving equipment and furniture into the new performing arts center, which had been completed the preceding week. After the break, the new school bus arrival and departure pattern was put into effect, using the ramp leading to the PAC/MS wing underground car parks.