

History of the University

The University of St. Thomas admitted its first freshman class, 40 men and women, on September 22, 1947. Of the ten faculty members, four were members of the Basilian Fathers, to whom the work of founding and operating the University had been entrusted. The Basilians, a congregation founded in France in 1822, had been working in the Diocese of Galveston–Houston since 1900, when they established the College of St. Thomas, now St. Thomas High School.

Bishop Christopher E. Byrne of Galveston–Houston had long hoped that a Catholic university might be established in his diocese, and in May of 1945 he announced that such an institution was about to become a reality. For that purpose the T.P. Lee mansion, located in the 3800 block of Montrose Boulevard, was purchased as a home for the new University, to which a science building and classrooms were soon added. From here a series of non-credit courses was taught from November 1946 until Easter 1947 to introduce students to what would be the University of St. Thomas.

With experience that was both practical and theoretical, the Basilian Fathers, led by Father Vincent J. Guinan, first president of the University, and Father Wilfrid Dwyer, vice president, shaped the initial curriculum. Influenced by the writings of Cardinal John Henry Newman as well as by their Basilian experience in Canada at St. Michael's College, the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies and Assumption College, they determined that all students should pursue a broad program in liberal studies intended to serve as a solid basis upon which to build their lives and their careers in the community.

As a Catholic institution of higher learning, the University of St. Thomas is inspired by the teaching of Pope John Paul II's apostolic constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, and abides by the application norms prescribed by the American Bishops. Because of the University's institutional commitment to the Church, "Catholic ideals, attitudes and principles penetrate and inform its activities in accordance with the proper nature and autonomy of these activities," (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 14). In its teachings and research, the University of St. Thomas is dedicated to the cause of truth and fosters the integration of knowledge, the dialogue between faith and culture, the ethical and moral implications of learning and the unique orientation to all study given by theology.