



UNIVERSITY OF SANTO TOMAS
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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TO : THOMASIAN COMMUNITY

FROM : OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

RE : 95th ANNIVERSARY OF THE FORMAL INAUGURATION AND SOLEMN DEDICATION OF THE UST MAIN BUILDING

DATE : 11 NOVEMBER 2022

The first campus of the University in *Intramuros* served as the home of Thomasians for more than three centuries. In the course of time, enrollment¹ exponentially increased, which prompted Very Rev. Fr. José Noval, OP (1861-1938)² to write a letter to Pope Pius X (1835-1914) in 1911, reporting that “the University population had grown so big that it had no more space left for additional classrooms or students.”³

Eventually, the cornerstone of the new building in Sulucan, Sampaloc in “*Extramuros*” was laid, coinciding with the celebration of the third centenary of the University in 1911. In 1920, Fr. Roque Ruaño, OP⁴ was assigned to prepare the preliminary plans for the new building, and construction began in 1923.

“The building’s gestation had been painful and long,”⁵ but in 1927, an impressive and breathtaking four-storey lone edifice emerged in the plains of Sampaloc, with a nine-storey tower, and its façade is decorated with the coat of arms of the Order of Preachers. A big clock rests above the coat of arms, and three big statues on its front base personify the theological virtues of Faith (*Fides*), Hope (*Spes*), and Charity (*Caritas*) (cf. *1 Cor* 13:13). The tower is crowned with a cross overlooking the entire campus. The building has two courtyards, which flank the central section that houses the *paraninfo*, originally an auditorium, but now occupied by the UST Museum. The edifice is a model of engineering achievement, being the first earthquake-resistant structure in Asia.

¹ From the pioneer 12 scholars (*becarios*) of 1619; to 360 students for AY 1776-1777; to 391 students for AY 1777-1778; to 573 students for 1785; to 370 students for AY 1823-1824; to 1718 for AY 1862-1863; to 3,003 for AY 1927-1928 (cf. Villaroel, Fidel OP, *A History of the University of Santo Tomas (1611-2011)*, 2012, Vols. I and II. (Thereafter, Villaroel OP).

² UST Rector Magnificus from 1910-1914

³ *Letter of the Very Rev. Fr. José Noval, OP to His Holiness Pope Pius X*, 31 August 1911; Villaroel OP, Vol. II, p.337.

⁴ the top graduate of the UST Faculty of Engineering Class of 1912

⁵ cf. Villaroel OP, Vol. II, pp. 338-341.



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With a record high of 3,003 registered students⁶ for AY 1927-1928, the opening of the academic year was postponed from June to July to hastily accommodate the enrollees in the new building. On 2 July 1927, the portals were finally opened to the Faculties of Pharmacy, Philosophy and Letters, Education, Liberal Arts, Engineering and the first- and second-year students of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery even before the new building was completed.

On **12 November 1927**, ninety-five (95) years ago, the formal inauguration and solemn dedication of the UST Main Building—which was then simply ‘UST’ in Sampaloc—was held during the rectorship of Very Rev. Fr. Serapio Tamayo, OP (1866-1948). His Excellency Msgr. Guglielmo Piani (1875-1956), Apostolic Delegate, blessed and inaugurated the UST Main Building to the immense satisfaction and rejoicing of the administration, University staff, and students. The chosen godmothers of the ceremony were Ms. Elizabeth Bowers of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters and Doña Aurora Quezon.⁷ Time has embellished the edifice in many ways.⁸

Some academic units remained in UST Intramuros, however, such as the last three year levels of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, the Ecclesiastical Faculties, and the Faculty of Civil Law, and most of the administrative offices.⁹ Despite this, the Sulucan campus flourished further, laying the groundwork for the eventual transfer of the whole campus.

Ninety-five years after its inauguration, the Main Building has withstood the test of time. It has silently witnessed triumphs and failures, times of peace and periods of upheaval, and has been home to countless Thomasians who revel in the history and significance of this National Cultural Treasure¹⁰ that the public associates most with UST.

May we remain faithful, hopeful, and loving as we reminisce the challenging yet fulfilling events that happened 95 years ago and the events that have happened since. At this point, we may now reflect on what we can do as we prepare for the Centennial of the UST Main Building five years from now.

Thank you.


FR. LOUIE R. CORONEL, O.P., EHL
Secretary-General

⁶ cf. Villaroel OP, Vol. II, p. 341.

⁷ A historical marker placed at the entrance of the main building to commemorate its inauguration mentions Ms. Elizabeth Bowers only. However, Fr. Serapio Tamayo, OP (*Memorias sobre la Universidad de Santo Tomás* in *Voz Estudiantil*, 1956, p. 80) adds the name of Mrs. Quezon as co-sponsor; cf. Villaroel OP, Vol. II, footnote 19, p.440.

⁸ From 1952 to 1953, 15 high statues measuring 3.05 m by the Italian sculptor Francesco Monti who taught in the University’s School of Fine Arts, were installed on pedestals at the roof deck.

⁹ cf. Villaroel OP, Vol. II, p.342.

¹⁰ UST’s Main Building, its Central Seminary, the Arch of the Centuries and the University’s open spaces were officially declared as National Cultural Treasures on 25 January 2010. pursuant to Republic Act 4846.