

EVERY CHILD CAN LEARN

*"You can't ever put him away anywhere. That's what folks don't understand... You can't put your child away from your heart. Besides, you don't want to miss everything of him just because you haven't all of him." — Pearl S. Buck, *The Time is Noon*, 1962*

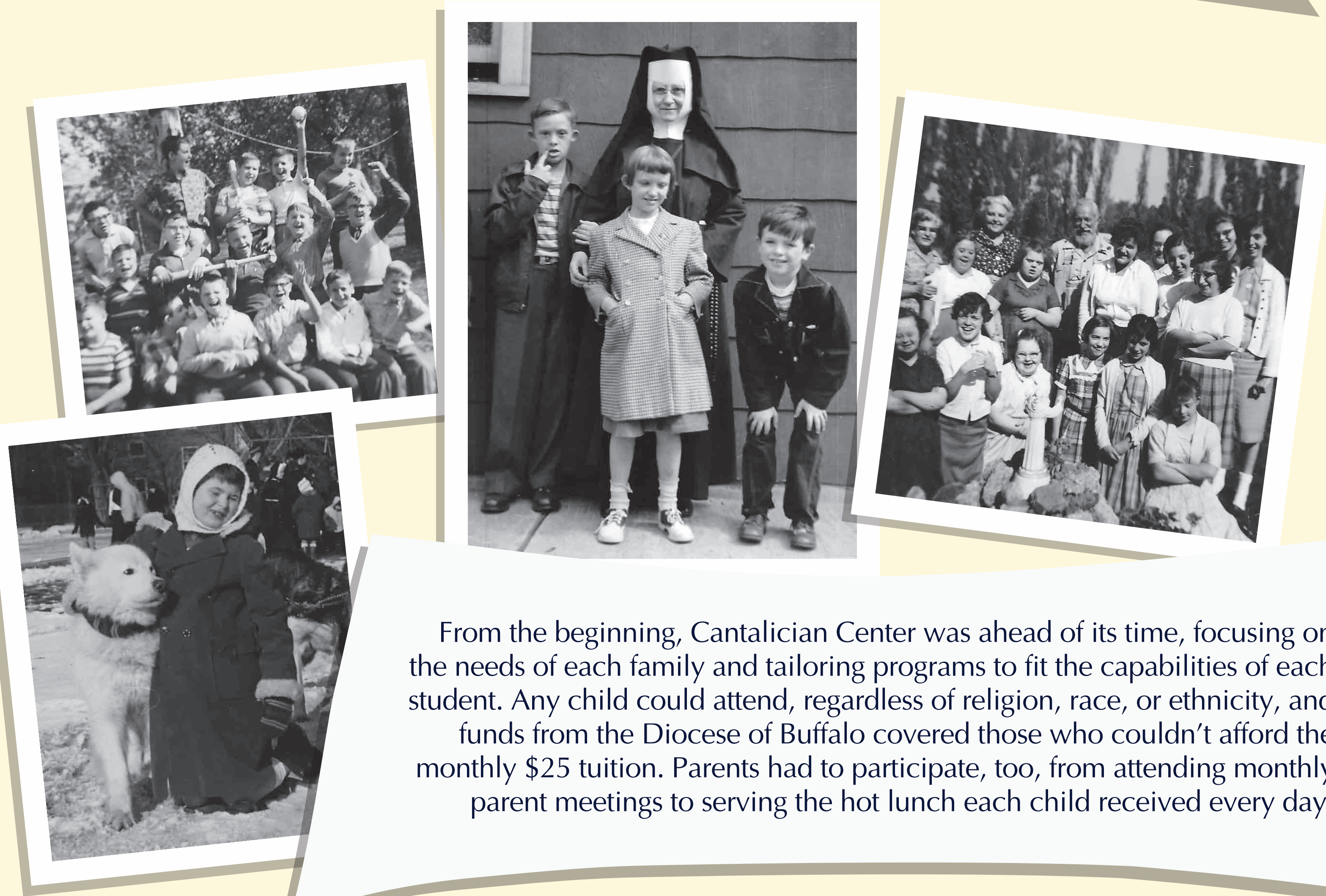
At the time Cantalician Center opened its doors in 1956, most children with developmental disabilities didn't go to school. They were sent to crowded institutions, away from their families and usually far away from home. This separation was devastating for parents and detrimental for most children, but people believed it was the only option for children thought to be "unteachable" and "helpless."

Fortunately, not everyone held those beliefs. The Felician Sisters had been teaching at parochial schools in Western New York for decades and had created classes for exceptional children as early as 1924. In what would become a habit of educational innovation, by the late 1930s the Felicians were earning advanced degrees in education, psychology, and nursing to better serve their most challenged students.

These experiences gave the sisters a hopeful insight: *every child can learn*. But patience and perseverance weren't enough. To help these "special children," teachers needed specific training, uncommon talent, and hours and hours of dedicated time. In the 1950s, state institutions, public schools, and parents couldn't provide all of this, but the Felician Sisters could.

When the Diocese of Buffalo decided to transfer the Little Seminary of St. Joseph and the Little Flower to a new location, the building at 3233 Main Street in Buffalo, New York became available, and the Felicians, once again, went where they were needed most. Under the direction of Sister Mary Angela Betke, PhD, three sisters and ten lay people welcomed their first students on September 6, 1956.

For the first time, many parents felt relief and saw a ray of hope. They wouldn't have to send their children away. There was help and hope for their children at a pioneering new day school called Cantalician Center for Children.



From the beginning, Cantalician Center was ahead of its time, focusing on the needs of each family and tailoring programs to fit the capabilities of each student. Any child could attend, regardless of religion, race, or ethnicity, and funds from the Diocese of Buffalo covered those who couldn't afford the monthly \$25 tuition. Parents had to participate, too, from attending monthly parent meetings to serving the hot lunch each child received every day.



Every activity was a chance to learn – even mowing the lawn! In addition to twelve classrooms, students benefited from an array of new learning environments – a kitchen, a vocational shop, rooms for homemaking, sewing, music, audio-visual instruction, arts and crafts – all specially designed to help them learn new life skills and be a part of family activities at home.

"Parents are reaching out for counsel and a ray of hope. That is why there is a Cantalician Center for Children."

— Sister Raphael Marie



Above all, every child could count on highly-trained teachers, nurses, and administrators to guide them and care for them with love and understanding. Then, as now, the staff was exceptionally dedicated to the students and their families, often spending hours and hours in one-on-one instruction. One sister even learned braille so she could teach her blind student how to read!