

Catholic Education Affordability

Catholic Schools

Catholic Schools Week was February 1-5, when schools celebrate the value Catholic education provides to young people, our church, our communities and our nation. Throughout their history, Catholic schools have proven to be among the best in the field of education imparting not only the academic knowledge for a healthy lifestyle, but also the moral values such as honesty, compassion, integrity with respect and dignity for all human life. Catholic schools provide the student not only the necessary academic knowledge, but also the knowledge of our God-given rights together with the moral values and responsibilities that accompany them. The total detachment of God from our public school curriculum continually endangers our students as they believe information not taught in the school curriculum cannot be very important.

Winds of Change

The Church would like all students to have a Catholic education, although that has never been possible here in the U.S. In the past there was a great push to make a Catholic education widely available to families. Thousands of nuns and brothers devoted their lives to teaching in Catholic schools for meager compensation, knowing they were making it possible for students to receive a solid academic and spiritual foundation. Those who wished to take advantage of a Catholic education were welcomed, rich and poor alike. Tuition fees were not a problem mainly because of the religious teaching staff. No longer are our Catholic schools staffed by nuns and brothers. Today's dedicated teachers have a responsibility to support their families and deserve just compensation. This compensation must come from some place and today a major portion of it comes from tuition fees.

The Challenge

Presently here in the Archdiocese of Atlanta, our schools are running at a deficit of approximately nine million dollars a year. Less than ten thousand students attend our Catholic schools, so this effectively means each student attending our Archdiocesan schools is automatically receiving nine thousand dollars in tuition assistance. Should a family qualify as active parishioners under the Archdiocesan guidelines and pay the lower tuition rate, they receive a further tuition subsidy. For example at both St. Jude and St. Pius, each student receives a subsidy of fifteen hundred dollars, and at Christ the King, that amount is twenty-nine hundred dollars.

The Question

How is this deficit or shortfall alleviated? There is no one answer to that question. Different dioceses employ different strategies. In the Archdiocese of Atlanta, the shortfall is alleviated by placing a school assessment (or tax if you wish) on the parishes. Here at All Saints, our 2016 assessments (including our school assessment) are as follows:

<i>School Assessment</i>	\$263,279
<i>Parish Assessment</i>	\$354,599
<i>Arch. Annual Appeal</i>	\$199,500
<i>Georgia Bulletin</i>	<u>\$ 29,190</u>
<i>Total Assessment</i>	\$846,568

Every week we pay \$16,280 toward these assessments. In light of the above, we can easily see the importance of financial stewardship. This is the time of year when parish verification forms are submitted to private schools. When I'm asked to sign off on a family's form there are two questions I must answer. First, is this family active? Second, can this family afford Catholic tuition? My only means of answering the second question is to review their financial

stewardship to the parish and Annual Appeal as set forth by the Archdiocese. More specifically, is there a sincere effort of 5% to the parish and 1% to the Annual Appeal considering that every applicant's tuition fee is already being subsidized by nine thousand dollars? With signed parish verification, each student receives a further subsidy of fifteen hundred dollars. If they are admitted, I take financial support of the parish seriously. After all, there is no moral obligation to send one's child to a Catholic school. There is, and goes back to the very roots of our faith, the moral obligation to tithe. I hope you agree that we should always meet our moral responsibilities primarily and all other activities and engagements should follow from there.

Affordability

As many know, not everyone who seeks a Catholic education can afford one. Today there are many very active Catholics involved in various commendable works of ministry who feel their children deserve to get into Catholic schools. I, for one, agree with them. However, the situation today is not only of deserving, but also affordability. The diocese offers financial aid and there is the Grace Scholarship for those who make a sincere effort to tithe. Until our system of public education changes, for example with a voucher system that follows the student to school, private or otherwise, and until Catholics raise this issue to elected officials, then our Catholic schools for the most part will remain open only to those who are not only deserving, but to those who can also afford them. The Archdiocese recognizes this and knows its financial support keeps Catholic education within financial reach for more families.

