

The Changing Face of Catholic School Funding

Because of so much prejudice against Catholics, the Church served as a complete community for our immigrant ancestors who were arriving in America at the turn of the century. Many Parishes included a school, some type of social service ministry, and a structure of support, which offered friendship, safety, love, and concern. Also, for the first 60 years of this century, men and women were entering religious life in unprecedented numbers; subsequently, new parishes began springing up all over our country. Churches operated schools at a fraction of the cost because religious lived at the church and were often paid with baskets of food--not salaries.

However, after WWII, education--both Catholic and public became a main concern for the country. Opportunities for second and third generation immigrants included many more choices, which past prejudice had prohibited. Younger Catholics entered the secular world; less entered religious orders.

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The era of religious orders running our parishes and schools was soon a memory. But thanks to the dedication and ingenuity of Lay Catholics, the system did not collapse. Instead, parish leaders began filling the positions left by religious with professional teachers.

These Lay Catholics lived in a secular world, so the cost of Catholic Education began to rise. What once cost a bushel of fruit and four dollars a month rose to approximately \$6,000 at year per student! At first, the parish picked up the rising costs, but eventually tuition had to become the mainstay of school support. In the 1980s many Churches chose to close their schools because of the prohibitive cost.

There were other choices. Here at St. Francis, we decided to do something else. We began an Educational Trust Fund, which would guarantee the future of our school. (We are one of the few schools to have had the foresight to do this.) Our trust fund is invested, and only the interest is awarded to the school--but since the interest continues to flow with the economy, the original gift becomes a living tribute.

Many of you have wondered why we don't ask the greater community to help us. Some have suggested we invite the public and private businesses to help with the rising costs--and we do, but only in a limited capacity--such as with matching grants and promotional opportunities. As the ballot defeat of school vouchers proved last November, the general public is not interested in funding us. This serves as a two-edged sword because if we return to the reason that we began our school, we discover a deeper spiritual meaning in helping ourselves. We are a Catholic School, and in order to keep our integrity, sense of values, and dedication to Christ we fund ourselves.

This year we will begin to ask more of you in the parish who do not have children currently attending our school, to look at what we are offering and how we are funded. Like our immigrant relatives, we too want to assure that our Catholic community includes a school, some type of social service ministry, and a structure of support, which offered friendship, safety, love, and concern.

