

Guilty!

It's easy to forget impact when our children leave the system!

I'm guilty as charged so don't think I'm disparaging you in any way. The Lillys paid Catholic School tuition from 1988 until 2013. That was 25 years of tuition, bingo, candy bars, games, magazines and committee assignments! I never thought twice about the amount of money we invested in our children and in our faith community. I never doubted the value of choosing to insulate our children's educational life in the Catholic School System. To this day my children (and many families like ours) still celebrate friendships rooted in the early years of their Catholic School education. But when my last child wore that green and gold at their Catholic High graduation, there was a sense of relief that MY family had benefitted from the system. It's not that we disappeared. We stayed supportive of the annual appeal, attended some games, and we tried to plug in from a distance. But the sense of responsibility for the school system isn't nearly as urgent when it becomes somebody else's child. It's just a fact of human nature.

Now, I find a **LOT** of humor in the fact that I've been entrusted with a measure of accountability and responsibility for all the issues that we face in our Owensboro Catholic School System. There are times of reflection when I can almost hear my guardian angel chuckling. The ongoing view from the inside is dramatically more complicated than from the comfortable position I had as an armchair quarterback. That's just another fact of human nature. But a day doesn't go by that I don't feel some grace or blessing from a student, parent or colleague in this system. I am inspired by the mom who calls out to her son to "be kind" as he walks into the 4-6 building, or from band students pounding out their intense practice sessions on a hot parking lot in the afternoon. There are examples in every building where acts of kindness, discipline and faith are being lived, and that hasn't changed regardless of whether I have children in the system or not.

As generations flow through our schools, every now and then you may hear a comment that, "I always paid my Catholic School tuition, and now it's up to somebody else." These words, while not common, reflect the myth that schools are funded by tuition. Only about 60% of the total cost of educating children is actually paid through tuition. That's why we need to show our appreciation to pastors, parishioners, teachers and donors who pick up 40% of the cost of a Catholic School education. This isn't an effort to diminish the significant sacrifice that many families are trying to make when they meet their tuition obligations. This is just a reminder that we would look very different if our only source of financial support were tuition from families with children in the system.

DOES ANYBODY PAY \$9000 PER CHILD?

The actual cost for educating a child each year is about \$9,000. Tuition for a parish sponsored single child in the system falls into a range of \$4500 to \$5600 depending on the school and circumstances. About 35%-40% of our families receive some type of discount or tuition adjustment based on multiple children enrolled. Tuition for three children in the system could cost \$10,000 to \$15,000 a year for a family, even though the actual cost of the education would be \$27,000. That's why the tuition assistance and efforts of fundraising are so important to the school community. The bridge between actual cost and tuition has always come from three sources. First, parishes subsidize students. Pastors and parishes provide about 27% of the cost of education. They do this because Catholic Schools powerfully influence lives that powerfully influence the future of the Catholic Church. This is why it is so important to financially support our parishes. The second major contributor is faculty and staff. Teachers in the system work for about 20% less than their public-school counterparts. This is a tuition savings of approximately \$1500 per child per year. The data is conclusive about the professionals we employ in the classroom. We prepare students for life. There are no perfect people or perfect systems run by people, but this system produces outstanding results thanks to the effort of the people we have in our classrooms. Teaching in the Catholic Schools is not a vocation for everyone. But for those who can and want to teach in

our system, we provide opportunities every day to connect the teachings of Christ to every subject we teach. Our goal is to provide a creative working environment that builds community, enables creativity, establishes healthy structures and disciplines and creates opportunities for professional fellowship. We search for and recruit people who exhibit great joy in their vocation, and practice faith with their students. We also want to exceed professional standards in the workplace.

The last leg of financial support for our Catholic Schools comes through donor contributions. There are times when parents, and even annual donors, feel overwhelmed by the sheer number of solicitations from the school, clubs and sports organizations. The two most significant “asks” from the school’s perspective are the two annual appeals; one which serves grades K-8 (Making K-8 great!) and the high school (Phonathon). The system plan in the future will be to try and eliminate non-sports fundraisers by placing more emphasis on the two annual appeals. These annual appeals primarily target families who have used the system and want to become part of the “subsidy” that enables other Catholic School parents to afford the system. The annual appeal also helps reflect an attitude that we were helped with our tuition and so we pass along these acts of generosity to the families that follow us.

The list of things we want to accomplish for our students in the Owensboro Catholic School system grows each day. And we will check mark them off our task list one by one as the generations who have gone before us help the generations who will follow us. And while the nature of our relationship changes with the school because our children move on, don’t grow tired of being asked to support such a powerful, life-changing organization. We can be an important part of the solution to the many challenges we face if we can just remember what a gift the system has been to us, and to all our families, and to the church community.