

Closing the tuition assistance gap for Catholic schools

written by Malea Hargett |

Catholic schools have been able to increase their financial aid over the past year, but there is still \$500,000 that the schools are not able to cover, associate superintendent Marguerite Olberts said.

The Catholic Schools Scholarship Appeal will kick off Nov. 12-13 across the diocese to raise awareness and support for 24 of the diocese's 28 Catholic schools. A letter from Bishop Anthony B. Taylor will be mailed to previous donors and a flyer should be placed in all bulletins.

"Catholic schools are an integral part of the teaching mission of the Church because they assist parents in the important obligation of educating and forming their children through faith development," the bishop wrote, "It is more important than ever that we continue to provide an academically rigorous education, rooted in the Gospel and rich in the cherished traditions and liturgical practices of our faith. In doing so, we ensure that students will have the foundation to live a moral and upright life to face the challenges brought on by cultural and moral changes in the world today."

"The parishes are doing their part. With the appeal, we want to get more Catholics involved." Marguerite Olberts, diocesan associate superintendent of Catholic schools

Olberts said the gap between what financial aid the students qualify for and what the schools can provide has decreased from \$900,000 to \$500,000. In 2015, 794 students requested \$2.8 million in aid, but the schools only had \$1.9 million to give. In 2016 849 students requested \$3.6 million in aid but only received \$3.1 million from the schools.

"The parishes and schools are working hard to cover this gap themselves through fundraisers, grants and other scholarships," Olberts said. "Some get CASA grants. The parishes are doing their part. With the appeal, we want to get more Catholics involved."

The goal of the diocesan appeal is to help the schools close the gap, but the appeal has had limited success so far. Since it started in 2013 the diocese has only been able to raise about \$56,000.

This month the diocese is sending about \$17,000 to 38 students in nine schools with the greatest needs. Olberts said there are even more students who qualified for diocesan assistance, but there were not enough funds.

Students getting \$500 to \$1,000 in financial assistance include:

- Fort Smith: St. Boniface, Immaculate Conception, Christ the King and Trinity Junior High
- Hot Springs: St. John
- Little Rock: Our Lady of the Holy Souls, St. Edward, St. Theresa

- Russellville: St. John

“All of these families pay something (for tuition). There is no free ride,” she said.

Only schools that use the Facts Tuition and Aid Management Company, a third-party company, are available to receive diocesan appeal funds, Olberts said. Four schools don't use Facts and are thus not eligible to receive the scholarships.

Donations to the appeals can be made online at givecentral.org/arkansas or mailed to P.O. Box 7565, Little Rock, AR 72217.