



Dear Friends of Our Kids at Heart,

It is so exciting to be celebrating our 10th Anniversary. It is hard for me to express my gratitude to you for contributing millions of dollars to OKAH over the last ten years to help the poorest, most disadvantaged families realize that they can send their children to Catholic Schools and transform their families. Thank you for your overwhelming support.

I am also grateful to our partners in this process: the parents of these families who all contribute the first dollars of the tuition for their children. It has been so encouraging to see the sacrifice these parents make to see that all their children participate in Catholic Schools. Over a dozen of these parents no longer receive OKAH support and are now paying the tuition themselves.

Founding Parish Success

With our early success at Sacred Hearth Parish in Austin, we have learned some important lessons. First, parents and children are required to attend Mass regularly as a family. The students must also receive their Sacraments at their home Parish. It is this combination of Pastoral leadership and community building that helps fortify the Catholic families. At Sacred Heart Parish, they have 188 children attending ten local Catholic Schools, with 90 or more at the Cathedral School of St. Mary in downtown Austin.



Chapter Parishes See “Pentecost Bombs”

With your help, OKAH is now creating similar Chapters through out the Diocese to encourage other Parishes to send children to many of the 20 Catholic Schools in our Diocese. We are learning that there are many empty desks. It seems a shame not to do all we can to support our Pastors to help fill those seats.

An example of this has been the OKAH experience with the dynamic Parishes of Santa Teresa Catholic Church and its brother Parish who runs St. Joseph Catholic School in Bryan.

Santa Teresa Catholic Church supports families sending over 30 children attending St. Joseph Catholic School. OKAH provides supplemental support to Santa Teresa Parish so that Father Victor Mayorga can help these families have their children attend St. Joseph Catholic School.

But what about the Parish that operates the Catholic School, how does it help them and their students? I recently asked Father Brian Eilers, Pastor of St. Joseph School and Parish. Here is what he told me:

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Fr. Eilers: “The children in the Our Kids at Heart program (From Santa Teresa) come from families who are the hardest working and lowest paid in our community. They deserve to have the best education. Working class families do not have school choice. They cannot afford Catholic education and cannot afford to move to the part of town where there are the best schools.

For these working-class families, Catholic school is an impossible dream come true. They take great pride in going to Catholic school which they express in the way they dress. Their uniforms are perfect, hair done with great care and the children are all smiles. This gift has helped them claim their true identity in Christ. They encourage the other children to appreciate the gift of Catholic education.

Many of the students in the OKAH program were not doing well in public school. When they were struggling or being bullied, their parents did not know where to turn. They were little fish in a big pond, lost. Being at St. Joe’s the children are known by all the teachers and they have a buddy family who helps them navigate the system. This gives the parents and students the confidence needed to be involved and to succeed.”

Father Eilers and Father Mayorga want more children to attend St. Joseph Catholic School, but they need more funding to do this. We cannot turn away.

Pray for Our Pastors

As we recruit Pastors to implement the OKAH program in their Parish, we pray for their strength and parishioner support. It is not easy for Priests and their staff to take on the additional work of encouraging parents, collecting contracts from each family, and raising funds. While OKAH can do much to help, these Priests are on the front lines working with families and promising support if the families will just take the leap of Faith and send their children to Catholic Schools.

O Jesus, our great High Priest, hear my humble prayers on behalf of your priests. Give them a deep faith, a bright and firm hope and a burning love which will ever increase in the course of their priestly life.

OKAH Needs your Help

Across the Diocese we are assisting parishes and families to send over 250 children to Catholic schools in Austin, Bryan, Taylor, and Temple.

It is with a deep sense of responsibility and a genuine desire to make a positive impact on the lives of these children that I am reaching out to you. We are seeking support from compassionate individuals and organizations to help us provide funds to Parishes for their deserving students, enabling them to attend our Catholic schools.

Won't you please help? Please send donations to ourkidsatheart.com or use the enclosed envelope.

May God continue to bless you abundantly for your generosity and compassion.

Father Mark Hamlet
Chairman of the Board
Our Kids at Heart

Enclosures

