



CATHOLIC EDUCATION
FOUNDATION

DIOCESE OF JOLIET

2024 | IMPACT REPORT

Dear Friend,

I am delighted to present this year's Impact Report. I view the past year's achievements and occasional disappointments through the lens of Saint Paul's charge to the Galatians — "Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest if we do not give up. So then, while we have the opportunity let us do good to all."

In today's polarized society, so many of us are weary and losing heart but YOU have answered the call to do good! Your unwavering support and commitment to Catholic education was instrumental in allowing us to provide 1,418 students with scholarships totaling more than \$2.2 million.

Your generosity reaped an abundant harvest. During the past school year, students throughout the Diocese of Joliet cultivated their faith becoming closer to God. As you will read, several of our scholarship recipients elected to be initiated into the Church. For these students, the opportunity to learn about their Catholic faith only occurred because they received financial aid made possible through your gifts.

The year also brought some difficult news in learning that Illinois leaders would not extend the Invest in Kids Act providing more than \$8 million in scholarships to our students. But YOU did not become discouraged. Supporters of Catholic education doubled down on their financial commitment financing more than 1,100 scholarships during the program's final year and increasing their gifts to the CEF to ensure students could return to their classrooms this fall.



Our supporters invested in our Catholic school students generously throughout the year in a multitude of ways. Throughout this report, you will read about donors who have donated their time, talent and treasure to the CEF mission. Sometimes, as in the case of our new board member, Chris Breyné, they do all three!

I am profoundly grateful for the dedication and generosity of our supporters, board of directors and staff. Each of you plays a crucial role in making the work of the Catholic Education Foundation possible. At every turn, you never gave up. YOU took the opportunity "to do good" for the students and families we serve.

May God bless you abundantly for your kindness and commitment.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Jennifer Georgis
Executive Director



Scholarship leads to service for new CEF board member

After the passing of Peg Breyne in 2016, her children – Chris, Matt, Pat and Mari – were looking for something for those who knew and loved her to donate to in lieu of flowers.

Among the choices was a scholarship in her name for a child attending St. Andrew the Apostle School in Romeoville — the place she taught for 24 years.

"We all went there and she started teaching at St. Andrew in 1968," Chris said.

Not only was Peg a teacher, she and Ron were founding members of the parish and Ron served as the school board President.

"My mom would always say it was her ministry, it wasn't a job, and so we thought that was an obvious choice to make," Chris said. "Her friends were very generous as far as how much they gave, so once we got that going, we decided to keep it going on an annual basis. There is a need up and down, so we leave (the choice of the recipient) at the discretion of the CEF (Catholic Education Foundation) and with the principal."

Chris said the decision to help those families wanting a Catholic education, but cannot meet financial requirements came from the lessons of his parents.

"My parents put all four of us through St. Andrew and then my two brothers and I went to Joliet Catholic and my sister went to Providence. We had 13 years of Catholic education.

My parents were by no means wealthy, but we never were for want of anything. And then, when I started my kids at St. Isidore (Catholic School) in Bloomingdale, it's one of those things you start realizing when you do the math on what they had to do. My mom was a Catholic school teacher, so we know she didn't make much and my dad worked at Argonne Labs. It was a sacrifice for them."

Chris said his parents even deferred some of Peg's salary to help support students in need at St. Andrew.

"Every little penny out of a Catholic school teacher's salary is a lot," Chris said. "They were dedicated to St. Andrew to the core. We learned from them about giving back to the church in general, but especially to St. Andrew."

Establishing the scholarship and working with CEF Executive Director Jennifer Georgis, opened another door for Chris.

At the beginning of 2024, Chris was asked to join the CEF Board, which he accepted.



Chris Breyne poses with a photo of his parents, Peg and Ron, outside his mom's old classroom at St. Andrew school in Romeoville.

"We specifically wanted to go through the CEF with the scholarship just because we know they handle it properly and they'll make sure that it goes to the people in need," Chris said. "So I couldn't say no to that. I've only been on for six months now, but the quality of people that they have on that board and the dedication to Catholic education and those in need is really outstanding.

"I joke that I gave my mom and dad a hard enough time — I wasn't a bad kid, but I needed some guidance — so this is a small way I'm paying back my mom for the years of torture that I gave her."

While serving on the diocesan school board, Chris said his mom joked that he could not let St. Andrew, which was struggling at the time, close on his watch.

Both the scholarship and his efforts on the CEF board can help keep that promise to his mom.

"Keeping the school open is important to me," he said. "If you don't have the people here, you're not going to have the opportunity to teach the students and unfortunately, we've seen what happens if the enrollment dips too far. So, it's a double bonus, you can help a family need, and you're getting a child in a seat that needs to be filled."



SAVE THE DATE

This year, the annual Plaid & Khaki Ball is set for 5:30 p.m. on Saturday, September 21 at the Westin Chicago Lombard, 70 Yorktown Center, Lombard, IL 60148.

Individual tickets are available for \$160 or a table of 10 can be purchased for \$1,600.

Tickets must be purchased in advance by calling the Foundation office at 815-221-612, online by scanning the QR Code at the bottom of this column or at www.cefjoliet.org/get-involved/attend.

BE A SPONSOR

There are several sponsorship opportunities for the 2024 Plaid & Khaki Ball that include recognition of your family or company on social media, in the event program, on the CEF website or with your name and logo displayed at the event.

Sponsorship opportunities are available by scanning the QR Code at the bottom of this column or going to www.cefjoliet.org/get-involved/attend.

To discuss sponsorship opportunities or for more information, call the Foundation office at 815-221-6127.



CEF steps up after loss of Invest in Kids Act

When the Illinois state legislature failed to act on the Invest in Kids Act, tax-credit scholarship, — in November, it eliminated the option for low-income families to determine the best-fit school for their children.

Lawmakers doubled down on that decision by not addressing the reinstatement of the program in the Spring session.

Their negligence eliminated school choice for the many families in the Diocese of Joliet, including the Mendez family, who saw one child forced to a public high school after graduating from St. John the Baptist Catholic School in Winfield.

“My daughter has told me that the beliefs in the public school and what she sees doesn’t go along with her beliefs,” said single mother Maria Mendez. “I know without St. John’s – spiritually and academically – she would not be the person she is now.” “I applied for St. Francis High School (in Wheaton) because my faith is everything and it is very important to me that my children grow up with a strong Catholic faith. Unfortunately, (with the lack of Tax Credit Scholarships) she didn’t qualify. They were expecting \$1,000 more in payment and I can’t afford that.”

Maria already had to make that choice with one child — now her other five children may have the same fate.

“My children are loving,” Maria said. “One of them was struggling with behavior and now he is a different person . . . it is because of God and St. John’s and I am blessed.

I would hear from teachers (when he was in public school) and it was always negative



The Mendez family greatly benefited from the Invest in Kids scholarship that was not reinstated by Illinois lawmakers.

and now here, we get calls for good things he is doing, and he gets really excited about that. My other son just turned eight and wants to become a priest.”

Former donors to the Invest in Kids Act stepped up, as did the CEF Board with \$1 million in additional funds, but more help is still needed. Hard-working families like the Mendez’s are counting on the Diocesan community to take a ‘Leap 4 Faith.’

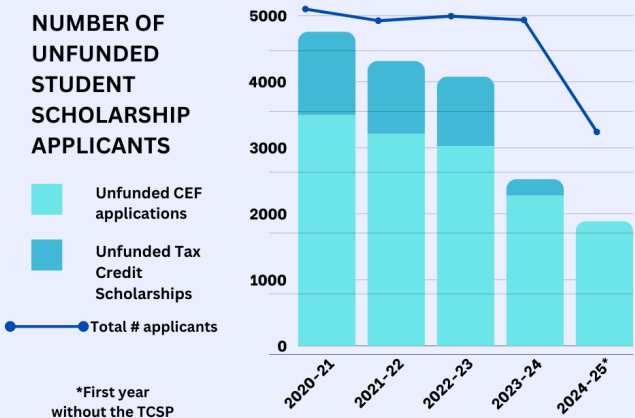
Every donation helps families looking for a choice of a faith-based education - \$400, \$40, and even \$4 from every family will

help bridge the gap.

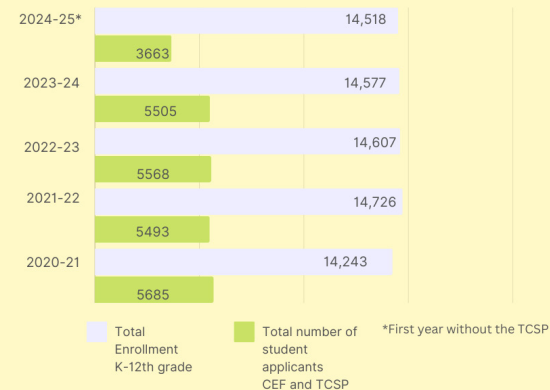
“I am trying – I work two jobs; I go to school and I am trying to improve my situation. I don’t lose my faith. I keep on going. I am doing what I can and then leave it in God’s hands,” Maria said. “If I had the money, believe me, I would donate as much as I could. This is not just a child – this is a life.”

If you can donate, please visit cefjoliet.org and look for Leap 4 Faith, or email Executive Director Jennifer Georgis at jgeorgis@dioceseofjoliet.org.

NUMBER OF UNFUNDED STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP APPLICANTS



Total enrollment compared to student applicants



Students earn sacraments through schools

For some students graduating eighth grade, the choice of which high school to attend is not always clear and easy.

Students who attend a private, often faith-based, high school, are not always selecting it because of religion.

Proximity to home, class size and athletics are just a few of the countless reasons that are not rooted in faith.

That was the case for several students at IC Catholic Prep (ICCP) in Elmhurst, Illinois, who chose to attend the school even though they were not devoted to the Catholic faith at that time.

It may have been something else that got the students in the door, but the students were touched by the teachings of God and because of that, chose to complete their sacraments and grow stronger in their faith through the school's Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA) program.

"Coming from a public school and learning about the Catholic faith and taking theology classes definitely helped me learn more about the (Catholic) faith," said Michael Silveyra, ICCP Class of 2027, who initially attended ICCP to play football. "It just helped me become closer to God and when the OCIA program opened up, it helped me make my confirmation so I can come into the church fully.

"Growing up, my grandma always wanted to get me into the faith, but I was never really able to at a public school. My grandma was my sponsor."

"Coming from public school, it's super different," said Jonathan Guzman, ICCP Class of 2027. "(At ICCP) More people are into God and they want to learn about Him and they want to speak to Him and feel Him. My public school wasn't like that. So, when OCIA opened up, and I got into it, my perspective on everything changed. I wanted to be closer to God and experience Him."

Just because a student chooses to attend a Catholic high school, it is not always something that is financially possible.

For some students, their journey began with a scholarship from the Diocese of Joliet Catholic Education Foundation (CEF).

"The scholarship really helped me a lot," said Manny Deoudes, ICCP Class of 2026. "If it wasn't for that, I might not be here. I wanted to come here for baseball and football, but I also came in wanting to become Catholic. I've always been Catholic, but I wasn't confirmed.



The members of the IC Catholic Prep OCIA program received Holy sacraments through the school.

When I was in theology class, I was excited to learn. I'm more into it with every theology class I can get."

Michael Diaz, ICCP Class of 2027, encourages all students searching for faith to follow through.

"Do it for sure," he said. "Get into the Catholic traditions and follow the traditions. I feel like after my confirmation, it was just indescribable."

Guzman said having a relationship with God is something important for teenagers.

"You always seek for someone to be there for you and at our age, you hold so much inside and you don't tell anyone anything. But then I took OCIA and I realized I always had God next to me and I could always just like talk to Him. There's always someone looking over me and protecting me, and that changed everything completely."

Deoudes, Silveyra, Guzman and Diaz were joined in their formation by seven other ICCP students: Kayla Carrillo, Elyssa Diaz, Jordan Hall, Lexi Russ, Maddy Dinino, Madison Kachiroubas and Eben Smith.

While these 11 high school students received sacraments in the 2023-24 school year, faith formation in Diocese of Joliet elementary schools has also inspired students to receive their sacraments.

Zoie Norals, who graduated in May 2024 from St. Andrew Catholic School in Romeoville was baptized at a school Mass this past spring with her principal, Carol Albreski, as her Godmother.

"I believe becoming Catholic would bring me closer to God and that was the choice I made," she said. "I wanted to become Catholic for a long time and I made the decision at the beginning of the year I asked my principal how to be baptized and she helped me."



Zoie Norals is baptized at St. Andrew.

Norals attended St. Andrew from the beginning of her education and, like the four young men at ICCP, was a recipient of a CEF scholarship, helping to offset the cost of a private education – an education her mother, Cathy Woods, wanted for her daughter.

"I wanted a private education and the values," she said. "The small, family-like environment builds character. I want to prepare her for the real world and I want her to go out there and be great."

Woods also left it up to her daughter to decide if she wanted to grow in her faith.

"I told her from the beginning that I wanted her to explore her faith and make her own decisions," she said. "I feel a lot of kids are forced into faith and they don't practice as they get older. She came home one day and said she wanted to be closer to God and even though she wasn't Catholic, going to school and learning, she would eat, breathe, and live based on the teachings. I am happy she was able to make her decision and every Sunday, we are at St. Andrew."

Norals, who again was granted a CEF scholarship, continues to follow her faith and is now a freshman at Joliet Catholic Academy in Joliet.



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