

Catholic School Revival

By Richard A. Lechleiter

In early October, Julie Baum and I visited Fr. Troy Overton, Principal David Bennett and the rest of the St. Edward School team to talk about how the Catholic Education Foundation could help expand the school's ministry. While St. Edward School was in session, it happened to be a day on which the public schools were not.

Before the start of the meeting, I peered through the Parish Office window and noticed six boys playing basketball on the playground. And I asked myself, "I wonder why these boys aren't going to St. Edward." A couple of things came to mind immediately. They live in the neighborhood. They attend a public school, likely Jeffersontown Elementary two blocks away. Some of their friends probably attend St. Edward. And they're comfortable enough to come to our campus and play basketball.

A few other thoughts followed. Maybe these boys aren't Catholic by faith. Maybe they're doing really well in the neighborhood public school. Maybe their parents decided that the public school was the best option for their education.

But then again, maybe not.

Maybe they're not in our school because their family can't afford the full cost of tuition. Maybe their parents yearn for the gift of Catholic education for their children, but have convinced themselves that it will never happen because it simply costs too much.

As we began our meeting, I suggested that those six boys be the focus of our discussion. Like all of our 37 Catholic elementary schools in central Kentucky, we don't need a new marketing campaign, or more sophisticated social media strategy or billboard advertisement to increase our student enrollments. In fact, in each of our school communities there are hundreds of families who would embrace a Catholic education for their children if someone would accompany them on this journey.

As we talked further, we all came to realize that the St. Edward community, together with the financial resources of the Catholic Education



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Foundation, the Archdiocese of Louisville, School Choice Scholarships and our other funding partners, can now have the courage and the confidence to invite those six boys and their families – and scores of others – to join our school community. *THE ANSWER IS YES!*

To every family who wonders if they can afford a Catholic school education for their children with their limited financial resources, *THE ANSWER IS YES!* To those who ask if we will accompany them through their entire Catholic school journey with our financial support, *THE ANSWER IS YES!*

Since that meeting, the St. Edward team has carried that message across their community, one family at a time. They have invited families who carry heavy financial burdens to join us, to provide to their children the educational experience that combines Faith, Family and Learning like no other. We have eased their fears and offered the scholarships that their children need.

Last Sunday, I spoke at the Masses to further spread the word to more families about the new day in Catholic education at St. Edward. Guess what has happened in three short months. The school has already added 14 students from the neighborhood! And they are talking to others who want to follow. They even added another classroom to their third grade in January. I wouldn't be surprised if they bust the doors down next fall and add 30 or 40 more kids. Just like they did last fall at St. Rita in Okolona, St. Paul on Dixie Highway, St. Athanasius on the Outer Loop and St. Catherine in New Haven.

At the Catholic Education Foundation and across the Archdiocese of Louisville, the Catholic School Revival is just getting started. And for that, we thank God.

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