



Angel Scholarship Fund helps families afford a Catholic education

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

STORY AND PHOTO BY CAROL KOVACH

When I first heard about the Angel Scholarship Fund, I thought it was too good to be true," said Frank Zbiegien. "I even checked with the diocese to ensure it was legitimate. It just seemed too simple that it doesn't cost you anything to help educate a child."

Frank said communication is the key to helping others across the diocese understand how the Ohio tax credit program works. "It's a win-win for taxpayer donors, scholarship recipients, and the diocese," he added.

Contributions to ASF provide tuition assistance for students to attend Catholic schools. Donors can receive a 100% Ohio income tax credit of up to \$750 (\$1,500 for married couples filing jointly) against their state tax liability.

In other words, the state of Ohio allows taxpayers to "spend" some of the state income taxes they must pay to provide tuition assistance for students seeking an education in a Catholic school.

A 1973 graduate of St. Joseph High School in Cleveland — now Villa Angela-St. Joseph High School since the all-girls Villa Angela Academy and all-boys St. Joseph High School merged in 1990 — Frank is active with the school's alumni network. He is working to encourage his classmates and other VASJ alumni to participate in ASF. Seventy VASJ students benefited from ASF scholarships last school year, helping their parents to afford tuition costs.

"I heard about ASF at my parish, St. Mary in Chardon," Frank said. For two years, he designated his ASF donation to a diocesan elementary school where a friend was the principal. Then he switched his ASF designation to VASJ.

"At our 50th reunion, we passed out information about the ASF scholarship program," Frank said, noting he is encouraging other classes to do the same. VASJ is doing its part to promote the program by making information available, including a page explaining ASF in the school's annual report. The diocesan website also includes ASF information.

"It all comes down to communication and awareness," Frank said. He is working with VASJ officials to reengage alumni, update contact lists and encourage participation in the ASF program.

In the 2023-2024 school year, Frank said about \$72,000 was funneled into ASF through VASJ alumni. The next year, as awareness increased, the amount grew to \$92,000, with \$17,000 coming from Class of '73 alumni.

Frank has fond memories of his high school days, recalling that he ran track and cross country. After graduation, he attended Case Western Reserve University, earning an accounting degree. He enjoyed a 48-year career with Valpak, becoming a franchise owner and living in Florida for many years.

Frank reconnected with his high school after returning to Cleveland and began getting more involved. He was inducted into the school's Hall of Fame and is an Advisory Board member, serving on several committees, including advancement and marketing.

He and his wife Aimee have four adult daughters. †



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