

Scholarship Fund

Goal \$200,000



St. Brendan School initiative supports Angel Scholarship Fund

STORY AND PHOTO BY CAROL KOVACH

With Tax Day — and the last opportunity to participate in the Angel Scholarship Fund for tax year 2024 — fast approaching, the St. Brendan School community decided to get creative to encourage support for the program. In January, they started a challenge offering incentives to students and their families to help build excitement and participation in the Angel Scholarship Fund program.

A chart on the school wall keeps families posted about the progress. Rewards include things like dress-down days, ice cream treats and more when benchmarks are achieved.

“We’re pleased with the results,” said Lisa Fusco, who became finance director for St. Brendan Parish in May 2024.

ASF, as it’s commonly known, offers tuition assistance to students attending Catholic schools across the eight-county Diocese of

Cleveland, helping to ensure that a quality, faith-based education is within reach for every child, regardless of their family’s financial situation.

Ohio taxpayers who contribute to the fund can benefit from a 1:1 state tax credit, making it a win-win situation for both donors and students. Donors receive a 100% Ohio income tax credit of up to \$750 (\$1,500 for married couples filing jointly) against their state tax liability. ASF donations made by April 15 are eligible for a 2024 tax credit, and the funds can be directed to the donor’s school of choice or the area of greatest need. There is no cost to taxpayers who choose to participate.

Lisa said during a Finance Council meeting last fall, school tuition was reviewed and they looked at options to maximize their dollars with the least impact to families.

“We decided to raise tuition by \$1,500 in order to take maximum advantage of EdChoice,” Lisa said. EdChoice is a state scholarship program that allocates up to \$6,166 for students in grades K-8 and \$8,408 for students in grades 9-12 whose families meet income guidelines. The application window for the 2025-2026 school year remains open through June 30, 2026. About 80% of St. Brendan families qualify for the maximum EdChoice scholarship, said Julie Onacila, St. Brendan principal.

Lisa said presentations were made at all three North Olmsted parishes that support St. Brendan School: St. Brendan, St. Clarence and St.

Richard. Father Tom Woost is St. Brendan's pastor and administrator of St. Richard Parish, while Father Neil Kookoothe is St. Clarence's pastor. She indicated that both pastors were very supportive. Father Neil told his parishioners that "Through the ongoing Keeping the Faith initiative that connects every parish to a school, St. Brendan's is our school, too."

Father Tom said, "Because of Keeping the Faith and forging a great relationship among the three North Olmsted parishes, our parishioners are taking ownership of Catholic education and seeing our school here at St. Brendan as their own. The Angel Scholarship has been the easiest and best fundraiser to help enhance our school as we strengthen the Catholic faith within our youth."

Lisa said the goal of raising tuition was to get access to all the funds available without an extra cost to parents. "In order to prevent 'sticker shock,' we explained how they could actually pay less tuition by taking advantage of EdChoice and the Angel Scholarship Fund."

"Lisa and Vincent (DeLuca, head of school) walked parishioners and parents through the process step by step, showing how it worked," said Julie.

Lisa suggested that, if possible, parents could make an ASF donation, put the amount on their credit card,

file their taxes and use their state tax credit to make the credit card payment without incurring additional fees.

"We were blessed because many parents jumped right in on the idea," Lisa said.

The school campaign encourages all families to participate in ASF. In order to receive ASF funds, parents must fill out an online application for each child. Julie said all families are required to apply for EdChoice in order to be considered for any other diocesan tuition assistance. The application process has been streamlined, she added, making it easier for parents to take advantage of the various forms of financial assistance for their children's tuition costs.

One St. Brendan parent who has participated in ASF for the past three years is Ryan Schlitter. He's also been a junior high school math and PreK-8 physical education teacher at St. Brendan for the past 15 years. Ryan said it was "a no-brainer" to contribute to ASF. "It's even easier now than when it first started," he added.

He credited Lisa, Julie and Vincent for sharing information about the program continuously at faculty meetings and through all platforms at the school and the three parishes.

"It's the biggest fundraiser that won't cost you a dime," Lisa quipped. +



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