

# Footing the bill: Schools find ways to make Catholic education affordable

**By Elizabeth Lowe**

Catholic school fundraisers have evolved beyond shelling out a few coins to be out of uniform.

Schools keep coming up with creative and engaging ways to help reduce tuition and operational costs in an effort to keep Catholic education reasonable.

Nine schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore participate in the "Scrip" program, a fundraiser where participants earn money for their organization by using gift cards for everyday purchases.

It has been utilized at Our Lady of Perpetual Help School in Ellicott City for more than a decade.

"It is a win-win," said Jodi Phelan, the school's development director. "Everybody is going to shop throughout the course of the year and everyone seems to love gift cards."

Of the school's 165 families, 95 percent participate, said Phelan, who estimates that Scrip generates about \$15,000 annually for the school.

Phelan said Scrip is just one way the school raises funds to keep tuition affordable. The primary way is its annual fund drive.

Because of its fundraising efforts, the school had a nominal \$75 tuition increase from the 2013-14 to 2014-15 academic years, Phelan said. Last year tuition was \$6,625 per child; this year it is \$6,700.

Additional fundraisers include a fall festival, bull roast and breakfast with Santa.

"We try to take advantage of every opportunity to bring families together in ways that are fun and provide an income stream for the school," said Phelan, who noted Our Lady of Perpetual Help also pursues grants for special projects.

In addition to Scrip, St. John Regional Catholic School in Frederick offers the Friends of Catholic Education food gift card program. Similar to Scrip, it works to help families reduce the cost of tuition at Catholic schools in Frederick County.

Karen O'Boyle, admissions director at St. John Regional, said upwards of 200 families are enrolled in Scrip; about 30 regularly use it.

St. John Regional's fundraisers include spirit nights - at which families who attend the opportunity to enter their name into a raffle to earn a \$500 tuition credit - a 5K

foot race, golf tournament and an annual fund.

The school offers a multi-student discount for families with up to five children enrolled and a Catholic and non-Catholic rate.

Like St. John Regional, Sacred Heart School in Glyndon has offered Scrip for several years, said Gina Darby, its Home School Association coordinator for Scrip.

At Sacred Heart, Darby said, families who participate in Scrip receive a percentage off of their tuition, depending on how much they spend on gift cards.

She noted about 150 of Sacred Heart's 410 families participate; the average family saves about \$500 on their tuition bill.

"It's a great way to buy the things you're already purchasing," she said. "It's one extra step to easily save money. It's almost like free money. Who doesn't want that?"

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