

Help! Parents search for tuition assistance

Anna Santana faces many bills at the start of each month, not the least of which being the tuition payment at The Catholic High School of Baltimore for her daughter Samantha.

"I consider it probably the most important payment I make," Mrs. Santana said. "It's an investment in my daughter's future."

The parishioner of Our Lady of Fatima in Baltimore has to count every cent and avoid nights at the movies to make sure that payment is made.

She's wondered - like many parents around the Archdiocese of Baltimore in these belt-tightening times - about the availability of financial help or scholarships for families trying to make Catholic education viable.

Diligence is required to secure what assistance is available.

Dr. Ronald J. Valenti, superintendent of Catholic schools in the archdiocese, distributes an emergency fund each year to families enduring hardship, like a death in the family or the loss of a job. Usually receiving funds from the Archbishop's Annual Appeal, Dr. Valenti said the emergency fund is allotted \$30,000 to \$40,000 annually.

"This year, I think we have already depleted the emergency fund," Dr. Valenti said. "I will have to wait for the next allocation of the appeal, which will probably come around in May."

The Archbishop's Annual Appeal - which is currently accepting donations in parishes and online at www.archbalt.org - has contributed millions in scholarships, grants and aid in the past. Parishes often give funds received from the appeal to their own schools so families can apply for help.

The Partners in Excellence program has worked with local businesses and city

archdiocesan schools to help educate 5,000 at-risk students each year. Depending upon the school, that cost ranges from \$4,000 to \$9,000.

Independent groups offer assistance or scholarships, albeit with stipulations.

The Children's Scholarship Fund Baltimore aims to help 500 city residents attend the private school of their choice, up to eighth grade. Recipients must qualify for school lunch programs to receive the aid.

That fund is bolstered through private donations, which executive director Paul Ellis said are holding steady. Mr. Ellis said there is a cap of \$2,000 for aid per student, and that those chosen for assistance are picked through a lottery.

"The stories are getting more dire," Mr. Ellis said of those seeking help. "Our goal is to carry all of our children through eighth grade."

The Knott Scholarship Funds, set up in 1981 by Henry J. and Marion I. Knott and expanded upon over the next decade, award scholarships to Catholic students who attend Catholic elementary and secondary schools, as well as colleges. Residents of Baltimore City and Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick and Harford counties are eligible.

"They wanted the best and the brightest to pursue a Catholic education," said Knott Scholarship administrator Michelle Burke. "We don't require anything from them except that they keep their grades up."

WHERE TO TURN

Archdiocese of Baltimore: www.archbalt.org/schools/parents/tuition-assistance.cfm

Partners in Excellence: www.pieschools.org

Knott Scholarship Fund: www.knottscholar.org

Children's Scholarship Fund: www.csfbaltimore.org