

ANGELS AMONG US

Guardian Angels Catholic School
Clawson, MI
Sharon M. Hammerschmidt, Principal



Van Lunen Fellows Applied School Project – July, 2009

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Angels Among Us was started because I believe that everyone should have the opportunity to attend a faith-based school. This would be a participatory program for donors making significant tax deductible contributions to the school. Making faith based education affordable in today's economy is a challenge and a very real struggle for some of our families. Faith based education should be made available for everyone who wants it, not just for the elite. So I wanted to help create a way that would help make faith based education a reality for all who desired one. There is something that sets faith based education apart from walking in the doors of a public school. It is a wonderful feeling to walk into a classroom and talk about the wonderful things that our God has done for each and every one of us. To be able to talk about the gifts that He has given to us and how we should be sharing these gifts. As Christians we want to be able to help in all ways but I would not be fiscally responsible if I gave it all away. Being fiscally responsible is important especially in today's economy.

I am creating a project that would allow people to donate money that would help families and give them tuition assistance. I am not just asking for their money but I am also giving them an opportunity to come into my school and get a taste of the Guardian Angels Catholic School “**DIFFERENCE.**” I would have at least two opportunities for the donors to come into our school, one in the fall and one in the spring. These donors would come into the school for a continental breakfast, prayer and an activity. By bringing people in and participating in the Partner Mornings, there is the hope that they become vested in the school financially and emotionally. Though the project didn't get started, many different activities took place and the goal was tuition assistance and to this date over \$40,000.00 has been raised.

THEN

1948 Guardian Angles Catholic School opens its doors with 232 students. The enrollment has been as high as 525.

1990 A Latchkey Program added to accommodate working parents.

2003 Preschool program launched to meet the needs of our three and four year olds.

2003 US Department of Education awards Guardian Angels Catholic School its National Blue Ribbon of Excellence, recognizing our students' high standardized test scores and our dedication to academic excellence.

2006 Guardian Angels Parents' group (GAP) raised enough funds to rewire and update the computer lab and added 38 new Dell flat-screen desktop computers.

2007 Classrooms, library and the science lab equipped with additional new computers and printers.

NOW

2008 – 2009 Anniversary Celebration for Guardian Angels Parish’s 85 Years and Guardian Angels Catholic School’s 60 Years.

LOOKING AHEAD

2009 – 2010 Tentative launch date for Angels Among Us. With your help we will be able to continue our commitment to strong Catholic values and academic excellence. Guardian Angels Catholic School is located in the city of Clawson, Michigan, which is only 2.4 square miles. Most of our parents are employed by automotive companies and their suppliers and have been adversely affected by downsizing and current economy. We hope that you will experience the Guardian Angels Difference —YOU are so very important to our students!

Project Results:

Levels of Giving:

- **Angel Among Us** - \$1500.00
- **Earning Wings** - \$500.00
- **Angel in Training** - \$250.00
- **Angel Corp** - \$150.00 allows you to designate a gift to a specific school department

Brochures were to be made available to parishioners of the parish. Families were to share them with:

- Relatives, neighbors, friends
- Their place of employment
- Additionally, print pieces were developed for vendors holding our parish/school accounts.

Project goal: An allowance of \$1000 per student; at least \$250,000 in the launch year

ANGELS AMONG US

The kick-off of “Angels Among Us” has been forestalled to focus our attentions on the year-long celebration of the Parish/School Anniversary. Many activities were planned and kicked-off and my project was pushed to the back. However, many things were learned and were born out of my project.

I learned that before an “ask,” a relationship needs to be fostered. In the past 3 years, community building has been a top priority within the Guardian Angels Catholic Community. We have made cards for our parishioners who attend our morning masses. We have invited them to our dress rehearsals of our school programs and have invited them into the classrooms when special events have taken place. I have spent a lot of time community-building and bridging the gap between the school and the parish.

During the 2008 – 2009 school year, the print piece draft of this program was discussed by a Focus Group, School Advisory Committee (SAC) and Pastoral Staff. Participants were asked to review, critique and amend. We would have random students participate in the Partner Mornings to protect the integrity of the donor and recipient. The funds would be deposited into a single account and the pastor, principal and business manager would credit those who need the assistance.

I realized that we weren't necessarily equipped with all the things that were needed to begin this project. It was discovered that we didn't have a data base that would be fluid and functional. We updated contact information of parishioners and guests. We recognized the necessity of tying graduates to the school and began an alumni database. There is still a lot of work to do in this area but we are on the ground floor with the only place to go is up.

Another thing that came out of the beginning of this project was the importance of "friend" raising. This began with an "85 and Over Luncheon," to celebrate our 85th year as a parish and to say thank you to them for all the support they have given to us over the years. We tapped into the age group of people who were behind the building of our school. This was an afternoon where over seventy seniors came to interact with our students—the school choir sang for the guests, acted as servers, greeters and escorts and dined with the seniors. I believe that our student ambassadors walked away with a great insight and feeling for the history of our school. Fr. Gerry, our Pastor, announced to the guests that we would be having a "Big Band Dinner Dance" to help raise funds for tuition assistance. Many of the seniors said that they were too old to attend, but that they would make a donation to the fund. We made sure that we sent them personal invitations to the event and many of them did send a donation to the tuition assistance program.

A Big Band Dinner Dance was launched to celebrate the Anniversary as we attempted to reach yet another circle of parishioners and friends. Over 170 people attended this tuition assistance Big Band Dinner Dance. Fr. Gerry, our Pastor of Guardian Angels has an aura about himself that gets to peoples heart. He gets people to open their wallets to help out. Stories of the need of some of our families were shared by me and the Pastor. This was the beginning of something wonderful. Proceeds from this evening were designated to Tuition Assistance. The evening was a success and it has been decided that that this will become a yearly event because we would be naïve to think that the need for tuition assistance will go away.

With a need to target donors outside of the parish community, Guardian Angels participated in Schools Rule Competition hosted by Oakland Mall from September to December 2008. We were awarded 2nd Place, winning \$2500 and enjoyed media coverage (TV/newspaper) that accompanied the event. This program involved registering your shopping receipts with Oakland Mall and a tally of dollars spent was recorded by the mall. This was a total community event, and this money has gone into the tuition assistance program. Weekly updates were given to the people in our church bulletin as well as the weekly newsletter that went home to our parents.

With an eye to the economy and its impact on our family finances, a Review Committee has been formed to determine the amount and type of fundraisers allowed during the school year. It has been determined to limit the number of fundraisers made available to our families. The marketing guru's tell you to have two fundraisers a year, one in the spring and one in the fall. Our goal is to eventually get to that point. Our hope is to eliminate some of fundraisers that we currently do and hope that our families will help support one that comes along quarterly instead of monthly. We do not have a mandatory fundraising policy but we strongly encourage the participation of these events. We have recently classified our fundraisers into four categories. The first one is our Service fundraiser; this one consists of but not limited to Market Day, Moms to Mom sale and scrip. The purchase of Scrip allows the percent that is made to go directly to that family's tuition. Scrip will become available to the parishioners in the fall and any monies raised will go into the tuition assistance fund. The second one is the money makers, auction, raffle and walk-a-thon. The third one is our fellowship fundraisers, the Golf outing and our Family Bingo. The goal of the fellowship fundraisers is not to make money but to create fellowship. Making money on these events is a plus. Finally the "no cost" fundraiser. This would be programs such as "Campbell Soup Labels/Boxtops" and "Hollywood Market." These no cost programs entitle us to get supplies and equipment that help enhance our classrooms. It was also determined that we need to let people know of our needs, our goal, prior to kicking off the event.

My hope is that the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year, I will be able to kick off "**Angels Among Us.**" The wheels have been put in motion, the ground work laid and if there was ever a real need for tuition assistance, it is now. The time is now to let the Angels Soar!