

# Financial assistance to students of St. Jo, Guadalupe

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Prior to 2006, St. Joseph Academy had no program to provide financial assistance to economically disadvantaged youth.

In that year, a financial-aid program was developed, designed to operate in cooperation with Guadalupe Regional Middle School. The program was personally run by Brother Charles Imbergam, the president of SJA. Funds were identified to provide financial assistance to students graduating from Guadalupe so they could attend St. Joseph. Ten members of Guadalupe's first graduating class then began attending St. Joseph with this financial assistance.

Within a few years, the program developed to the extent that a Financial Assistance Committee at St. Joseph assumed responsibility for its operation. Procedures were established, requiring families seeking financial aid to submit an application providing information about the family and its finances. This information was then submitted to a non-profit entity, the Private School Aid Service, which was qualified to review applications and make recommendations regarding providing financial assistance.

The Financial Assistance Committee then reviewed those recommendations and made a final decision about whether to provide financial aid, and the amount of aid. St. Joseph people worked with the families, making every effort to provide assistance to worthy students. This process at times was difficult, since some families had no regular income and some had limited ability to communicate in English. The entire process was handled in a confidential manner.

The program with Guadalupe Regional Middle School is the cornerstone of the St. Joseph financial aid program, but financial aid is not limited to those students. Other families learn of the program and approach the Financial Assistance Committee independently. These families go through the same application process as the Guadalupe families.

In addition to providing financial aid, St. Joseph has an emergency fund, used in the event a student's family is suddenly unable to pay the tuition due to unemployment, illness, or death in the family.

Guadalupe Regional Middle School is located on Lincoln Street in Brownsville, adjacent to the Guadalupe Catholic Church. The school is housed in a building owned by the Catholic Diocese of Brownsville, which was vacant at one time. The diocese allowed the school to renovate the building, which now provides space for classrooms and other facilities.

Guadalupe Regional Middle School is jointly operated by the Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament, the Congregation of Christian Brothers and Marist Brothers, a part of a world-wide Catholic order that sponsors wide-spread educational and service facilities.

Guadalupe provides education from the first through the eighth grades for some 80 students, all of whom come from economically disadvantaged homes. The families of these students live in different areas of Brownsville, including the Southmost area, the Cameron Park area and the area near the school.

Guadalupe provides tuitionfree education to its students. It is the only Catholic middle school in Texas offering tuition-free education. To meet its annual budget, the school generates income from a variety of fund-raising activities.

The school opened in 2002, and its first class of 30 students graduated in 2005. Ten of these students went on to attend St. Joseph Academy. Throughout its history, 237 students have now graduated, and about 80 have gone on to attend St. Joseph Academy. St. Joseph has been generous in providing

financial assistance, which varies according to the needs of the student, but on average it covers approximately 75 percent of the tuition at St. Joseph.

Michael Motyl, president of Guadalupe, asserts that the generous support provided by St. Joseph has made it possible for these students to continue their Catholic education, and has been of great help in fulfilling Guadalupe's mission of educating students from among Brownsville's economically disadvantaged families.

Motyl also reports that students who have graduated from both Guadalupe and St. Joseph have been successful in their studies at Columbia University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Texas A&M, as well as other schools, including the University of Texas at Brownsville. These graduates have achieved a level of education that would have been impossible without financial assistance.

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