



Q&A with Dr. Brian Bennett

Q. What does the Brian's Scholars Foundation mean to you?

A. It is a very rare circumstance to be approached with the concept and this gift of such earthshaking importance. The Blickenstaff Family understands the importance of a values-based education in the Catholic tradition of service to families and children. Blessed Sacrament Parish School has proudly opened its doors to the community for the past 60 years, and the Blickenstaff Family has now ensured that those doors will remain open to those in need of help.

Q. As one of five children, how did you benefit personally from a Catholic education?

A. Catholic schools have long upheld a religious education tradition based on the unique worth of every individual and the support of families where parents are seen as the primary educators. Catholic schools instill a passion for justice and a sense of service to others, especially those most in need. They are a central element in faith formation and should serve as a beacon of light in every community. For me, Catholic education has been a constant source of energy for community involvement and social justice.

Q. Blessed Sacrament Parish School has served families in East San Diego, City Heights, Rolando, the College Area and beyond for 60 years. What sets it apart from other schools?

A. Blessed Sacrament offers a faith-filled environment and a commitment to individual growth and academic excellence is primary to the life of the school. This was the commitment when the school opened 60 years ago, it was the commitment when I served as principal from 1979 through 1997, and it remains so today. The strength of the school has always rested in the commitment of the staff and the support of the parents and the parish and priests – Blessed Sacrament has been blessed by all of these!

Q. With the help of the Brian's Scholars Foundation, what can a Blessed Sacrament education mean for children whose families otherwise could not afford to pay the tuition?

A. Every family should have the right to choose the education that is best for their child or children. If their choice is a Catholic school, low income should never serve as a bar to their admission. To perpetuate income disparities and allow them to be used to keep children out of a Catholic school is immoral and profoundly anti-Catholic.

Q. In recent years, your career has centered on public school choice and quality charter schools. Are you coming full circle to focus on Blessed Sacrament and if so, why?

A. I don't believe that I ever left the starting point! Equity of educational choice is a fundamental tenet irrespective of what educational venue a parent chooses. Choice within the public school system, and between that system and others, including Catholic schools and other non-government schools through tuition scholarships, is all part of the same battle. Every family ought to have the right to choose among a variety of quality educational options. Wealthy families have always been able to do this – I simply believe that every family, regardless of income, ought to have the same choices. Equity of opportunity is a cherished American ideal – we need to start living it out for everyone.

Q. As an educator and a parent, how has being diagnosed with ALS changed your perspective on what is important?

A. Following my diagnosis, a greater sense of the power of prayer and a greater sense of urgency certainly exists. My wife, Jeanine, and our two daughters and their husbands, Monica and Dan and Annie and Ryan, are the topic of my constant thoughts. I am not angry or intimidated by having ALS – I am a patient ... I refuse to be a "victim." I am blessed every day by friends who keep me alive with their prayers and visits and notes. Having a terminal illness only sets me apart because I have some sense of how and why I will die – but everyone is "terminal" in a broader sense. All of us should be doing what we can to help others and love our families – and do so with a great sense of urgency!

Q. What are your hopes for Brian's scholars in the years to come?

A. I would hope that the amazing and unselfish commitment of the Blickenstaff Family would be a source of inspiration for others – and that the students who are helped by "Brian's Scholars" would expand this program to help every needy family in the city, the county, the state, and the country!