Mission Statement & Vision

We provide opportunities for children and adults from Chicago’s underserved neighborhoods to excel academically, grow spiritually, expand life experiences and become effective leaders.

Holy Family Ministries’ (HFM) programs strengthen communities by educating youth for entrance into high performing high schools; instilling in youth the values and resilience needed to succeed in life; providing them sanctuary within a struggling area of the city; and developing new, young leaders within the community.

Population Served

The Holy Family Ministries Center is located on the border between the Chicago communities of North Lawndale and West Garfield Park, and serves youth from these and surrounding neighborhoods such as Austin and Humboldt Park. Children from the neighborhoods we serve struggle with:

Poverty: 100% of the students at Holy Family School qualify for free lunches based upon the State Board of Education’s guidelines. All of the students in our program come from low-income families. 47% of households in North Lawndale/Garfield Park live in poverty.

Cultural Isolation: Children grow up lacking the experience and confidence to go away to college or take a job outside of their comfort zone.

Safety: The Center is located in the troubled Harrison Police District 11. Of the 23 police districts in the City of Chicago, the Harrison District is ranked highest in the number of all crimes, violent crimes, and in 1st and 2nd degree homicide, with over twice as many as the Chicago mean. The District also ranks highest in the number of drug abuse crimes, with more than five times the Chicago mean.

Struggling neighborhood public schools: The three public high schools in our neighborhood have a mean ACT score of 14.7, and less than 4% of graduates meet “college readiness” benchmarks! Rather than attend these schools, our goal is to prepare our students for admittance into private and selective enrollment public and charter high schools.

History

Holy Family Lutheran School was founded in 1985 as an alternative to under-performing area public schools in the Cabrini Green public housing community. An after-school program was added in 1992. To streamline operations, programs were united in 1999 under the umbrella of a new 501(c)(3) organization and Holy Family Ministries was created.

In 2008, HFM opened the 45,000 square foot Holy Family Ministries Center on the historic Homan Square campus in North Lawndale, Chicago to serve as a permanent home for Holy Family’s programs. The new Center was built to allow for the expansion of critically needed services. Since opening, program enrollment has tripled in the new facility.

In 2010, after a merger with St. Gregory Episcopal School, the school was renamed Holy Family School in recognition of HFM’s unique operating model – a public charity umbrella organization operating an ecumenically sponsored faith-based school alongside several secular programs.
Holy Family School: Kindergarten through 8th Grade

Holy Family School nurtures the healthy social, academic, physical, and spiritual development of Chicago youth. Students enter with a wide range of abilities and academic readiness skills, yet, by the time they graduate 8th grade, typically every graduate is accepted by a strong high school.

Factors in our success include:

- A focus on competency in core subjects of reading, mathematics, social studies, language arts, science, and technology, supplemented by instruction in art, music, and physical education
- Emphasis on problem-solving skills
- School-wide character education to teach respect for self, other students, teachers and parents
- The Parent Education Initiative, designed to provide training and education regarding best-practice parenting skills, and to offer activities for parents and children to promote positive bonds
- The 8th Grade Mentoring Program matches a young professional with 8th grade students to help them apply to competitive private and/or public college-prep high schools. The same type of mentoring program has been expanded to 7th graders to begin the process of high school research and selection.
- Electives, including STEM enrichment activities or music in middle school
- Intensive support for students who are struggling academically and need additional assistance to stay on track
- The Discover America trip for 8th grade students to visit colleges in other states was designed to encourage students to expand their horizons outside of the Chicago area, and to dream big dreams. This program has been expanded in a modified version for our 7th graders, giving all participating students the opportunity to see diversity on campus and envision college in their future.

Holy Family School Outcomes

Academic Excellence

Holy Family School uses a national standardized test, the Northwest Evaluation Association – Measures of Academic Progress (NEWA MAP), that compares our students to students from all economic backgrounds across the country. In 2016 the school average in reading on the NWEA MAP exceeded the national norm, and our composite score approximated it.

High School Placement

Over the past six years, 99% of our 8th grade graduates enrolled in private and selective-enrollment public and charter high schools (100% in 2014, 2015 and 2016).

Our Students

We also evaluate success by listening to our students!

“At Holy Family I learned important skills that I will use throughout my whole life. I learned to always be the best person I could be, put my best effort forward, treat everyone with respect, and to remember that my achievements in life will always follow me and set me apart from mediocrity.”
Little Learners Academy

The Little Learners Academy equips children ages 3 to 5 for kindergarten and beyond by offering an ambitious curriculum designed to challenge students as well as make learning an exciting process of discovery. The preschool is combined with a child-care program to provide care for the entire day to accommodate working parents.

Little Learners Academy Outcomes

Students who are preparing to enter kindergarten take a nationally-normed Kindergarten Readiness Test. This past year, 50% of our graduates scored stanines of 4, 5, and 6 representing “readiness” for Kindergarten and 29% of our graduates scored stanines of 7, 8 or 9 representing Above Average readiness for Kindergarten entry. Graduates falling in the Marginally or Not Ready stanines are often referred and evaluated for special needs services such as speech and language development.

Little Buddies

My preschool buddies like to play a lot; they’re energetic, silly and carefree.

I’d like to think they look up to me, because I’m helpful, smart and nice to them.

I’m heading off to high school where I won’t see them. But I’ll be back to visit and to check on them.

I hope they do well and live carefree, My Little Buddies.

Poem by Brian W.

Adventures in Learning (after school & summer)

A report by the Illinois Center for Violence Prevention - Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois, indicates that “In response to a George Mason University study, 72% of Illinois’ law enforcement leaders chose providing ‘more after-school programs and educational child care programs’ as the most effective strategy for reducing youth violence and crime, over hiring more police officers, prosecuting juveniles as adults, and installing more metal detectors and surveillance cameras in schools.”

The Adventures in Learning program provides youth with a safe haven, caring and trusted adult role models, educational support and enrichment, meaningful activities, and exposure to the larger world outside their neighborhoods. Our strategy combines activities that are proven winners in after-school and summer-programs (arts, fitness, technology, etc.) with new and out-of-the-box initiatives that speak to youth in a fresh voice (spoken word performance, drama).

Adventures in Learning Outcomes

HFM uses a survey adapted from the Colorado Trust’s Toolkit for Evaluating Positive Youth Development which measures reported improvement in academics, life skills, life choices, core values, and sense of self. In a May 2016 survey, 74% of students reported improvement in academics. 89% reported feeling good about themselves, with more control over things that happen to them and feeling better about the future; 86% indicated caring about the feelings of others and telling the truth more often; and 93% believed they are good at making friends, listening to others, and making good decisions/problem solving.
In 2013, Holy Family Ministries created The Peace Exchange, an innovative leadership development initiative for young people ("Peace Builders") dedicated to peace and violence prevention.

The program includes in-depth study of the issues of peace, violence, and nonviolence; an exposure trip outside of the country; and a final phase in which Peace Builders share their new knowledge and experiences with youth within their communities. We have now finished three full years of peace training. Our first group of Peace Builders traveled to Thailand and Burma in late 2013, and our second group traveled to Nicaragua in 2015.

Our 2016 Peace Builders completed 60 hours of classes and seminars this year as did the first two groups, covering topics from Genocide to Anti-Bullying to Peace Circles to Child Abuse and Trauma. While the pre-trip education and workshop experiences are essential to the teens’ understanding, their travel undoubtedly has the most impact. During their trip to South Africa this past year, the Peace Builders witnessed poverty, food insecurity, and inadequate housing on a staggering scale. They heard first-hand accounts of crime, xenophobia, genocide, domestic violence, and a completely inadequate educational system. But their greatest lesson was witnessing the power of human capital, with like-minded individuals working together to bring about change.

The Peace Builders now continue to share what they learned in their studies and international travel with thousands of neighborhood youth in their communities. A documentary film of the trip, used by the Peace Builders as they share the ideas and concepts they’ve learned, can be viewed at: http://www.peacex.org

Holy Family Ministries earns Charity Navigators’ 4-star rating for the fourth consecutive year!

Only 11% of Charity Navigator rated charities have received four consecutive 4-star evaluations, indicating that “Holy Family Ministries outperforms most other charities in America.”