

August 14, Celebration
GSS Chairman Speech

Thank you Archbishop Aymond for being an integral part of our celebration.

We could not celebrate today without remembering our founder Fr. Harry Tompson S.J.

In 1999 and 2000, Fr. Harry gave the city of New Orleans inspiration that would drive the push to open Good Shepherd to continue after his passing. Rather than dwelling on the physical pain he suffered at the time, he helped us realize and remember that as long as at-risk children in our city suffer, we all suffer: that all life was valuable in our community and blessed with potential. He also gave us the inspiration to work towards saving these at-risk boys and girls; kids whom he knew were just as special as children from families of better means and resources.

For Fr. Harry's inspiration, model of compassion, and love of all in our city, we will always be grateful.

Through the determination of many, Good Shepherd Nativity Mission School opened its doors to 30 kindergarten and first grade children in August 2001.
Four months after Fr. Tompson's death.

Over the past ten years, our benefactors, Board of Directors, and staff have all partnered together and ensured that every child admitted to Good Shepherd receives an educational opportunity rooted in the Nativity Model and designed to help him or her begin to create lives as productive citizens in our community, lives beyond the poverty that has often plagued their families for generations.

When we opened in 2001, our educational model and approach to the care for and instruction of at-risk students was proven and tested in older schools in the Network of Nativity Schools around the U.S. The holistic approach to the education of at-risk urban youth pioneered 40 years ago has proven nationally to contradict the myth that children who live in poverty cannot achieve.

At Good Shepherd we expect our students to eventually become assets to and leaders in our community as "men and women for others," the hallmark of a Jesuit education.

When a child first walks through the doors of Good Shepherd, our Board, staff, and benefactors are determined that this child will succeed. That this child will learn and embrace his or her self-worth and develop the talents and gifts he or she was born with.
Today, we're fortunate to see what Fr. Tompson knew a school like Good Shepherd could accomplish in New Orleans and what at-risk students are able to accomplish when they are given more—not less.

We now know what compassion and love along with educators; corporate, nonprofit, and private benefactors; and parents and guardians can accomplish with children when they remain dedicated, united, and focused on the potential of those children.

Success of the Nativity/Miguel Model throughout the United States reminds us that the children that our society often has overlooked and dismissed remain our greatest treasures and resources and that we must remain focused on our long-term goals for our school and each boy and girl entrusted into our care.

I am proud to say we have all our graduates attending quality area high schools on partial or full scholarships. We have high school cheerleaders and football players, we have some struggling with a few subjects, a few have changed high schools they originally went to, however all still remain in high school where they continue to build on the foundation received at Good Shepherd.

We will continue to monitor the progress of these graduates through our Graduate Support Program, providing them with the academic and social support they need as they work towards their goals.

It has not been easy. We have lost children along the way for various reasons including – Katrina when only 38 of 90 students returned and we started rebuilding the student body, families move out of the area, students have been expelled for inappropriate behavior and we have lost one student over the years when the guardian refused to do service hours.

We are prayerful we made an impact on these lives even though they did not complete the entire eight years with us.

In our tenth year as we reflect on our accomplishments and the lives we have impacted, the need for Good Shepherd in the New Orleans community is still great.

At The Good Shepherd School, we unfortunately see daily the pressures put on the young lives of our students.

I have been asked more than once - not was starting Good Shepherd School the right thing to do; But what made Fr. Tompson think he could actually establish much less maintain a school for at risk children living in poverty in New Orleans where the tuition is paid by others.

My favorite reply is – By the grace of God and a group of people who knew we are all called to mission in one way or another.

What was needed then and is still needed ten years later are God's help and a group of committed individuals who are called to be persons for others. A group of people willing to commit their time, talents and treasurers, ones who take true ownership.

Ones who have what I call “a fire in their gut” for the mission.

We have such a group of people here in New Orleans.

A group of people who are called to mission.

A group of people who are called to be persons for others.

This group of people who know very well they cannot do it alone.

The sustainability of Good Shepherd School for the next ten years will take, as was in the beginning - God's help and the time, talent and treasures of many many people and different organizations.

It cannot be said today as some said ten years ago that Good Shepherd School will not survive. We can now say Good Shepherd School has survived and the New Orleans community has acknowledged they are blessed to have a real opportunity to continue to help those in our own area in need.

We pray the New Orleans community will continue to step forward as they have for the first ten years and assist in the sustainability of Good Shepherd School for the next ten years.

To all of those who do step forward with compassion in their hearts and respect for human dignity we say - May God bless you.