

Catholic school in Uvalde, Texas, is reaching out to help community heal

WASHINGTON (CNS) – When schools close for the summer, their websites and Facebook pages often get pretty quiet too.

That's not the case for Sacred Heart Catholic School in Uvalde, Texas, established in 1913 by the Teresian Sisters.

The first image on the school's website is a map of Texas with children's handprints and the message "Uvalde Strong" with a moving banner underneath that says: "Pray for Uvalde."

Since the last day of school in late May, the school's Facebook page has had frequent posts. These posts – without directly mentioning the May 24 mass shooting that occurred just a few miles away at Robb Elementary School – tell the story of how this school is reaching out to the local community while dealing with its own loss and heartbreak.

On May 20, the pre-K through seventh-grade school posted photos of its own graduates, followed by a post three days later of local graduating high school seniors who came back to visit their former elementary school dressed in graduation caps and gowns.

The images of visiting graduates and current students, along with accompanying words of encouragement for them, were posted just a day before the mass shooting by a teenage gunman, who killed 19 children and two teachers at the nearby public elementary school.

Sacred Heart's Facebook posts in the days since that shooting are somber reminders that everything has changed. There were no pictures from the last day of school or notes about keeping

up with summer reading.

Instead, the school has posted information on the availability of counselors at the school and free child care services for families attending a funeral Mass. It also posted reminders of "Wellness Wednesday at Sacred Heart Catholic School" with games, art and counseling services for children and families.

"This will be a space of grace for healing hearts," one post said.

The school also announced it would have a rock painting table at a June 18 "Uvalde Strong Wellness and Resource Fair" taking place at the local junior college.

And on June 16, the school posted photos of the installation of a comprehensive security system at the school – donated by the security company Covergint Technologies – with security cameras, magnetic locks, a key card system and wiring and hardware throughout the school.

Several families, including those with students from Robb Elementary, have said they would like their children to attend Sacred Heart School in the fall. Six families have already enrolled their children as of early June, according to the San Antonio Archdiocese, and dozens more have picked up enrollment packets or scheduled tours.

The main questions they have are about security measures in place, help for tuition cost and availability of counselors.

There are currently 55 elementary school students at Sacred Heart School, but the school has room for 170.

"Additional funds will allow us to ease the anxiety our families will face coming back to school this fall," said Joseph Olan, Sacred Heart's principal.

"With a more secure facility, tuition support and counseling staff, we can more fully embrace additional children and their

families who have experienced this horrific tragedy,” he said in a statement.

Convergint Technologies, with its donated \$42,000 security package, was an initial contributor.

“We have a corporate culture of service, but this project was an incredibly special mission. It was a humbling experience, and a very special day of giving back for our team,” said Rick Alexander, the company’s general manager.

The San Antonio Archdiocese is seeking additional funding for safety and security measures, tuition assistance and counseling services for Uvalde families in need of immediate care and a commitment for long-term support. To help in this effort go to <https://www.givecentral.org/SacredHeartUvalde> or text the word “Uvalde” to (210) 750-6712.