



## HELPING OUT IN “BOOK DESERTS”

One of the simplest findings in reading research is this: Kids learn to read by reading. The more time children spend engaged with text, the more they will achieve as readers and writers. This is great news for kids who are surrounded with interesting and high-quality books. Unfortunately, not every child is.

“Book Deserts” are neighborhoods where it is difficult to find books for purchase in places such as Target, grocery stores, or gift shops. For example, in higher-income neighborhoods, an average of 300 books are available for purchase for every child that lives in that neighborhood. In low-income neighborhoods, that number can be much lower, such as a neighborhood in Detroit where each book available for purchase *would have to be shared by 830 children* (Neuman & Moland, 2016)! In such neighborhoods, schools become the source of reading material for kids, and they need as many books as they can get. So we are organizing a book drive with a very specific goal...Oak Park Public Schools is a district 15 minutes away, but worlds away in terms of the resources the schools and families have for supporting children’s literacy development. I work as a literacy coach there and **my goal is to give each of the ten first-grade teachers 25 books, totaling 250 books.**

Additionally, research has suggested that African American students learned more and read more successfully when the books feature African American characters and deal with themes prevalent in African American lives (Bell & Clark, 1998). In Oak Park, the students we are serving are primarily African American, so we are providing a list of books recommended by literacy experts to meet such criteria. Copies of the list are available by the collection boxes in the church vestibules, or can be accessed on the parish website.

If you would prefer to help out in a different way, you could also make a monetary donation using the Christian Outreach envelopes at offertory time during mass. Just make checks payable to Sacred Heart and write “books” in the memo line, and write “books” on the envelope. I am hopeful that my church community will help us reach this goal! Thank you!

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