



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on November 20, 2017

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This Little Light of Hers

A typical day at Oklahoma City's Little Light Christian School looks much like one at any other school. Students arrive in the morning, have breakfast, attend classes, eat lunch, attend more classes, stay for after-school programs, and then return home.

There is, however, one big difference between this school and all others: Every student at Little Light has a parent who's in prison.



"We are the only school that we know of in the world that's doing what we're doing," executive director Robin Khoury said in an interview with *The New American*.

It took years for Khoury's vision of such a school to come to fruition. At first, she wasn't even sure what her vision was. All she knew for certain was that one day in the 1990s, during her morning devotions, she "felt impressed by God that He just said to me, 'Someday you will have a school for poor kids.'" At that time, she "was almost like Sarah, who laughed," because although she was then homeschooling her own children, she had no formal training in education or any idea of how to go about realizing this dream.

Nothing much happened with her call for a long time, though Khoury said she thought about it from time to time. She did, however, work extensively in children's ministry at her church, taking training along the way to learn how to be better at it.

Eventually she got into prison ministry and began mentoring women at a nearby correctional center. As part of her ministry, she attended a conference on women's incarceration. One of the topics of the conference was the problems of children with incarcerated parents, among them depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Then came the clincher. According to Khoury, "[The speaker said] the moment a parent is incarcerated, [children] become up to seven times more likely to be incarcerated by their 23rd birthday, and the first thing that happens is that they begin to struggle in school, and that's when God just tapped me on the shoulder and said, 'These are your kids. These are the kids that I'm talking about for your school.'"

Shortly thereafter, in 2009, Khoury incorporated Little Light Ministries and assembled a board of directors. For about two years there was a lot of talk about the school but very little action. Finally, the board told Khoury it was time to pick a date to open the school, so she chose autumn 2012.

"We didn't have any money. We didn't have a facility. We didn't have any kids," she said. "And God provided those things kind of in a domino fashion after we made a commitment to do it."

The first prospective donor Khoury approached gave \$100,000 outright, plus a \$50,000 matching grant, which was enough to get the school started. Apparently he was pleased with the results because he recently provided Little Light with an additional \$1.6 million to purchase a former school building sitting on nearly 10 acres of ground. The school moved to the new facility this past summer.



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Little Light is a privately funded, 501(c)(3) nonprofit that accepts no government funding. It charges no tuition yet supplies students with transportation to and from school, two meals a day, instruction, and clothing.

"We do what we have to do to help our families and to help our children," explained Khoury.

That means going far beyond simply giving kids an education. If a family has a need, Khoury and her staff do their best to help meet it. For example, in talking with the mother of one of her students recently, Khoury learned that the family had been evicted from their apartment after turning in the landlord for refusing to deal with a bedbug infestation.

"It was just breaking my heart because I thought this is exactly what Jesus was talking about when he said that you shouldn't abuse the poor and you shouldn't do things to people like this just because you can," she said. "We see people all the time that take advantage of these poor little families."

Khoury arranged to supply the family with leftovers from the school's meals.

Of course, Little Light's focus is on education, and the school's 32 students, ranging in age from four to 14, do get a rigorous, well-rounded one. When they arrive each morning, they are treated to a hot breakfast, after which they attend morning meetings, a social time with classmates and teachers. Then the academic day commences, starting with Bible class. They also have chapel once a week. ("We are unapologetically biblically based," declared Khoury.) After lunch, the youngest children have nap time, while the older ones go to special classes including maker studio, a creative class involving imagination and engineering; art class; private music lessons; and choir. Later in the day, said Khoury, the after-school program involves students in "fun but mentally stimulating things" such as archery, drumming, and cooking. Then the students are taken home.

Teaching students of incarcerated parents isn't always easy, but it can be rewarding.

A second-grader named Jamar came to Little Light having failed reading at his previous school. "I have F's in reading," he said, "but that's 'cause that other school wasn't teaching me nothing."

One reason the other school wasn't teaching him is that he had major behavioral problems, as the Little Light staff soon learned. At times he would hide under the teacher's desk and refuse to come out.

Khoury made him a proposition: "You promise to try your best this year, and we promise to teach you to read." He accepted.

Sure enough, by the end of the school year, he was reading at the fourth-grade level. Khoury asked him if he remembered their deal. He nodded, and she asked him what it was.

"I promised to try my best, and you promised to teach me to read," he beamed.

"Our goal is to break the cycle of generational incarceration within these families," stated Khoury. "I've got one little boy who, his mother has eight or ten siblings and so does his dad, and every single one of them has been or is now in prison. So what do you think his future is when he sits back and looks at 'What am I going to be when I grow up?'"

"We're trying to help [our students] make a road map that shows them options, that prepares them for life, that gives them life skills and how to survive in a neighborhood that isn't a poverty neighborhood. What are the unwritten rules of society? How do you speak to people? How do you show respect? How do you dress? What do you say? What do you do? We're going into all of that with these children



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because these are a lot of the things that they just don't know."

Khoury said she hopes to start a "parent university" soon to help her students' mothers and fathers improve their parenting skills. She also wants to "branch out and give families more support because a lot of these kids also live with a grandma or a family member who might be totally overwhelmed." In addition, she dreams of opening a church at the new building because, she explained, "I know that we could care for them more if we also had a church family that was looking after them as well as just our school."

It's a tall order, but if anyone can do it, it's the staff of Little Light. After all, they have on their side the One who makes all things possible.

Photo: Little Light Christian School



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