

# The University of Texas at Brownsville



ENDOWMENT PROFILE

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## Fighting Voter Apathy in Perpetuity

ARMAND MATHEW, Oblates of Mary Immaculate, has two faded bumper stickers on his car: If you want peace, work for justice and Si quieres paz, lucha por la justicia.

These wise words of Pope Paul VI have guided this 90-year-old Oblate Father on his life's journey of service. In 2001, Mathew returned to the Rio Grande Valley and Brownsville, where he had served for 16 years as pastor of Immaculate Conception Cathedral. Mathew's friendship with Dr. Juliet V. García, President of The University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB), was the catalyst for Mathew's decision to return to his adopted home town. Mathew had accepted García's invitation to join the university and launch the Center for Civic Engagement.

"There I was sitting in my new office trying to put this Center together and it occurred to me that voter apathy was a problem that a university center for civic engagement should address," Mathew said. "Having lived in Brownsville before, I was aware of the apathy of its residents when it comes to voting and participation in public discourse and public action."

Thus began Mathew's mission to ensure that Kids Voting USA—Brownsville became an established component of the K-12 curriculum throughout all Brownsville schools. Kids Voting is an age-appropriate social studies curriculum that takes the mystery out of the voting process by simulating voter registration, voting day roster sign-in, and casting ballots.

"Kids Voting is of great value to our home town. Children in all of our schools grow up knowing about and learning to appreciate the privilege to vote," Mathew said. "Just recently 152 teachers showed up early Saturday morning to attend a Kids Voting training session."

Mathew believes deeply in the mission of Kids Voting, but he understands that such initiatives must become independent and self-perpetuating to survive. In 2005, therefore, Mathew created The Kids Voting USA Brownsville Endowment.

"Through Kids Voting, I have learned that it is important that every American should take the initiative to vote," said UTB junior Sonia Figueredo, who became interested in civic engagement through the Kids Voting program in her high school. "Kids Voting made such an impact on my life that a month before my 18th birthday, I registered to vote. I am so grateful to Fr. Mathew for his work with making sure that Kids Voting remains in Brownsville schools."



Father Armand Mathew

No sooner had the Kids Voting Endowment been created than the word circulated among friends and colleagues: "Bring your checkbooks to Father Mathew's birthday party." The custom became well established. Now, seven years later, at Mathew's 90th birthday celebration, Mathew was once again showered with gifts in the form of checks or payroll deduction forms written out to Kids Voting USA--Brownsville.

"I could live a thousand years and never merit the love and generosity and the respect and friendship that I have received as a priest," said Mathew. "You just don't merit that, it comes to you as a reward, and I suppose that's why my life has been enchanted."

If you would like more information about how to start an endowment, please contact: [Office of Development](#) | [giving@utb.edu](mailto:giving@utb.edu) | (956) 882-4328