

THE GOOD NEWS

FROM ALUMS & FRIENDS & FAMILIES

Providing tuition assistance to students at Community of Saints Regional Catholic School



Dollar-for-Dollar Match Now — Until June 30!

Help us reach our goal to support tuition assistance.

See page 4 for details.



First grade students on a Zoom call show their teacher what they're reading during the quarantine.

INSIDE

- >> Fr. Steve's Column
Page 2
- >> Remembering how Jerry Sexton started A&F&F
Page 3
- >> COS Class of 2016 is headed to college
Pages 4-5

During Crisis, COS Supports Students and Families

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on school families has been a constant worry for Principal Bridget Kramer. At Community of Saints, over 65% of families qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch, one of the highest rates for Catholic schools in the archdiocese, putting them at greatest risk during the economic downturn. What follows is a look at how the school responded to the crisis.

Assistant principal and middle school teacher Nick Yannerelly remembered the day before everything changed. "It was Wednesday, March 11. We decided we should have a plan in case we had to send home Chromebooks. The next day Bridget came to my room before school and said, 'We need to send home Chromebooks today.'"

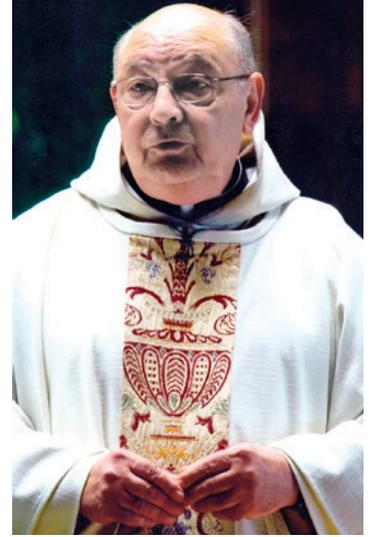
Everything moved at warp speed. To stay on top of things, Principal Kramer compartmentalized each area that required her attention. "We needed to hash out what distance learning looks like, think through the sustainability of the school, and ask what basic needs we needed to provide families to support them," she said. One thought that troubled her was how they would maintain the school's tight-knit community. "We take a lot of pride in creating an environment that's conducive to student learning. How would we transfer that to 130 households? How would we still make it feel like Community of Saints?"

— Continued on page 6



Distance learning with COS third grade students.

MESSAGE FROM **father steve**



Dear Alums, Families, and Friends of Community of Saints:

These last months have taught me that flexibility is the name of the game and the lead article of this issue demonstrates that our faculty and students are up to the challenge and succeeding.

Community of Saints continues to increase enrollment. Next year we will add a second kindergarten room. We already have 29 students registered for kindergarten in the fall, and we conservatively expect to have 32-35 students by the start of school. We have received commitments from several of our funders to help cover the additional costs.

Growth is wonderful, and it also brings new challenges and opportunities. With the addition of a second kindergarten we have maxed out our space. The Facilities and Development committees of the Board will need to find a way for us to expand the use of the building to accommodate our growing student body.

I continue to remind people that the growth and development of COS is in part the fruit of your work and generosity. Without you, low-income families would not have the opportunity for a Catholic education for their children. The present unemployment condition has affected our families, so the need for tuition assistance will be greater for school year 2020-2021.

This year, our 8th grade graduates had a "drive-by" ceremony. These students are finishing their life at COS in a way they never expected in their wildest imaginations. Yet these young people demonstrated flexibility, accountability, and creativity in the face of "distance learning" and the pandemic. They demonstrated a maturity and industriousness beyond their years. They are a credit to their family, school, and community. Any high school would be lucky to get them as freshmen next school year.

Thank you for your ongoing assistance to the ministry of COS. You make the difference. Without you COS would not be possible. Thank you.

With gratitude,
Fr. Stephen Adrian
Canonical Administrator COS



COS 8th grade students on their annual fall trip to Wolf Ridge Environmental Center in northern Minnesota.

Margaret Pohl's Estate Gift Supports COS Students

We'd like to acknowledge the generous gift from Margaret (Galvin) Pohl's estate. Margaret died on March 1 at the age of 99. "She almost made it to 100," said her son, Dan.

Margaret grew up in a house on Carrie Street, and attended school at St. Matthew's. "Mom always had a soft spot for St. Matthew's and wanted to support the parish," said Dan. "She'd be very pleased her gift is going to support the students at Community of Saints."

If you have questions about estate gifts, gifts from stock or IRAs, please call Doug Lieser at 651-457-2510.



Margaret (Galvin) Pohl

Remembering Jerry Sexton '44, Founder of A&F&F

From the Editor: *I met Jerry Sexton for the first time when he came to my house in 2007 and asked me to be the editor for a newsletter he wanted to publish. He already had a name for it, "The Good News." I was dubious — he was insistent. The newsletter was part of a bigger plan he had to support St. Matthew's School. Since that meeting 13 years ago, over \$2 million has been raised for tuition assistance, first at St. Matt's, now at COS. Jerry passed away on March 21 and to honor him, I want to share the story of how this whole Alums & Friends & Families thing got started, because Jerry was the one who made it happen.*

Back in the early 2000's, Jerry Sexton was pessimistic about the future of Catholic education. He saw the trend lines, tuition rising, enrollment dropping, and a growing number of parishes less and less able to financially support a school. Jerry, along with his entire extended family, graduated from St. Matthew's. "He had a lot of good memories from going there," said his daughter, Sheila Sexton Stai '70. "He saw the school was faltering and he thought — what can we do to save it?"

It wasn't the first time Jerry had led an effort to shore up Catholic education. A few years earlier, he'd brought together a number of urban Catholic elementary

Jerry and Marilyn Sexton

schools who were all struggling. The schools banded together and approached large donors for support. The result was multi-year, multi-million dollar contributions from the Pohlada and Rauenhurst foundations.

Now Jerry trained his attention on St. Matthew's. "Jerry felt that we got our education for nothing, and we needed to pay something for the future," Fr. Steve Adrian said. "That was the birth of Alums & Friends."

Jerry asked Fr. Steve to help pull a committee together. Roy Ferber '59 was one of the first recruits. "Jerry was very passionate about Catholic education for kids," said Roy. "He was willing to do whatever it took to make the committee successful."

With the help of Joe Cullen '79, the committee set a concrete goal — increase enrollment by 50 students and raise \$150,000 by the following year. "It was not a researched goal," said Fr. Steve, "But it became law, and we were successful. We raised the money and we got the kids."

With A&F&F's support, tuition would

not be a barrier to any family who wanted to send their child to St. Matthew's. To fund it, the committee turned to alums. "We didn't have a database, or phone numbers or emails or anything," remembered Roy. "Jerry had a big network of friends and he would reach out and make contacts for us."

"If you give kids a good education when they're young, it makes a difference for their entire life."

— JERRY SEXTON '44

"We'd brainstorm names of people who might contribute," said Fr. Steve. "A name would come up and Jerry would say 'I know that guy, I'll give him a call.'"

"My dad believed a good way to communicate with people was to put out a newsletter," said his daughter, Sheila. As the president of Sexton Printing, Jerry offered to underwrite the entire cost for design and printing the newsletter. "Once my dad saw a need for something and got his teeth into it, he went all the way with it," she added.

Fr. Steve agreed. "The thing would never have taken hold without him. He was the person who kept us going — needling us constantly. He shamed us, he cajoled us, but he always did it with a smile."

"To my dad, the two most important things were a good education and a strong family base," explained Sheila. "If you give kids a good education when they're young, it makes a difference for their entire life. Supporting families and education — the two things went hand in hand."



Jerry and Marilyn Sexton (seated) surrounded by their children:

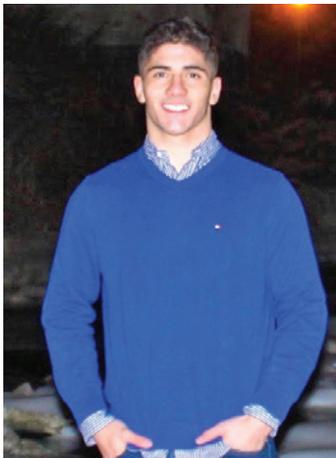
Back Row (l-r):
Colleen Sexton Pladson, Steve, John

Middle Row (l-r):
Tom, Bill, Sheila Sexton Stai, Sue Sexton Gemoets, Tim

Congratulations to the COS Class of 2016 as They Graduate High School

Graduation ceremonies are on hold but we still want to recognize the COS class of 2016 as they graduate high school. In talking with the four students featured here, something really stood out. They all described how tight-knit their COS class was and how those friends continue to be among their most treasured relationships today, which is pretty special.

Isaac Enriquez-Olvera '16 Concordia University Montreal



When Isaac graduated from COS in 2016, he received two, four-year scholarships to attend Cretin-Derham Hall High School: the Flaherty Scholarship and the Skipper Slawik Scholarship. Next year he will attend Concordia University in Canada where he will be on the pre-dental track, while also

earning a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology. Isaac is the first person in his immediate family to go to college. "It means a lot to my mom," he said. "That's why she put me in Catholic school — she thought it would provide better opportunities for me."

Isaac's parents immigrated from Mexico but came to the United States from Montreal, where Isaac was born. "I have dual citizenship which makes it cheaper for me to go to school in Canada," Isaac explained. Isaac is also looking forward to practicing his French while living in the Quebec province. It is one of three languages Isaac speaks and writes fluently.

Isaac credits teachers at COS for helping him succeed at CDH, where he earned good grades and was captain of the wrestling team his junior and senior years. "The teachers at COS were patient with me and really believed in us. That's something I needed."

Maria Ramos '16 University of St. Thomas



Based on her 4.0 GPA at Sibley High School, and a high SAT score, Maria has received a substantial merit scholarship to attend the University of St. Thomas in the fall. Maria said St. Thomas was her first choice after she fell in love with both the campus and the people when she toured her junior year. Plus, there's a family connection. "My grandma worked there, my parents both graduated from there, and they got married at the chapel," Maria said.

Maria plans to major in mechanical engineering. "Math and science have always been my strength and St. Thomas has a great engineering program." She also plans to play college volleyball. At Sibley, Maria set several school records for volleyball, and was the first Sibley player ever to get 1,000 digs. (A dig is when an opponent spikes the ball and the player dives to the floor to "dig" it out before it hits, keeping the ball in play — not easy.)

Looking back, Maria recalls the transition to the much larger school was pretty easy thanks to her COS teachers. "I went straight into AP classes as a freshman, Maria recalled. "At COS with the smaller classes it was easy to feel comfortable. I always felt like I could ask a lot of questions at COS, and no one ever thought you were dumb. That made it easier to speak up in class when I went to Sibley."

In addition to a good education, COS gave Maria good friends. "There's nothing like the bond I had with people in my class at COS," Maria said. "We were together every single day and we're still good friends."



DOLLAR-FOR-DOLLAR MATCHING UNTIL JUNE 30
100% of funds go for tuition assistance

Your support of tuition assistance is needed now more than ever. Match your contribution dollar-for-dollar by making a gift before June 30. To give, you can mail your contribution using the enclosed envelope, contribute online at www.communityofsaints.org/aff, or call Doug Lieser at 651-457-2510.

Aaliyah Gurley '16

Hamline University



Aaliyah is looking forward to starting classes at Hamline University next fall where she plans to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree in French, and a second degree in either journalism or anthropology. Hamline awarded Aaliyah a generous combination of merit scholarships and financial assistance to win her over.

Aaliyah graduates from Sibley High School with numerous academic honors including Academic Letter

Awards for maintaining a high cumulative GPA for both her junior and senior years. Aaliyah served on the Sibley Link Crew, a student leadership team, for the last two years, and also excelled in high school athletics. She was named Best Offensive Player in volleyball for 2018 and 2019, and in track she holds the second highest distance record for the triple jump in school history (34'9"). Aaliyah has been approached by Hamline's track team coach about competing for the college next year.

Aaliyah will be the first person in her immediate family to go to college. Her parents immigrated to the United States from Liberia in 1988 and she is one of eight children.

Remembering her time at COS, Aaliyah said it was a big change to go from her 8th grade class of 17 students to an incoming freshman class at Sibley of 400. But it wasn't a problem. "They really prepared you well at COS," she said. "For me, freshman year at Sibley was a lot of review."

Like her classmates, Aaliyah talked about the good times they all had together on the 8th grade class trip. "I have really fond memories of middle school," she said. "It was such a warm, close atmosphere. A lot of people I went to school with then, I still talk to now. Those friendships are really important."

Max Karas '16

University of St. Thomas

Max has received a full scholarship to attend the University of St. Thomas through the Schulze Innovation Scholarship Program. Funded by Best Buy founder, Richard Schulze, the program targets and nurtures future entrepreneurs. Max will major in entrepreneurship with a second major of his choice.

Max already has one successful start-up under his belt with Max Cakes, a catering company he launched when he was in eighth grade. "Max Cakes are donut ice cream sandwiches," he said. "It's been huge — we do all kinds of events, especially graduation parties. Although not this year."

Max thrived at Cretin-Derham Hall where he was captain of the mock trial team, which he credits with developing his public speaking skills, as well as the ability to think fast on his feet. Max was also captain of the Color Guard for Junior ROTC and was active in the school's theater program. Like his classmate and good friend, Isaac Enriquez-Olvera, Max credits much of his success in high school to the preparation he received at COS.

"I remember Ms. Novak stayed after school to help us prepare for the CDH entrance exam," Max said. "It was such a great advantage to have the close relationships with teachers at COS. It taught us skills that carried over to high school."

Max learned another lesson at COS he expects will serve him well throughout life. "COS was very diverse in every way, including where people were from. I learned that people are people and what matters is your character. That stuck with me going to high school. We all have the opportunity to do great things and be great people."



COS CLASS OF 2016 — WHERE THEY ARE HEADED

Margaret Allie | Minnesota State University, Mankato
 Brianna Bolly | Iowa State University
 Isaac Enriquez-Olvera | Concordia University Montreal
 William Estlie | Inver Hills Community College
 Marisela Fuentes | Florida SouthWestern State University
 Aaliyah Gurley | Hamline University
 Max Karas | University of St. Thomas
 Salvador Lang | Inver Hills Community College
 Maria Ramos | University of St. Thomas

Frank Rivera-Prescott | Inver Hills Community College
 Natalia Rodriguez | St. Paul Community College
 Olivia Rosario | Undecided
 Christian Sanchez-Lopez | Inver Hills Community College
 Sergio Sierra | Gap year
 Emilio Urbina | University of Arizona
 Aleah Vasquez | Century College
 Mark Vasquez | Undecided



During Crisis, COS Supports Students and Families

continued from page 1

Who Needs WiFi? Bridging the Technology Gap

Third grade teacher Brigid Krause recalled the flurry of activity in the days following the shutdown. “The first challenge was the technology issue, helping families who don’t have any computers or any way of connecting to the internet,” she said. “We had to solve that problem to even think about distance learning.”

A few days after closing, the school staged a tech drive for parents to come by and pick up the hardware they’d need. Last year, the school received new Chromebooks through a grant from the University of Notre Dame, but there weren’t enough for every student to have their own. The school surveyed families to find out what, if any, computers they had at home, then pooled the school’s remaining laptops and iPads and invited families to come in and pick up what they needed. “We wanted to make sure that every family had at least one piece of hardware,” explained Mr. Yannarely. “For a family with three or four students, we tried to get them two.”

School secretary Angie Lopez said another issue was families without internet service. “So many kids relied on hotspots from mom’s or dad’s phone,” she said. That meant students could only do schoolwork when their parents were home. Plus, the hotspots didn’t provide enough bandwidth for the programs students were using.

To solve the problem, Ms. Lopez worked with the school’s City Connects coordinator, a part-time position funded by the GHR Foundation. The coordinator helps families address barriers that impact a child’s educational experience. Together, Ms. Lopez and the coordinator helped the families get WiFi service through a special program at Comcast.



School Secretary Angie Lopez made daily calls to families and helped solve problems that interfered with student attendance.



COS Principal Bridget Kramer asked, “How do we help meet families’ basic needs?”

Taking Attendance and Helping Families

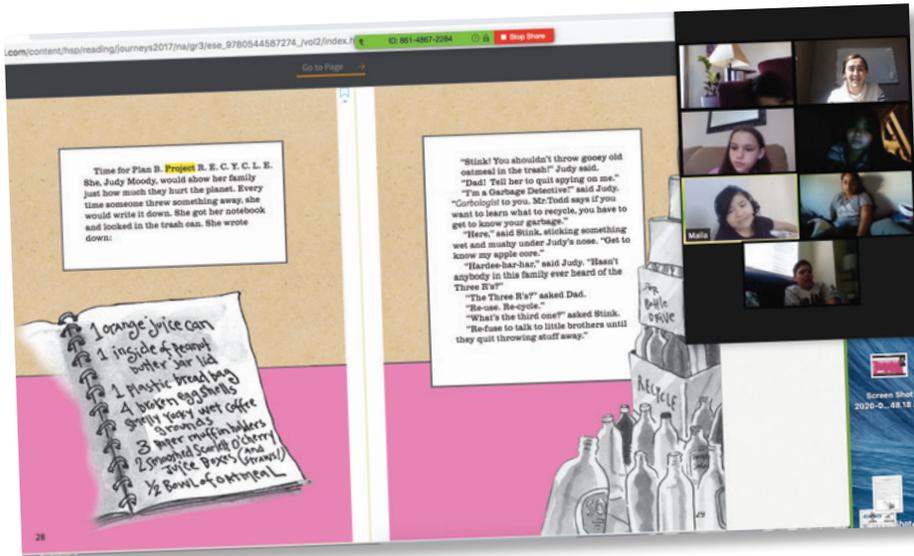
From the start, the school aggressively tracked student attendance. If a teacher didn’t hear from a student the school secretary called the family the next day. “When I called I made it clear they were not in trouble,” Ms. Lopez said. “I told them we’re here to support you.”

One third of COS students are English Language Learners, which means English is not the only or primary language spoken at home. Those families were at the biggest disadvantage with the transition to distance learning, observed first grade teacher, Sue Maher. “If parents don’t speak English well, it’s hard for them to help their child with assignments. That’s especially true for younger kids, who are bilingual, but still may need help,” Ms. Maher said. “The school’s approach was to call and ask, ‘Is there something your family needs in order for you to connect and get your child doing their assignments?’”

Ms. Lopez, who is fluent in Spanish, talked parents through each challenge as it came up, whether it was how to switch the software to Spanish, so they understood the assignment, or troubleshooting when technology wasn’t working right.

The school’s diligence paid off. “In the first days we consistently had around 27 kids absent,” Ms. Lopez said. “We got it down to under ten regularly.”

Attendance served as an early intervention strategy for other serious concerns, like families struggling with food insecurity. Principal Kramer knew losing access to the school breakfast and lunch would be a problem for some families, so COS offered to be a neighborhood distribution site for District 197 families to pick up breakfast and lunch for their school-age children. Principal Kramer also drew from a special fund created to help COS



During a Zoom call with third graders, Brigid Krause teaches students about the elements of a story as they read a Judy Moody book together.

now,” said Mr. Yannarely. “Students were already working on these platforms with this hardware so they knew what to do.”

Because of Blended Learning, Mr. Yannarely’s social studies class had already switched to an online textbook. He never had to worry about scanning pages for students, who had everything they needed. Blended Learning meant Ms. Maher never had to send home

packets to her first graders. Her students had been working on Chromebooks all year, so it was easy for them to log in and out of programs from home. “They knew the computer wasn’t just for playing around on, and that there is a purpose for it in education,” said Ms. Maher.

Ms. Krause implemented Blended Learning last year with her third grade students. “I already knew the technology would give me an accurate read of my kids because we spent so much time learning how to use it,” she said. “Parents, students, and teachers all had trust in Blended Learning because we’ve been using it for the last year and a half.”

Principal Kramer recently asked for additional Chromebooks through the Notre Dame grant, and the request was approved. When school starts in September, each student will have their own computer.

Making Education Better

The school recently surveyed parents to see how they felt about the switch to distance learning and the results were overwhelmingly positive. “Thanks to Principal Kramer’s leadership, we’ve done a really good job of trying to focus on the whole child,” said Ms. Krause. “We think about the family, and the child’s emotional well-being, and not just that we have these six standards left for math that the student needs to know.”

Principal Kramer is proud of her staff and believes the hard work the school has done over the last few years to strengthen school community and continually improve academics is paying off. “We’ve learned a lot through this experience, and we’ll bring what we’ve learned into the classroom next fall,” she said. “Education isn’t going to look the same at COS — it’s going to be better.”

families with other basic needs. “Thanks to some generous donors, we provide gift cards for groceries, gas, and other things families might need help paying for.”

Attendance sometimes revealed a family that felt overwhelmed. In those cases, school counselor JoEllen Flak got involved. Ms. Flak spends three days a week working with students at COS in a position funded through Catholic Charities. “The school secretary might hear from a mom

“...we’ve done a really good job of trying to focus on the whole child. We think about the family, and the child’s emotional well-being, and not just that we have these six standards left for math that the student needs to know.”

— BRIGID KRAUSE, COS THIRD GRADE TEACHER

who says her daughter can’t do schoolwork and she’d ask me to check in,” explained Ms. Flak. “Or teachers would email me to ask about something one of their students wrote today, and they’d ask for suggestions for what to say back.”

“For parents, it takes a lot of energy to keep their own fears in check and provide support to kids when they’re worried about their income and feel isolated,” said Ms. Flak, who continued to counsel students via Zoom calls. “From kids I kept hearing about how much they missed school.”

Blended Learning Gives School a Head Start

For all the challenges, teachers agree that COS was ahead of the game for distance learning because of the work done to implement the Blending Learning model, which incorporates the strategic use of technology in the classroom. COS is in the second year of a three-year program rollout, which is funded by a grant from GHR to collaborate with the University of Notre Dame. “Had this pandemic happened last year, we would not be at the place that we are

**COMMUNITY OF SAINTS
REGIONAL CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

335 Hurley St. E.
West St. Paul, MN 55118-1605

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
TWIN CITIES, MN
PERMIT NO. 3673

The Good News is published
quarterly by



Editor: Maggie Lee

COS Principal: Bridget Kramer
Email: BKramer@communityofsaints.org

Advancement: Doug Lieser
Email: DLieser@communityofsaints.org

COS Phone: 651-457-2510

Web: www.communityofsaints.org

Congratulations

to the 8th Grade Graduating **Class of 2020!**



TOP ROW (L-R):
**Francisco Hernandez,
Mr. Yannarely, Gabe
Aviles-Sanchez, Marly
Rodriguez**

2ND ROW (L-R):
**Isaac Garcia, Christina
Palmillas, Adrian Snook,
Jaída Crawford**

3RD ROW (L-R):
**Knean Aweke, Aleah
Villatoro, Eliciana Garcia,
Rafael Rodriguez-Murillo**

4TH ROW (L-R):
**Adriana Silva, Latrice
Jondro, Jayda Miller,
Lydia Sanchez**

BOTTOM ROW (L-R):
**Ashley Haynes, Christian
Lubajua, Tanner Thurston**