

Removing Barriers & Changing Lives

821 Donations Totaling \$403,270

Schools with demographics similar to Community of Saints (COS) encounter some hefty obstacles to academic success, so when I heard last year’s standardized tests showed COS students learning at an accelerated rate, I wanted to share that news. I also took the opportunity to look at what it takes to get those results. Everyone knows classroom instruction is crucial to student achievement. The extra lift at COS is meeting students’ needs beyond the classroom.

In a faith-based, loving and safe environment, COS constantly strives to remove barriers to academic achievement and create opportunities for all students to develop their unique, God-given talents. Your generous gifts to Alums & Friends & Families make this important work possible. At COS, where 96% of students receive financial assistance, your donations are truly changing the lives of children and their families. **Thank you for your continued support.**

— Maggie Lee, Editor

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Right to left: **Elba Rivera, Victoria Suarez in 7th grade, Carlos Suarez, and Micaela Suarez, 4 years old.**

RIVERA-SUAREZ FAMILY
“We Found a Community”

Elba Rivera was born and raised in Puerto Rico, and she recalls life there was difficult. The lack of good-paying jobs, the constant threat from hurricanes, and the unreliability of basic services like electricity, were among the reasons she moved to Minnesota in 2011. For the first few months, Elba, along with her partner and their one-year old daughter, Victoria, lived with her aunt who had a home on the West Side.

Elba’s sister had also made the move, and one day, after Mass at Our Lady Guadalupe, she told Elba she’d heard about scholarships that were available to send children to Catholic school. “I thought that was amazing,” said Elba, whose daughter was in kindergarten at the time. “As soon as we knew, we moved Victoria to COS for first grade.”

Victoria is now in seventh grade and Elba couldn’t be happier with her experience. She is quick to list all the things she loves about the school. “The quality of education, the quality of those teachers and the principal,” she said. “And the community! It just all feels like a family.”

Elba also appreciates the extra effort the school puts towards creating a positive culture. She recalled how a few years ago, some conflicts emerged among students in Victoria’s class. The school addressed the problem quickly. “The counselor came and they created Club Kindness,” explained Elba. “I think it’s transformed the kids because now they’re in seventh grade and it’s really different. There’s no drama anymore. It’s been wonderful.”

Sending her daughter to Catholic school has filled a hole that Elba wasn’t even aware existed. “I grew up with the Catholic faith, and when you have your own kids, you want to pass on the same values,” Elba explained. “When we moved here, we felt like something was missing. Then, we enrolled her in Community of Saints — through Victoria, we found a community.”

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HUERTA BUENO FAMILY "My Prayers Were Answered"

In 2022, when the oldest of Myra Huerta Bueno's three children was 8 years old, she noticed a dramatic change in his behavior. "He became very aggressive, which wasn't like him," she said. "I kept asking him, 'what's going on?'"

When Pedro came home from school with a black eye, he finally admitted to his mom that he was being bullied by a classmate. Even after talking to school officials, Myra didn't feel her son was safe.

A friend she confided in asked if she'd ever thought of sending her children to Catholic school. Myra felt with three children, Catholic school was out of reach, but her friend, who had two children at COS, assured her the school would help with tuition. "She said, 'I love it, Myra, and I promise you're going to love it, too.'"

When Myra got a call from COS saying they could take all three of her children, she began crying. "My prayers were answered," she said. "It was so hard seeing my boy going through all this."

As soon as Myra's children were enrolled, Pedro began meeting with the school counselor. "They took action right away," said Myra. "We got help immediately." Within a few weeks, she noticed a change in her son's behavior. "He went back to being Pedro, the boy I knew,"



Myra and Daniel Huerta Bueno with their three children, Pedro in 7th grade, Mia in 4th grade, and Emilio in 6th grade. They are members of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

she said. "He told me everybody at school is nice. He feels safe."

Myra was also pleased to see the impact COS had on her children's faith. A few months after her daughter, Mia, joined the COS kindergarten class, she began reminding the family to pray before meals. "Mia would say, 'We can't start eating. We all have to give thanks to God,'" said Myra with a smile. "And the excitement, the happiness when my kids made their First Communion. They were super excited."

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MATA FAMILY "I Thought — We've Got to Do This"

Oly Mata remembers her decision to switch schools, back when her oldest child, Nathan, was going into third grade. Oly lives across the street from COS and sending her kids to a school they could walk to appealed to her, but it wasn't the biggest reason.

"I came and toured the school and compared it to where Nathan was going at the time, and I really liked it," Oly recalled. "I felt like it was more caring, more loving. It was a good environment. I thought, okay, we've got to do this."

Oly's daughter is now a fifth grade student at COS while her two sons have both graduated and attend Two Rivers High School in Mendota Heights. Back when Nathan was a freshman in high school, Oly was worried about the change in schools. "For his whole childhood, he went to school with the same group of kids and then suddenly he has hundreds of kids in his class."

Oly realizes now she didn't need to worry. This year Nathan is a junior at Two Rivers, and he has grown into a disciplined student. Early on, he developed the habit of going to school before classes began, whenever he needed help. His diligence paid off. "We learned recently that because of Nathan's GPA for ninth and tenth grade, he will receive an academic letter award," Oly said proudly, adding that Nathan has also helped his younger brother make the transition to high school.

Oly believes COS did a good job preparing her sons to succeed in high school and she's confident it'll be the same with her daughter. "If she's struggling with something, they tell me right away," Oly said. "They don't just let it pass. I like the communication."

While Oly and her husband both work, the tuition assistance was crucial. "At the time, my husband was self-employed, so we couldn't count on the same income every month," she said. "Without the financial assistance, I don't think my kids would have been able to go."



Oly and Pedro Mata's two sons, Nathan and Mason, graduated from COS and are students at Two Rivers High School. Their daughter, Natalie, is in 5th grade at COS.

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