



THE GOOD NEWS

January/February 2011
Issue 22

FROM ST. MATTHEW

The community of St. Matthew exists in the world as a visible expression of God's love

The *Face of Catholic Education* at St. Matthew's



Photograph by Terry Bebertz

These students reflect the unique role St. Matthew's plays in educating young Catholics. To learn more, see story on page 4.

A&F Scholarships in Action

Meet Kiara and Mirka Martinez

Kiara and Mirka Martinez are identical twin sisters who will be graduating from St. Matt's this year. The girls are difficult to tell apart but they try to help people out by wearing different eyeglass frames: Kiara's are clear and Mirka's are dark. When you talk to them, they have a habit of completing each other's sentences and they always seem to agree with what the other said. They're also a great example of the kind of students to whom St. Matthew's has committed to provide a Catholic education.

Kiara and Mirka started at St. Matthew's in 5th grade, right after Christmas vacation. It was the third 5th grade class they'd attended that year. Their mother,

Maribel, had recently moved the family from New York City to the Twin Cities, which she judged was a safer place to raise her children. The girls started out in public school in Minneapolis while they lived with a cousin. Later, the family moved into their own home on the West Side and the twins enrolled in a magnet school, but, the girls say, "We didn't like it at all!"

Maribel had a friend at Catholic Charities who helped connect her with St. Matthew's. Doug Lieser, St. Matthew's principal, remembered their first meeting.

Kindergarten Roundup
Thursday, Feb. 24
at 6:30 p.m.
Learn more and meet the new teacher – see pg. 6 for details.

Continued on page 3

MESSAGE FROM **father steve**



Fr. Steve's homilies are available on-line at www.st-matts.org

Dear Saint Matthew School Alums and Friends:

Melissa and Nikki, two Saint Matt's grads from 2006, both graduated from Cretin-Derham Hall High School last spring and are on January break for their freshman year in college. They are deeply grateful for the educational opportunities, teachers, classmates and friends of their Saint Matthew's years; in particular for the strong academic foundation which allowed them to achieve in high school and enter college with a strong background.

To show their appreciation, they have organized their Saint Matt's classmates and have challenged them to make a gift of one dollar per year since graduation to the annual giving campaign of Alums and Friends. As "struggling" college freshmen they believe they can afford to support their grade school alma mater with a \$5 gift this year, a \$6 gift next year, a \$7 gift in 2013, etc.

During the month of January, Melissa and Nikki and their classmates will be contacting other alums and asking them to do the same — give a dollar per year since graduation.

I am delighted and excited to see the enthusiasm of these young graduates and their energy to enroll other grads in support of their school.

It's easy — one dollar per year. Most of us, if not all of us, can do that.

If you have not yet been contacted by the grads of '06 please take the time to send a gift to Saint Matt's Alums and Friends — a gift of \$1 for each year since your graduation.

The result: the educational opportunity you received yesterday can be the gift you make to the Saint Matthew student of today.

Here's another example of giving. John, a 1957, grad has stepped forward to challenge his siblings — six Saint Matt's grads, to make a family gift of \$10,000 to the Alums and Friends Campaign. Another grad, from the class of 1978 is talking with his siblings about making a similar gift. Would you consider working with your siblings to make a family gift to the Saint Matthew's Alums and Friends Campaign? A family gift of \$5,000, or \$3,000, or \$1,000 or \$500?

I encourage you to generously support this work. The need today is great. Struggling Saint Matthew's families do all they can to support their child's education, but present tuition aide does not stretch far enough. We must close the gap and continue to make a strong Catholic education available for West Side students. Your gift as an alum or friend of Saint Matthew's School makes the difference.

A blessed and happy New Year to each of you.

Yours truly,
Stephen Adrian, Pastor

St. Matthew's Celebrates 125 Years!

Throughout the coming year, St. Matthew's will host a number of events to celebrate!

Join us on **March 5 for 5 p.m. Mass & Mardi Gras dinner** with Archbishop Flynn.

The band City Vibe will perform.

For more info call the parish office at 651-224-9793.

Meet Kiara and Mirka Martinez, continued from page 1

He says, “Maribel really wanted a Catholic education for her kids but she didn’t have the means to make it happen. We knew we needed to do everything in our power to make that possible.”

Maribel agrees, “The scholarships made a difference. There is no way my kids could go to a private school without help.” In addition to the girls, Maribel enrolled her son, Timothy Lee, who is now in 7th grade.

The first day the girls started school, they knew St. Matt’s was different, as they explain, “We felt more welcome. I remember the first girl who talked to us. She said, ‘Hi, what’s your name.’ She introduced us to everyone and showed us around.”

Doug thinks the girls have been a great addition to the school, “They’re good students but what’s more impressive is that they’re extremely good people.”

The girls have had to work hard at their studies, as one of them says, “I feel like I’m in high school!” But they appreciate all the support they get from their teachers. “I love the teachers here. They’ll stay after school to help us. They keep saying, ‘Ask questions!’ which helps a lot. They know us a lot better since we have small classes.”



L-R Mirka and Kiara

“I feel like St. Matt’s is my second home. For me, there’s never been a day I didn’t want to come here.”

MIRKA MARTINEZ

The girls plan to attend Cristo Rey High School next year, and they both say they want to go to college at the University of Minnesota. Kiara, whose favorite subject is science, says she’d like to study engineering but she knows it will be tough, “You have to know a lot of math and science.” Mirka’s favorite subject is religion and she thinks she’d like to become a veterinarian. Their choices reflect their mother’s philosophy, which Kiara explains, “Mom says don’t pick something simple. Have a job that will make for a big experience in your life.”

Maribel has followed her own advice. She was born in Honduras and immigrated to New York when she was 18 years old and lived there for 20 years. After moving to Minnesota in 2006, she worked at cleaning jobs while going to school to earn her GED. After that, she completed two years studying child development and now teaches preschool at the YMCA.

Maribel acknowledges that getting an education as a single parent wasn’t easy, and she appreciates all the support she got from St. Matthew’s. She says, “They’ve been very patient with me. Sometimes I didn’t have the money, but you talk to them and you can get help.”

Doug thinks Maribel’s experience reflects the school’s sense of community. He explains, “With a parent like Maribel, we know she has a lot going on between getting her GED and raising her kids. At St. Matt’s, she doesn’t have to choose between her own education and her daughters’. We want her to be successful and we want her kids to be successful.”

The girls are excited about high school next year but they will be sorry to leave St. Matt’s. Mirka says, “I feel like St. Matt’s is my second home. For me, there’s never been a day I didn’t want to come here.” Her sister agrees.



Maribel with her children. Front row, left – right: Mirka, Maribel, Kiara. Back row, left – right: sons Morris, Eliseo & Timothy Lee. Morris is a senior at Cristo Rey. Eliseo is in the Marines and has served one tour in Iraq and will be leaving for Afghanistan in January. Timothy is a 7th grade student at St. Matt’s.

The *Face of Catholic Education* at

With the support of Alumni & Friends, St. Matthew's has made Catholic education available to many more families in our community; but this effort has implications beyond the West Side. We're also supporting an important goal identified by the U.S. Council of Bishops: to dramatically increase the number of Latino students attending Catholic schools.

In the Catholic school community, St. Matthew's stands out for many of its accomplishments:

- Since 2008, enrollment is up almost 40%.
- 94% of school families receive tuition assistance.
- Academically, the school challenges all students, from those below grade level to gifted learners.
- Diversity is a given — the school environment welcomes families from a wide range of cultures.

Most importantly, St. Matt's works to impart the essential message of our faith as it prepares the next generation of Catholics to take their place in the church.

I'd like to share with you a few things I've recently learned about Catholic education in general and at St. Matthew's in particular. Together, they demonstrate St. Matthew's unique role in making Catholic education available to the community and provide many reasons to be proud of your school.

— Maggie Lee, Editor

At St. Matthew's, what does diversity look like?

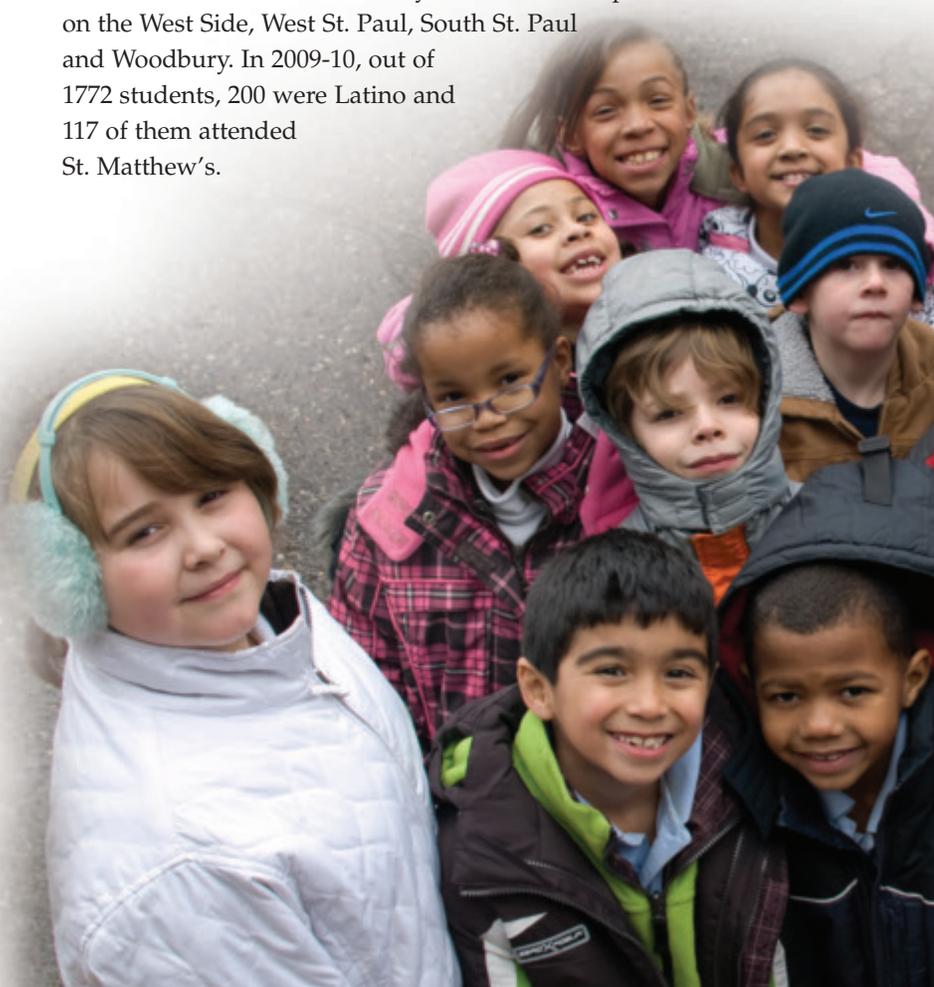
58% of St. Matthew's students are Latino, 24% are Caucasian, 16% are African American, 3% are Asian and 1% are Native American. St. Matthew's has the highest number of Latino students of any Catholic elementary school in St. Paul.

U.S. Council of Bishops support increasing Latino students in Catholic schools.

75% of Latinos in the U.S. are Catholic but only 3% of Latino children attend Catholic schools. Last year the U.S. Council of Bishops praised the goal of increasing the number of Latinos in Catholic schools to one million. The report argues that given the growing number of Latino Catholics, the future generation of Catholic leadership is at stake.

In our deanery, over 50% of Latinos enrolled in Catholic schools attend St. Matthew's.

St. Matthew's is currently educating over half of the Latino students enrolled in our deanery which includes parishes on the West Side, West St. Paul, South St. Paul and Woodbury. In 2009-10, out of 1772 students, 200 were Latino and 117 of them attended St. Matthew's.



St. Matthew's | FROM THE EDITOR

Has giving out scholarships hurt St. Matthew's financially?

The school's financial situation has improved dramatically since it's welcomed more families who rely on scholarships. There are several reasons for this:

- Due to the generosity of Alumni & Friends as well as other initiatives, our fundraising efforts to support scholarships have been very successful.
- Increasing enrollment to almost 200 brings in additional revenue without significantly increasing our costs.

St. Matthew's has the highest percentage of English Language Learners of all Catholic schools in St. Paul.

An English Language Learner is a student who lives in a home where someone speaks a language other than English. 18% of St. Matt's students fit this description. While the student may be fluent in English, they typically require additional support to acquire strong literacy skills. Sometimes the intervention required is significant. St. Matt's has developed an exceptionally strong program to help these students achieve.



St. Matthew's has the 5th highest number of students in Free and Reduced Lunch.

62% of St. Matthew's students qualify for the Free and Reduced Lunch program. That's the 5th highest for all Catholic Schools in the Twin Cities.

What is the Catholic School Advantage?

- Latino and African American students who attend Catholic schools are more likely to graduate from high school and college than their public school peers.
- The poorer and more at-risk a student is, the greater their relative achievement gains in Catholic schools.
- Catholic schools tend to produce graduates who are more civically engaged, more tolerant of diverse views and more committed to service to others as adults.



The Catholic School Advantage at St. Matthew's

The following is based on St. Matt's Class of '06 which had 25 students:

- 100% graduated from high school
- 80% started college this fall (20 students)
- 8% enlisted in the military (2 students)
- 4% working (1 student)

**We couldn't confirm post high school plans for two graduates.*

Compare to St. Paul Public School statistics for last year:

- High school graduation rate for all students: 86%
- High school graduation rate for Latino students: 73.5%
- St. Paul high school graduates who go on to college: 56%
- St. Paul Latino high school graduates who go on to college: below 50%



Introducing Ms. Mara Smith

Teaching Reading and Writing in Our All Day Kindergarten

It used to be that kindergarten was a half-day spent playing games, making art and getting accustomed to school. But that's changed. Now kindergarteners are at school all day and they're expected to learn how to read and write as well as develop other skills. In a diverse school like St. Matt's, that goal can be even more difficult to achieve since students often begin school at such different learning levels.

But for St. Matthew's new kindergarten teacher, the challenge of working with a diverse group of learners is one of the things she likes about her job. Mara Smith joined St. Matthew's faculty last August. At the heart of her teaching philosophy is a commitment to help each student work at his/her own level and advance at their own pace.

Mara, who attended Catholic elementary school in Lakeville, MN, graduated from St. Mary's University in Winona in 2007. After earning her degree, she spent two years teaching kindergarten in Taiwan at an English immersion school. She says, "It was very interesting, adapting to the culture and teaching the kids. They went from not knowing any English to learning to read and write in English. It was a very rewarding experience." She thinks her experience in Taiwan has helped her teach the English Language Learners, students from a household where another language is spoken, in her current class at St. Matt's. "There are a lot of similarities, so my past experience has been helpful."

In her current class, students range from those who are learning to identify letters to others who have basic reading skills. For Mara, that means tailoring the curriculum to meet each student's needs. She says, "Accommodating the wide range of learners is something I take into consideration for every lesson. I want to make sure that one activity or lesson isn't way too easy for one kid and way too challenging for another."

One of her strategies for accomplishing that involves what she calls "Reading Centers." The centers allow students to work independently, at their own level in a highly structured environment. During the school day, students may work at a variety of centers, such as a



computer center, a phonics center, a writing center or an art center. While the activities at each station vary, they're all designed to advance the students' literacy skills, regardless of their current level.

She says it took six weeks to phase in the centers, but the class has responded well. "For the first couple of weeks, I really pushed structure, class routine, and they picked it up. They want to learn. One of the reasons I love teaching kindergarten is that learning is so fun for them."

Mara acknowledges that working with young students brings special challenges but it also brings unique rewards. "It's such a fun age. You never know what's going to come out of their mouth." She laughs when she recounts a recent class discussion during which she asked the students what Advent is, "One student said 'It's getting ready for Jesus' birthday.' And another commented, 'Boy, Jesus sure is getting old.'" She adds, "That just makes it worth it."

She's also pleased with how well the class gets along. A few of the students hadn't attended preschool but have had a very smooth transition. And, she notes, the students look out for each other, "If they see that someone doesn't understand something at their table,



“Accommodating the wide range of learners is something I take into consideration for every lesson. I want to make sure that one activity or lesson isn’t way too easy for one kid and way too challenging for another.”

MARA SMITH

they’re quick to help each other out. They’re very caring towards each other. That’s nice to see at this young age.”

That observation fits with her overall impression of St. Matthew’s. “From the day I was hired, I felt that St. Matt’s is a very close, tight knit community. Lots of students with extended family attend, and there’s so much alumni support. That’s something different that stands out about St. Matt’s that a lot of other schools don’t have.”

Always Knew She Wanted to Teach

Mara says, “In elementary school I’d play ‘school’ with my younger brother. I’d sit him down and make him do worksheets.” Her enthusiasm is just as strong now, “There is so much I want to teach and so many activities I want to do with the students. It’s hard to fit them all in. But that’s made me learn how to prioritize and really make the most of the time we have.”

While she has lots of ideas for things she’d like to do with her students, they all share a common purpose. “Every student is going to learn a different way and at a different rate, but helping each student reach their full potential is the number one goal.”

Ms. Smith, welcome to St. Matt’s.



FROM STEPHEN ADRIAN, PASTOR

Dear Alums and Friends:

The Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis is asking each Catholic elementary school to undertake a sustainability and vitality audit over the next two years. For two months — mid-October through mid-December — a committee made up of grads, parish members, community leaders, school parents and past parents has been meeting to draft a plan for the sustainability and viability of Saint Matthew’s School.

Catholic inner urban parishes and schools always live on the razor’s edge: we provide the highest quality academic opportunity; we engage our communities as partners in this effort; we hand on a strong formation in Catholic faith. At the same time, we struggle with tight cash flow, aging buildings and the constant need to assist low and moderate income families with significant tuition assistance.

We borrow money to meet today’s expenses, we defer capital expenditures.

In addition to tuition and parish support, we depend greatly on annual subsidies from the Archdiocese, commitments by FOCUS – Friends of Catholic Urban Schools, assistance from our sister parish — Saint Francis of Assisi of St. Croix Beach, an annual return from a parish education endowment of \$1,200,000, gifts from donor advised funds of the Catholic Community Foundation and generous family foundations.

Most of all, we rely on you — Alums and Friends who make generous gifts, small and large, more than \$400,000 in the past three years. This patchwork of financing makes it possible for us to meet the \$5,000 annual cost to educate each student at Saint Matthew’s.

On December 16th Saint Matthew’s School representatives presented a balanced school and parish budget for the next three years to the Archdiocese Schools Task Force. This budget included operations and debt repayment.

The work of financing inner urban Catholic education is a balancing act; we provide the best product and we struggle to fund it.



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St. Paul, MN 55107

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Parish Office: 651-224-9793

Weekend Liturgies:

Saturday - 5 p.m.

Sunday - 8:00 & 10:30 a.m.

www.st-matts.org

EVENTS calendar

METROPOLITAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA — January 30 at 3 p.m.

Join us for a FREE Family Concert in the church! After the concert, children are welcome to meet the musicians and try out some of the instruments.

SCOUT SUNDAY — February 6, 10:30 a.m. Mass

St. Matthew's Boy and Girl Scout troops will participate in the 10:30 a.m. Mass and host the coffee hour after both Masses. Come, learn more about scouting and meet these fine young people and future leaders.

"THE BIG GAME" PARTY — February 6 at 5 p.m.

The Men's Club invites everyone to watch the biggest football game of the year in the Social Hall on the BIG screen. There's games and food for kids so bring the whole family. The cost is \$10 per adult, \$5 per kid ages 13-18 and free for kids under 13. Doors open at 4:30 p.m.

KINDERGARTEN ROUNDUP — February 24 at 6:30 p.m.

Families are invited to visit St. Matt's with their future kindergartener to learn more about our academic goals, religious education and tuition assistance. If you know a family with a child who will be attending kindergarten next year, let them know. For more information call the school office at 651-224-6912. Find out about our new kindergarten teacher on pg.6

125TH ANNIVERSARY 5 P.M. MASS & DINNER WITH ARCHBISHOP FLYNN — March 5 at 5:00 p.m.

Throughout the coming year, St. Matthew's will host a number of events to celebrate. Join us for Saturday Mass followed by a Mardi Gras dinner to kick off St. Matt's 125th year. The band City Vibe has been booked to play at the Mardi Gras Party. For more information, call the Parish Center at 651-224-9793.

ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICES — March 9

Masses with ash distribution at 6:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Prayer services with ashes at 9 a.m. (with the school,) 12 p.m. & 7 p.m. (with Religious Education students.) Fish Fries are every Friday from March 11 – April 15.