



# Stream ~ Lines

E-News from CSA Office of Vocation Discernment

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## CSA Out 'n About!

By Sister Monique Heller, CSA

It is an old school, soon to be 116 years old. The school is above the church and recess is held on the sidewalk. Three hundred students from 37 countries come here. English is our second language. Welcome to St. Thomas of Canterbury School of Chicago, Illinois! <http://www.stcuptown.com/index.php>

We live on blessings. The stakes are high and there can be "no child left behind." These are the children of parents who risked everything to come to this country. Many are political refugees. They entrust to us their hopes and dreams and the future of their children. Knowing their stories of courage and suffering, I feel an even greater responsibility to do the very best I can.

Teaching here is a little like teaching in the future. The school is a place of safety and peace. Different races, traditions, religions, and languages are one community. No one notices the differences because we are all different and all are welcome. Everyday the world is opening anew in the eyes and hearts of a new generation living and learning together.

We live on blessings. The principal is dedicated to helping these families and has helped to obtain

more than a half million dollars in scholarships. Tutors come every week, for years, to work one-on-one with those who need it most.

Teachers welcome new students anytime of the year. Many come not speaking any English. Friends provide Christmas gifts, hats, mittens, jackets and school supplies. Aids mend sweaters or hem pants in their "spare time."

Option for the poor? We are poor only in money. We are rich in Spirit, trust and hope. We are rich in community and we have our eyes on the future.

Someone once said, "Work at what you love and you will never work a day in your life." That is how I feel about teaching. I am humbled and grateful to do this work, especially at St. Thomas.

Along with this writing, Sister Monique provided a booklet of stories from students in grades 3 to 5, "immigrants and children of immigrants," who have chosen to write on the topics of their journey to America, on being an American, and the value of a Catholic school education. Excerpts follow:



*"My dad came to America because he worked three jobs and still didn't have enough money. My mother had to go to school at night. In my country, we did not have good schools. They have to use candles because there was no light from 5 p.m. to 8:a.m. They did not have pencils and paper. They could use only one book and have one teacher, too. In America, my dad had a job, and enough food for my family. My mom here has a good opportunity to go to school to get more skills for a better job. My dad had to work four jobs and my mom had to work two jobs and to go to school. They have to work hard for us to come here. Now my sisters, brothers, and I have a great life. We go to a good school and my parents work only one job."*  
S. A. Grade 3 – Eritrea

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*"My family is from Vietnam and I am proud to be American because here there are books so I can learn and there is freedom. America has school for your brain and it helps you to get smarter so you can go to the next grade. I like that it is colder here because in Vietnam it is always hot. There are too many mosquitoes and snakes in Vietnam. That is why I like America better too." T.B. – Grade 4 – Vietnam*

*"I think St. Thomas of Canterbury is special because you get a better education, a better future and a better career. I know this by my own lifecycle. I come from a very nice public school with education and uniforms, but when I arrived at St. Thomas I got encouraged to follow my dream, never give up or go back. Before I told myself, oh I'm just an ordinary girl who goes to public school just like everyone else. But now, I say no, I'm not just an ordinary girl. I'm special. "Why"? Because I get to go to a school that is advanced and has nice teachers. Teachers that stay after school outside and make sure no one gets hurt and also make sure everyone knows where there [sic] going and stay safe. That never happened at my old school! That's why I think St. Thomas of Canterbury is special!!!!" S. R. Grade 5 - Congo*

