COS Student Wins Flaherty Family Scholarship

Amari Muhammad will attend Cretin-Derham Hall High School

“I’m just really curious. I love to learn.” Those are the words of 8th grade graduate Amari Muhammad, the latest Community of Saints (COS) student to receive a Flaherty Family Scholarship. The scholarship is awarded to high-achieving students with economic need and will cover the cost of tuition at Cretin Derham Hall High School (CDH) for four years. Amari will also be eligible for continued support through college and graduate school.

At the beginning of the year, Amari had planned to attend Simley High School because of its championship-winning football program. “But then I toured CDH and I just loved it,” he said. “I thought — I have to go there.” Amari’s mom, Gloria Romo, loved her son’s enthusiasm for CDH, but as a single parent of three, she didn’t know if she could swing the tuition. “I want Amari to have the same opportunities as a kid from a two-parent household, but I didn’t know if I could afford it,” Romo said. “When we got the email from the Flaherty Family Foundation, I thought, this is the answer to my prayers.”

“I Was Struggling, but I Overcame It”

Just a few years ago, the idea of Amari winning an elite scholarship would have seemed like a longshot. “There was a time when Amari was getting into trouble at school daily,” his mom said. “He was constantly, and I thought he was on the verge of getting kicked out.”

“Amari had a hard time managing his emotions, so the school worked with him on that,” explained COS counselor, JoEllen Flak. “He had a lot of

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MESSAGE FROM father steve

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

Each time a teacher comes to school it’s an act of faith that what they do makes a difference. That’s why people become teachers; they want to make a difference.

Teachers are animators, stimulators; most of all, teachers are encouragers. The teacher’s prayer is found in the 50th chapter of the Prophet Isaiah:

“The Lord has given me the tongue of a teacher; that I may know how to encourage the weary with a word.”

You see, teachers are people who change lives and save lives.

Even if we are not classroom teachers we can be the encouraging word that awakens in the mind and heart of a student a renewed sense of their worth; you can be the one that opens the eyes of a young person to see what yet can be.

This issue features an alum of Saint Matthew’s, General Joseph Votel, who has “the tongue of a teacher; one who knows how to encourage the weary with a word.” He stimulated and encouraged our 8th graders to focus on making a difference, seeking a way they can contribute to their school, their neighborhood, their state and nation; to see that they can make a significant impact on their world.

This issue also tells the story of the impact COS teachers and staff have had on three 8th grade graduates: Amari Muhammad, May Knorr, and Nevaeh Martin. Such stories of the power of COS can be told over and over again.

This issue also has short reflections by 8th grade graduates after hearing the encouraging presentation of General Votel. I find the sentiments in those reflections affirming of the work you and I do. We make Catholic education possible for so many families who otherwise would not have the opportunity.

Each time you and I make a gift, we make an investment. We make an act of faith that what we do makes a difference. This issue tells so many stories about the fruits of our investment. Don’t sell yourself short. You do make a difference.

Stephen Adrian
Canonical Administrator of COS

Donor Finds Estate Planning is Another Way to Give

A native of St. Paul and St. Catherine University graduate, Mary Ann Ogden held a variety of jobs in nursing and public health in St. Paul and Ramsey County during a career that lasted 35 years; but it was a 1980 trip to Southeast Asia that changed her outlook on life. Ogden spent four months as a volunteer at refugee camps in Thailand set up for Cambodians fleeing the Pol Pot regime, and another month traveling the region with a friend.

“Seeing how people lived, I was overwhelmed by how much Americans have in comparison,” said Ogden. “I became a bit of a minimalist after that.”

Ogden never thought about making a will until she got married at age 52. “I don’t have that many assets,” she said. “But I wanted to be sure that part of what I had went to the organizations I support.”

Community of Saints (COS) is one of Ogden’s designated beneficiaries. “I like that the school serves a diverse community and helps families with limited resources,” Ogden said. “Public schools are important, but we need Catholic schools, too, where kids are grounded in faith. That’s good for kids.”

For information on how you can support COS in your estate plan, contact Doug Lieser, Director of Advancement, at 651-457-2510.
What kinds of challenges bring a student to your office?
For students at COS, it runs the gamut. Some students face the same challenges that children in wealthier areas face, such as developmental problems, mental illness in their families, alcoholism, drug abuse, emotional abuse, and so on. Since many of our students live in poverty, that brings additional challenges. Some students experience temporary homelessness, exposure to violence, or they may have family members in jail. The deportation of a family member can upend students’ lives, and the emotional loss may be compounded by the loss of income necessary for the family to survive.

We often hear about a mental health crisis in young people — do you think young people have more challenges today, or are we just more aware of them?
I think young people have more challenges and, hopefully we are more aware. Surviving a worldwide pandemic was hard on everyone, especially young people. Some lost family members, others experienced fear, anxiety, loss of income, and loss of social support. All this interrupted the average education and development of children. Social skills took a real hit and students had to relearn how to be at school. On top of that, the death of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer wounded our whole community. And of course, there’s social media and the internet. Children have exposure to so much information so quickly. Some content they are not developmentally prepared for. When young people post or text things without any regard for empathy, it creates a lot of harm and social mistrust. More than ever it’s important that we teach critical thinking skills, and help children act from a moral core.

How would you describe the culture at COS and how does it factor into your work with students?
At COS, our superpower is Love. God is Love and Love is everywhere in our school. Love creates and nurtures life. Love gives us patience. It motivates us to help one another celebrate and enjoy our school community. When I ask teachers to make accommodations for a student in distress, I NEVER get push back. A frequent response is, “Oh, I just love that kid,” and we go on together to make a plan for support. Our staff loves and enjoys our students.

What’s kept you motivated over the years?
I am motivated by working with a great school community. I have worked intimately with schools for 40 years now, so I know what makes a great school. Excellent, dedicated leadership is the foundation of everything, and we are blessed with that leadership in principal Bridget Kramer and Father Steve Adrian. We have families who partner in our work. Volunteers and donors who have a passion for the mission. I am especially inspired and motivated by the bravery of the students I work with, who face overwhelming circumstances and pull through. I know the world will be a better place because they are in it.
GENERAL JOE VOTEL (RET.) ADDRESSES COS MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

“What type of impact do you want to make in our world?”

Joe Votel ’72 achieved the rank of four star general and was appointed by President Obama to be Commander of U.S. Central Command, one of the highest positions in the military. In his address to students, he challenged them to think about their future and how they might make a difference in the world. Following his presentation, members of the 8th grade class had a chance to talk with him. Later they reflected on the relationship between service, faith, and leadership. We have shared some of the students’ reflections here along with excerpts from Votel’s address. To see his entire presentation, go to the COS home page — www.communityofsaints.org.

“General Votel motivated me to think about how I should be prepared for high school, and how the journey will be hard, but it can lead you to something good. My dream is either to be an immigration lawyer who helps families or a nurse.” — DAMARIS

“I was an Army Ranger and a paratrooper. You guys know what paratroopers do? Jump out of airplanes. Crazy stuff, huh? It’s actually pretty fun. It gave me a great opportunity to serve the nation. And through my service in the military, I not only got to meet people across our own country who had different experiences and brought different ideas to our work, but I also got to meet a lot of people in other parts of the world.” — JOE VOTEL

All of you are going to have an opportunity in the future to make some decisions about what you’re going to do. I hope you will choose to do something that involves serving your communities, serving your fellow citizens, or maybe even serving your nation in whatever way that might be done. Service comes in a whole bunch of different forms. You can serve in law enforcement or services, you can be a teacher, you can be a volunteer in an organization that helps people move forward. This idea of service, is really an important one.” — JOE VOTEL

Joe Votel and Sean Doyle have been good friends since they were classmates at St. Matthew’s.
I think one of the biggest accomplishments that I’m most proud of is being a dad. I have two boys who are both adults now. I think one of the most important things is having a family of my own and seeing my own kids move forward and do well in their lives.” — JOE VOTEL

St. Matthew’s and Cretin were really great institutions. They not only prepared me academically and athletically but also spiritually. I had people like Coach Rowan or teachers like Mrs. Baetz, Sister Carol Anne, and others who taught us that values are important in life. As a very senior military , I was involved in a lot of things, and it was always important to not forget my values — because those things really do matter.” — JOE VOTEL

“I thought General Votel’s speech was very inspirational and it motivated me to keep living up to my dreams. One day I want to work with animals and maybe become an animal doctor or even a marine biologist. I will make sure to work very hard for this dream.” — GRACIELA

“I think understanding other people can help you be a better leader. You have to be positive about everything. Thinking about my future, a dream I want to accomplish is to become a nurse.” — MADELYN

“The success that you are able to achieve isn’t done solely by you. Lots of other people help you. In my case, my family was a big part of what inspired me, but also what inspired me was having the same experience that you’re having right here of going to a great school.” — JOE VOTEL

“General Votel shows that a person’s faith can inspire them to be kind and loving. He motivated me to be a leader at Cretin-Derham Hall. He also made me want to join the JROTC at CDH even more. After JROTC, I hope to serve in the Air Force.” — BRODY

Students got to try on Votel’s West Point cadet uniform, and the uniform he wore in his final position, Commander of U.S. Central Command.
adults around him who were inflicting harm on him. He has an amazing mom, and all the teachers could see his potential.”

Amari recalls those days, too. “In fourth grade, I was getting into trouble, but by fifth grade I’d gotten a lot better,” Amari said. “I was struggling, but I overcame it.”

Looking back, his mom is glad he learned such an important lesson at a young age. “Amari’s very poised now. He gets upset but he knows how to control himself and he doesn’t let other people get in his head,” Romo said. “The school has played a huge role in helping him get himself together.”

**Education First — Sports Second**

Ask Amari about his goals and he’s ready with a list: become a chess master, play in the NFL, start a business, maybe start an organization that helps young people on the West Side. He brims with enthusiasm for his schoolwork. “Science is probably my favorite class right now, although I’m better at math.”

“Amari approaches everything as a challenge,” said COS middle school Science teacher Audrey Moorhouse. “All of our 8th graders see themselves as change-makers, and I think Amari recognizes that Science is an important tool for change.”

Amari is also a talented athlete and helped lead his West Side Boosters football team to a state championship last year. While he looks forward to participating in athletics at CDH, he’s clear about his priorities. “I choose education over football,” he stated. “Back in 5th grade I started thinking about college and it was all about playing football, but now I want to go to college so I can keep going with my education.”

**“It’s the Love They Give You”**

Middle school teacher John Capistrant looks forward to hearing about Amari’s future success. “He knows what he wants to accomplish and always strives for excellence,” said Capistrant. “Amari’s capable of doing anything he sets out to do.”

Amari is quick to give credit to his teachers for all their support and discipline over the years. “It’s the love that they give you,” Amari said simply. “It helps so much. For some kids, their teachers are like their parents. The discipline here is love.”

As Amari looks ahead to high school and beyond, he counts his blessings. “My faith has really helped me, and I feel like God has helped me personally,” Amari said. “He’s blessed me with going to school here.”
COS Graduate Heads to Vis

May Knorr will be the graduate of Community of Saints (COS) to attend high school at Visitation School. What really caught May’s interest was Visitation’s Robotics Club. May is an enthusiastic member of the COS STEM Club where she’s been learning to build and program small robots. When she saw what students at Vis were doing, she was impressed. “They’re building these huge robots and taking them to competitions,” said May. “Competing will be extra pressure but I think it’ll also be more fun.”

COS middle school teachers describe May as a dedicated student who is not afraid of a challenge. “In STEM Club, it’s been fun to watch her think outside the box,” said Science teacher Audrey Moorhouse. “Some students get frustrated because they want the one right answer but May gets excited by the possibilities of all the different answers.”

While May loves STEM Club and Science, it’s hardly her only interest. She also loves singing in choir and writing poetry. “She is one of the strongest readers I’ve ever had,” said English Language Arts teacher John Capistrant. “May’s thorough analysis of the stories we’ve read in class have enriched the classroom conversation immensely. We’ll miss her at COS, but she will thrive at Visitation.”

Tuition Assistance Made It Possible

May has been a student at COS since kindergarten after her mother, Ashley Daggy, learned about the school from family members who had sent their own children there. Daggy says the tuition assistance is what made it possible for May to attend. “We were looking for an alternative to the public schools,” she said. “But we wouldn’t have been able to afford COS without the help.”

Tuition at Vis seemed even more daunting until Daggy learned about the school’s generous assistance that puts the school within reach of families at all income levels.

A Quiet Leader

In talking about May, her teachers describe a reserved, dedicated student, with kindness and compassion. “She is a quiet leader who doesn’t feel the need to do what everyone else is doing,” observes Moorhouse. “She does her own thing and makes good choices.”

May knows it may not be easy to go to a school where she won’t know anyone, but she also knows there will be many other new students, just like her. She told a story about when she was in sixth grade and her closest friend moved away. “That was hard for me, because everybody had their friend groups,” she said. “Then I started talking to other people, and it gave me more Other people can be really nice, and you never know what someone is like until you talk with them.”
Congratulations!

COS Principal Receives Leadership Award

Principal Bridget Kramer received a 2023 Leadership Award from Minndependent, the largest state-wide organization serving private and independent schools. “It would be a challenge to find a better leader,” said Minndependent’s president, Tim Benz. The award recognizes Principal Kramer for instilling passion in her staff and promoting innovation. “Bridget’s a rock star,” adds Benz. “She’s a really strong mission-driven leader.”