

# CATALYST

ST. MARCUS SCHOOL MAGAZINE · SPRING 2023

*Ladonna's  
Bright Future*  
p. 7







WE LIVE IN UNPRECEDENTED TIMES. OUR SCHOLARS AND FAMILIES ARE CONFRONTED WITH CHAOS AND AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE AS PART OF DAILY LIFE. LIVING ON 2<sup>ND</sup> STREET IN THE HARAMBEE NEIGHBORHOOD, ONE OF THE MOST PRESSING ISSUES AMONG MY NEIGHBORS IS HOW TO CROSS NORTH AVENUE WITHOUT GETTING KILLED BY A RECKLESS DRIVER. IN THE FIRST SEMESTER, EACH OF OUR THREE CAMPUSES WAS HIT BY A CAR, CAREENING RECKLESSLY AT HIGH SPEEDS. JUST A FEW WEEKS AGO, A FATHER OF A THIRD GRADE SCHOLAR WAS KILLED BY TEENAGERS DRIVING A STOLEN CAR AT HIGH SPEED THAT RAN A RED LIGHT. IT WAS AN UNSPEAKABLE TRAGEDY FOR OUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY.

At St. Marcus, we seek to respond to these urban challenges in a way that Jesus would. Actual change happens when one is willing to walk with ‘the other’ linked arm in arm, facing life’s challenges together, no matter the cost. Through this we are reflecting Jesus’ approach to us, who left his throne in heaven and chose the humble state of a baby, born into poverty to a teenage mother, as his divine pathway to connect with us. Rather than stand at a distance in judgment over our stumblings and mistakes, he chose instead to run toward us in our flawed state, hold our hands, collect our tears, and pull us close. *“Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*

At St. Marcus, we call this **radical withness**; a new term we coined to describe the “how” of our ministry.

In this issue, you will read about the **radical withness** of Moe Lawrenz — our life coach who works directly with school families, walking with them as they move out of crisis to stability and eventually to home ownership and thriving. You will also read about new leadership council members, Mike and Maureen Kasdorf, who passionately find new ways to walk with us and our scholars and families. And lastly, scholar and alum stories, who are directly impacted by unwavering, 1:1 relationships.

In these unprecedented times, having an approach of **radical withness** is the answer. We live this out through the God in Isaiah who wrote: *“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.”*

*“When you pass through the waters...”* indicates that raging waters of life will come. There will be trouble. We will have struggles. And yet our God is WITH us. In the same way, we walk WITH people amidst the struggles of life. We move toward the fire. In doing so, relationships are deepened, lives are transformed, and lifelong connections are the result. Together, we can do the hard and beautiful work of standing with people daily.

We are thankful that as partners and friends of St. Marcus, you walk with us in this critical way. Choosing to be in a deep relationship makes this beautiful and impactful work possible. Most often the life of **radical withness** is difficult and comes at a personal cost — and yet, amazingly, this is God’s entrée to true beauty and a full life.

Because you are walking side by side with us in this work, we can walk hand in hand with our scholars and families. In the raging waters of our current culture, through the power of relationship in community, empowered by your love and carried by the Holy Spirit, we are re-energized to transform lives through the daily walk of **radical withness**. Because of your partnership in this important work, lives are forever changed by the power of Christ.

God bless,

Kole Knueppel  
Executive Director



ST MARCUS

ST. MARCUS HAS A NEW LOOK!

It’s a new logo that helps tell an old story.  
The story of Jesus.  
The story of our beautiful neighborhood.  
The story of St. Marcus.

With the growth of our ministries, the addition of a third campus, becoming a “network” of schools, and more intentional outreach into the community, the timing became right for St. Marcus to embark on a brand refresh.

Our long-time, valued partner in the project was a Milwaukee-based agency - CI Design. They have partnered with St. Marcus for the past seven years on Gala feature videos and the like and are experts in the branding process, having gone through it nearly 500 times! Since the summer of 2022, they guided us through strategic visioning workshops and interviews.

They asked us to think about what we are all working toward, and out of this arrived the concept we coined “radical withness.”

**RADICAL WITHNESS (verb):** *the state of being radically with others; the act of consistently walking alongside others with loving compassion toward a brighter future and a deeper relationship with Jesus and one another; this act is fueled by the Holy Spirit and was originated by St. Marcus, an urban ministry in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.*  
*(see also: St. Marcus)*

We knew that whatever the logo became needed to reflect and honor what we’ve always been and what we will always be. How we’ve always stood with our community and had a faithfulness to each other that makes us all family.

To our mission. Our values. [those aren’t changing!]

For the church. The school. And everything we do in the community.

That’s why we combined a symbol of our neighborhood...with a powerful symbol of Jesus’ love... and a hint of our name.



Every time we see this logo, it will remind us all...

Of our story. Our calling. Our family.

The St. Marcus family. Of you.

Keep your eye out — over the upcoming months we will slowly start shifting to our new look!







# PHILANTHROPY AS AN ACT OF RADICAL WITHNESS

written by Michele Kitson, Mission Advancement Team

Mike and Maureen Kasdorf are members of the Courage to Commit Leadership Council and faithful supporters of St. Marcus. Recently, I had a chance to sit down with Mike and Maureen to discuss their philanthropy and their role as advocates for St. Marcus and urban education.

**Q:** As we prepared for this interview, I shared with you the definition of our new term - "Radical Withness". What were your initial reactions?

**Mike:** It is exciting! Interestingly, it reflects what we try and do with the Kaztex Foundation. We want to walk alongside the organizations we

fund in true partnership. I like the definition. It is creatively bold.

**Q:** Tell me more about why you are passionate about St. Marcus.

**Mike:** For me, St. Marcus is a light for the city. St. Marcus is answering a need for kids and families. We are passionate about education and know that the school is delivering high-quality education and helping over 1,000 kids toward a brighter future.

**Maureen:** As a former teacher, I know that a good education can launch people and set them up for success. I fundamentally believe that all kids deserve access to a quality education.

The proof is in the pudding – the statistics show that a difference is being made. St. Marcus is a special place, and it is making a real difference for kids and families.

**Q:** How did you first get involved at St. Marcus? What were your first impressions?

**Maureen:** My mom was volunteering. We came to the Gala in 2013, and it was such a special evening. The room was filled with hopeful, excited supporters, scholars, and leaders. The 8th grade scholars that we met were so charming. It was easy to get excited about the organization.

**Mike:** The Gala was our first real introduction. We were wowed by the quality of the event and the interaction with the kids. I was also struck by the attendees – it was such a vast array of people. It was obvious that the organization has a large circle of supporters and influencers. I remember thinking, "this must be something major to be pulling supporters from such a wide community." That night I learned about the quality of St. Marcus, the waitlist of students, and the unmet need for high-quality Christian education options in the city. I walked away thinking, "Wow, how did we not know about this place?"

**Maureen:** Being in the building still makes an impression on me today. It is organized and quiet, with no chaos. It gives the kids the opportunity to focus on learning in a peaceful environment.

**Q:** What does it mean to you to "walk alongside" someone?

**Mike:** To me, it is an image of a father and child walking together. It means to tell someone, "I am with you," and being there to encourage, provide resources, support and do it consistently. It is not a one-off.

“

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**Maureen:** It means taking the time to make a more personal connection as an encouraging friend. We donate to places where we have a connection and establish an ongoing relationship. We go back, we visit, we check-in, and we stay connected.

**Q:** How would you describe St. Marcus to someone who has never visited before?

**Mike:** It is an AWESOME, high performing, urban Christian choice school in Milwaukee serving the kids and families that need education most. They have top-notch leadership and are making a difference for over 1,000 kids. As a donor, it is more than charity, it is a sound investment.

**Q:** You have made a lot of introductions for St. Marcus to people in your network. What drives your passion for doing so?

**Mike:** We simply make introductions and let God do the work. We are so pleased when we come to a Gala and find someone who had been our guest in a prior year, and now they have their own table filled

with new contacts for St. Marcus. It's clear that the Holy Spirit goes before the school, constantly paving the way for new connections.

**Maureen:** As a former educator, I have a wide network of people who care deeply about education. My goal is to open their hearts to St. Marcus and help them see the need for kids in

Milwaukee. I think there are a lot of people who want to give because they are frustrated and saddened by the education crisis in Milwaukee.

By introducing them to St. Marcus, we are helping to connect them to a very tangible and specific need. I hope that they will have that "ah-ha" connection. Giving to the children of St. Marcus is forward-looking and hopeful. We are giving people the opportunity to experience hope-filled giving. My goal for 2023 is to help people from my network engage as volunteers so they can see St. Marcus in action and really get involved.



St. Marcus is deeply grateful for our steadfast supporters like Mike and Maureen. To find out more about hopeful giving at St. Marcus, please reach out to Michele at [michele.kitson@stmarcus.org](mailto:michele.kitson@stmarcus.org).



# UNWRITTEN STORIES

With your support, the 2022 Gala raised \$1,324,424! This tremendous goal was achieved in part by an anonymous donor and members of the Leadership Council who together put forth \$375,000 in matching gifts!

Every dollar is invested in helping write scholars' stories of hope, possibility, and success. The proceeds from this event bring critical resources to each of our three campuses. The Fund-A-Need is being used towards the completion of renovations at our third campus, which will serve an additional 600 scholars!

Your commitment to St. Marcus turns our scholars' unwritten stories into something beautiful.

If you attended the Gala, donated an auction item, bid in the auction, or made a financial contribution of any amount, we are grateful.

Thank you for letting our scholars' stories be part of yours.





# LADONNA'S BRIGHT FUTURE

written by Cecilia Davis,  
Mission Advancement Team

**"EDUCATED. RESPONSIBLE.  
ELEVATED. POTENTIAL."**

When asked to think of specific words describing how she sees herself in 2023, St. Marcus scholar Ladonna chose these words without hesitation. Ladonna has big plans for her life, and with this new year off to a strong start, she's well on her way.

A 7th grader at the North Campus, Ladonna came from a district school in fall 2021. "It was really comforting when I started," she recalls. "People really invited me in, and right away I felt like I was part of a community."

It didn't take long for Ladonna to begin making her mark.

She has maintained honor roll academic status since she enrolled, and her teachers speak highly of her work ethic and leadership. Her favorite subjects are math and ELA. "Ladonna is highly motivated and excels in interpersonal relationships and academics," says David Menk, her ELA teacher. "She is the first person to volunteer and consistently advocates for support when she needs it. She is guaranteed to put a smile on your face!"

Ladonna's homeroom teacher, Katie Thornton, agrees. "She's very independent," says Ms. Thornton. "She always strives for excellence and insists on doing everything to the best of her ability. As someone who always wants to build others up, she is also eager to help and be a teacher to other students."

Ladonna's commitment to excellence doesn't stop at academics. She also pours passion into her pursuits outside of school. Last fall, she ran on the St. Marcus cross country

team, and she can't wait for track season this spring. "Running is the BEST!" she says. Next fall, she plans to join the volleyball team. Ladonna is also an eager chef and often cooks for her family – as one of seven siblings, she cooks big meals! She enjoys trying new recipes, experimenting to create her own dishes, and making breakfast for her mom on Saturday mornings.

If academics, sports, and cooking don't keep Ladonna busy enough, her endeavors as a youth council

**"Ladonna is very strong-minded. She knows what she wants, and she goes for it."**

member at COA Youth & Family Centers, plus budding work as a soon-to-be-certified babysitter, will keep her on her toes. Every week, Ladonna participates in after-school programming at COA. Her leadership roles there include being a youth community coordinator, in which she helps make phone calls to connect other local organizations to COA. She also adds (with a confident smile) that at COA she "keeps the teenagers in check, even though they're older than me". Ladonna also began babysitting this year and looks forward to taking a certification class soon to grow her clientele. In addition, she is eager for a summer job and hopes she can get her first one this year.

While Ladonna's full plate (both in and out of school) may seem awfully ambitious for a 7th grader, her mom, also named Ladonna, isn't surprised about her daughter's appetite for success. "Ladonna is very strong-minded. She knows what she wants, and she goes for it," says mom. As a single parent of seven, she has worked to instill leadership and motivation in her daughter at a very early age. "She's my fifth oldest child. She is such a leader at home, especially with her younger siblings," she adds. She also taught Ladonna how to pray, to

lay a foundation of faith as a key personal value. Ladonna prays daily, and also uses prayer as a calming tool. "When I feel negative emotions, or when I feel like I'm in trouble, I always pray to God," she says. "I breathe in and out. Praying is like a way for me to hold on and keep going."

Another thing that keeps Ladonna going is loving encouragement at school and home. "When my teachers and friends give me compliments and support, it makes me want to be that kind of person for other people." Mom's support is an important influence for Ladonna as well. "My mom reminds me to be excellent in everything I do. When she tells me that I'm bright, it sticks with me, and it makes me want to be something that I'm proud of."

High expectations and encouragement at school are one of the things Ladonna's mom loves the most about St. Marcus. "It's so powerful how St. Marcus takes the time to really acknowledge, recognize, and build



*"When I feel negative emotions, or when I feel like I'm in trouble, I always pray to God."*

students up," she says. "They walk with our kids. That plays a big part in helping Ladonna to keep striving for her goals. I've always told Ladonna that hard work doesn't go unnoticed, at school, work, and in life."

One of the ways in which hard work at school definitely gets noticed is when scholars earn the opportunity to experience Discover America, a one-of-a-kind, educational travel experience for 5th-8th grades. The 7th grade itinerary features several destinations in Arizona. Ladonna has her sights set on becoming a Discover America traveler this year. As she puts it, "I really, really, really want to see Arizona!"

Ladonna knows that God has an amazing plan for her. If everything goes according to her 2023 vision, the year will see her excelling academically, growing spiritually, running track, playing volleyball, traveling with Discover America, leading her peers at COA, cooking amazing meals at home, babysitting more, and landing her first summer job. And beyond 2023, her long-term goals include becoming a lawyer and attending culinary school. Wherever Ladonna's journey leads, there's no doubt she'll rise to the occasion—and St. Marcus will walk right alongside her.



# THIRD CAMPUS

## CONSTRUCTION & RENOVATION UPDATES

### THE MARDAK | VANDENBERG CAMPUS GATEWAY

If you haven't had the chance to drive by our third campus on First and Burleigh streets lately, you will see dramatic changes just by driving down the street.

The Mardak | Vandenberg Campus Gateway, which will encompass our new main entrance on First Street, is nearing completion and is expected to be open for scholar use this spring.

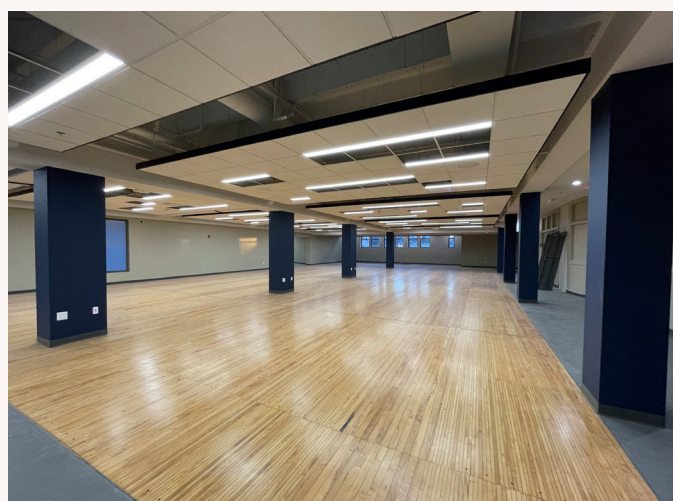
In addition to a secure entrance and improved traffic flow for drop-off and pick-up, this space will also house additional classrooms, a new conference room, and school offices.

We hope you are just as excited as our scholars will be to walk through the new doors in the coming months.



### THE COMMONS

The Commons, which include the cafeteria and kitchen, are also nearing completion. If you have toured the building, you have heard about and maybe seen the bowling lanes, which were part of the original flooring. The floors have now been completely restored with the lane markings included. Currently, the final touches to this space are being completed, and scholars will be using this space for lunch and other large group activities later this spring. Construction on the kitchen is in progress and is scheduled to be completed this summer.



### THE TODD WEHR GYM

The Todd Wehr Gym featuring the Connaughton Courts is complete and in full use. Our scholars love playing basketball, and all teams are having a great season! In addition, scholars and staff use the gym for physical education, all-school chapel, other sports leagues, community events, seating for stage productions, and large meetings.



### Campaign Update

(numbers as of February 15, 2023)

#### People



#### \$10.4M Goal

\$9,564,452 Raised to date  
operating support for  
1,137 scholars

#### Place



#### \$19M Goal

\$15,852,571 Raised to date  
capital support for our  
third campus

#### Promise



#### \$1.6M Goal

\$122,270 Raised to date  
endowment support for  
St. Marcus' future

**\$31M Total Goal**

**\$25,539,293 Raised to date**

## GO ON A TOUR OR LEARN MORE

If you're interested in learning more about our third campus or going on a tour, please reach out to Michele Kitson, Director of Mission Advancement:

michele.kitson@stmarcus.org  
414.562.3163, ext 7556



# FINDING SUCCESS AT ST. MARCUS

Think back to your days at grade school: Who was that one teacher who dedicated a little bit of extra time to you? What subject did you look forward to the most during your long day at school? What got you and your best friend sent to the principal's office on more than one occasion?

Now, when you're reflecting on those days, imagine you returned years later as a teacher to that grade school. Could you do it? If so, you're like Christiana Winzer-Burrowes - a K4 support teacher at the Harambee Campus who graduated from St. Marcus in 2018. It's been only four years since Christiana graduated from St. Marcus, but the now 19-year-old college student says she knew she wanted to return to St. Marcus and launch her career at her alma mater.



*written by Sean McNealy, Mission Advancement Team*

"It means so much to come back to work at St. Marcus," says Christiana, an aspiring speech and language pathologist. "I'm passionate about working with urban youth and setting them up for success. I love it here, and I really believe in our mission and would love to continue working here after college."

Christiana started her education at St. Marcus as a scholar halfway through her 7th grade year in 2016. Christiana, a Milwaukee native who has also lived in Houston and Detroit, was enrolled at a Milwaukee public school prior to her enrollment at St. Marcus. Needing a change, her mother got Christiana on the waitlist, but an emotional conversation between her mother and the middle school director led to Christiana being admitted and enrolled.

"I'm incredibly grateful for the moment my mother spoke with the director and got me in," says Christiana. "That conversation was the start of a new beginning — I wouldn't have been baptized or confirmed, I wouldn't have my current job, and I probably wouldn't be living here in Milwaukee - my life would have been so different."

It was a new beginning, she says, because she wasn't used to being held accountable at her public school and held onto some of her "hot-headed" emotions in her early days at St. Marcus. She says teachers, such as Mr. Andrew Becker and Mrs. Paula Adamson, always showed up for her despite her initial struggles assimilating into St. Marcus' academic and social cultures.

"Mrs. Adamson and I shared an advisory, and we did not let up on Christiana at all," Mr. Becker says. "But she put up a decent amount of resistance. After graduation, you could tell Christiana was transforming, especially as she progressed through Luther Prep high school."

Mr. Becker says the change from where Christiana was when she graduated from St. Marcus to now is remarkable. After being her teacher in middle school, he says, it would have been hard for him to imagine Christiana returning to St. Marcus as an employee.

**"I'm passionate about working with urban youth and setting them up for success."**

"It has been pretty remarkable to see where she was at leaving St. Marcus and where she is now," Mr. Becker says.

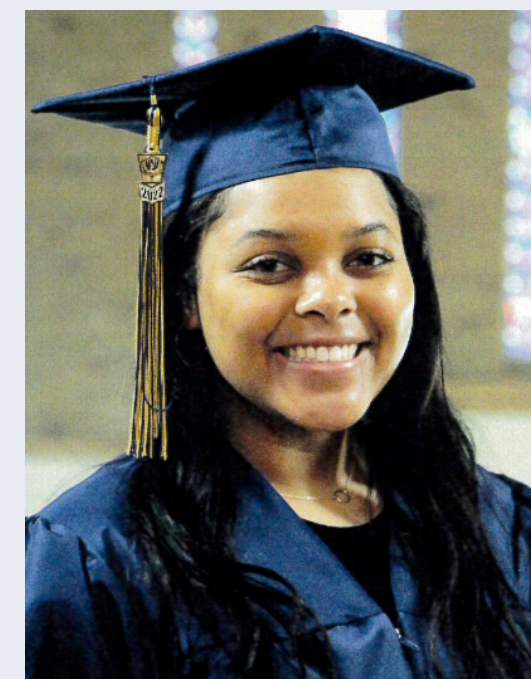
St. Marcus also provided Christiana with a place to learn and connect with her faith. She says Mr. Becker encouraged her to get confirmed and that Mrs. Adamson ensured Christiana made it to church services on the weekend.

"As one of Christiana's advisors, I watched her blossom into a beautiful, amazing young lady of faith who lets the Holy Spirit guide and compel her," Mrs. Adamson says. "She is a rare gem."

**"Eventually, I want to be what my St. Marcus teachers were for me to other kids."**

Christiana graduated from Luther Prep in 2022 and started school at Milwaukee Area Technical College this August while taking on her role at St. Marcus. Christiana intends to enroll at UWM or UW-Madison after her two years at MATC to earn her speech and language pathology degree.

"I talk a lot," Christiana admits, "but I take my ability to talk and speak for granted. I want to be able to help others communicate, particularly urban youth and those who lack the confidence to use their voice. Eventually, I want to be what my St. Marcus teachers were for me to other kids."





# LADIES ON THE RISE

written by Sean McNealy, Mission Advancement Team



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS A GROWING PART OF ST. MARCUS THAT IS MADE POSSIBLE WITH DEDICATED STAFF, TRUSTING FAMILIES, AND STRONG PARTNERS!

ST. MARCUS CELEBRATED STORIES OF SUCCESS AT THE END OF 2022 AND PUT THE SPOTLIGHT ON SEVERAL SCHOOL PARENTS WHO HAVE PROGRESSED THROUGH FINANCIAL LITERACY PROGRAMMING.

HERE ARE GLIMPSES INTO SOME OF THE POWERFUL TESTIMONIES ABOUT HOW THESE INDIVIDUALS PROPELLED THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES TOWARD THEIR GOALS!

## RAQUEL

Raquel, a special education teacher with Milwaukee Public Schools and mother of two St. Marcus scholars and two adult kids, knew the way to homeownership was discipline. She already had good credit, but was accustomed to renting. She wanted a change for her family. “I don’t think I had ever been so disciplined in my life,” she says, “because I needed security for my children - that was my motivation. They now have somewhere to call home and I have something to pass down to them.”

Raquel’s homeownership journey began when she received an email from St. Marcus life coach Moe Lawrenz about a homeownership session in January 2022 - by July Raquel had closed on her home and moved in that August. During the session, Moe connected her to a loan officer who provided Raquel additional resources and encouragement. “It was a joy to work with Moe — her persistence and informative emails moved me forward.”



## COLETTE

Colette, a resident service specialist and mother of three St. Marcus scholars (and seven kids total!), is in the process of closing on her first home this spring! She was inspired to look into St. Marcus financial literacy workshops after seeing a news segment about the programming.

“Moe and I prayed, we cried, and then we got down to the bottom of what was financially hindering me in the past,” she says. “Now I’m on the road to homeownership!” In the year since Colette partnered with Moe, she has eliminated debt and was approved for a home through Habitat for Humanity.

“...we prayed, we cried, and then we got down to the bottom of what was financially hindering me in the past... Now I’m on the road to homeownership!”

## JAUTONE

Jautone, a specialist with Milwaukee county and mother of four St. Marcus scholars, wanted to gain better control of her life, the life she was giving her children, and her savings. In November 2022, Jautone decided to act on the emails coming from Moe and see what the workshops and classes could offer, despite having tried financial literacy classes in the past elsewhere. “It’s one thing to learn the information, and it’s another to apply it,” she says. Since she connected with Moe, Jautone has applied what she’s learned and paid down nearly \$1,000 in credit card debt and has kept up with her car payments. “My children are the reason I am pursuing these goals,” she says. “I want to leave something for them when I’m no longer here.” Eventually, Jautone wants to boost her credit score and pursue homeownership.







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St. Marcus is a Christian,  
high-expectations choice  
school serving students from  
grades K3 to 8th.

Using a proven urban education  
model, St. Marcus seeks to instigate  
change and provide a community of  
learning where children and families  
live, grow, and thrive.

St. Marcus' driving vision is that  
every family has access to excellent  
education in the city of Milwaukee.



[STMARCUS.ORG/SCHOOL](http://STMARCUS.ORG/SCHOOL)

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