



NEWS RELEASE

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École St. Matthew School kicks off campaign to sponsor refugee family

École St. Matthew School is the first Saskatoon school to take the 1000 Schools Challenge and privately sponsor a refugee family from Burundi, a small eastern African country with almost a quarter-million refugees fleeing civil war.

In partnership with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon, members of the school community have spent the last several months planning for Thursday's official launch of their fundraising efforts.

"With all the media attention around the refugee crisis in the fall and winter of 2015, our staff, students and parents started asking, 'What can we do to make a difference?'" said François Rivard, principal at St. Matthew. "Danielle Schock, one of our parents, heard about the 1000 Schools Challenge from a friend in Alberta, and there was immediate interest and support from our whole school community—staff, students and parents. It was pretty unanimous that this would be a great way to put our faith into action, a tangible way to share God's blessings and demonstrate compassion and service to others."

Events were held at the school on February 4 to officially launch efforts to raise the \$30,000 necessary to sponsor a family. Representatives from the Open Door Society gave presentations to help educate students about refugees and the role they will play as sponsors.

Christine Zyla in the migration office of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon has worked closely with the school. "It's truly commendable that a school is taking the initiative to do this," said Zyla. "It's usually an entire parish that takes on the responsibility of sponsoring a family. The school community is helping real people from half way across the world. They are setting such a great example and giving the students such a great life-experience of what service truly is."

A refugee sponsorship committee—consisting of students, school staff, parents and members of the Catholic School Community Council—was established to oversee planning. "We expect it will take about 18 – 24 months of fundraising before we can welcome a family into our community," said Krista Schreiter, chair of the committee. "Our involvement won't stop there. The family will need support to get used to their new home for about a year after they arrive. We'll be here to support them every step of the way."

With 45 schools and nearly 17,000 students, Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools provides Catholic education from pre-kindergarten through Grade 12, rooting students in their faith, helping them grow in knowledge, and encouraging them to reach out and transform the world.

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