

**Letter from Blessed Mother Theresa Gerhardinger, SSND  
On American Children  
From Baltimore, December 22, 1847  
Sent to Rev. Mathias Siegert, Munich Motherhouse<sup>1</sup>**

Below is an excerpt from Letter #728.

“Here are some experiences we have had in our three schools which might prove helpful in sending personnel. Schools will not become large, for there are too many of them, and attendance is voluntary, which is bad. Children attend one school today, another tomorrow, just as they please. If they are corrected they do not come back; learning they often consider recreation. All they want to do is eat cookies, taffy and molasses candy, a cheap sweet. This causes us much trouble. If we forbid it they threaten not to come to school any more. At the slightest punishment their parents say, ‘In this country one may not treat children so severely; they, too, must be given freedom.’

They do not listen to any one, and even strike their parents if they do not give in to them. They laugh and jeer at priests. They ask boldly, ‘Can I go down stairs? I want to go home now.’ They will not write one letter of the alphabet at home. ‘I go to school for that,’ is their answer. Homework cannot be introduced here; the parents do not want it either. Therefore, everything must be studied with them in school. They do not manifest the slightest eagerness to learn German. English, however, they want to learn to read and write. They hate German. All one hears is English. If they want to insult each other they say, ‘You German!’...

“It is difficult to give them grades or keep school records; today one or other leaves, and four to six weeks absence is not uncommon. They show little or no interest in needlework. What is most to their liking is jumping, running, dancing, tagging, singing, and fighting. They are like wild animals, and try out all their naughtiness in school.

Children sit in the school benches with legs crossed, backs leaning and arms folded like men at the theater in our country. They even speak to priests in this position, and the latter must put up with it in order not to displease the parents. It is difficult to get them to come to holy Mass on Sundays and holy days. As soon as it becomes a bit warm they use fans, want a drink constantly, and do not want to study. If it is cold, only a few come to school; these do not take off their wraps, but write with their mittens on. This is how pampered and spoiled even German children are in America. If they do not know something they answer boldly, ‘Teacher did not know it either when she was little.’

They mumble all kinds of abusive language in English. One of the reasons the children do not want to study is the fact that their minds are filled with concern for

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<sup>1</sup> Hester Valentine, SSND, ed. *Letters of Mother Theresa Gerhardinger: The North American Foundations*, (Winona: St. Mary's College Press), # 728, Baltimore, Dec. 22, 1847, pp. 75-76.

boys. They write little notes to each other, exchange gifts, etc. They consider this all right, and parents laugh about it if told. In the lavatories they behave indecently, do not close the door, talk, laugh and sing while there. This is common in America, even with adults... Teaching school is difficult and we implore the dear Lord fervently for his grace..."

Your eternally grateful,  
Mary Theresa of Jesus

NB. School Sisters of Notre Dame were originally allowed to teach only girls, so the above refers to female students.