

Chesterton Academy

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In Twin Cities . . .

Lay Catholics Launch The Chesterton Academy

By PAUL LIKOUDIS

ST. PAUL — Last November, a 32- year- old attorney with the Army Judge Advocate General's Corps at Fort Drum in New York packed up his wife Annie and their five children and their belongings and headed west to St. Paul to take on a daunting new challenge: founding headmaster of The Chesterton Academy, a private, independent high school inspired by the thought of G. K. Chesterton.

" This is ridiculous," said the new headmaster's five- year- old daughter in true Chestertonian fashion.

The new headmaster is John DeJak, a graduate of Loyola University Chicago, where he was a recipient of the Presidential Scholarship, and a 2004 graduate of the Ave Maria School of Law in Ann Arbor. He was an easy pick for the school's founding board of Catholic parents, led by Dale Ahlquist, president of the American Chesterton Society and an internationally recognized authority on Chesterton's life and work.

DeJak has taught Latin, theology, Church history and ecclesiology at Catholic high schools in Chicago and Cleveland, worked as a legal intern for the St. Thomas More Society, and is an active pro-lifer, fully committed to The Chesterton Academy's goal of building a "culture of life."

And he is a passionate devotee of Chesterton and Chesterton's mentor, Hilaire Belloc.

Also leading the effort for the new school is Thomas Bengtson, publisher of the *North- Western Financial Review* and a member of the board of the Couple to Couple League and publisher of its *Family Foundations* magazine.

The founders of the school are in the process of settling on a permanent location for the school in the southwest Minneapolis area, and a closing date is forthcoming, DeJak told *The Wanderer* in a recent telephone interview.

"This is a wonderful effort by parents here in the Twin Cities," DeJak said.

"As parents are the primary educators of their children, this new academy is truly an effort that comes from the heart of the Church's teachings and what better model than G. K. Chesterton in terms of intellectual giant and culture warrior.

" Chesterton is someone who appreciated everything. He took an interest in everything and he was excited about everything and through that love of learning and the world he came to a profound love of God; through God's creation, he also came to understand how all truth is connected to The Truth, who is Jesus Christ.

" What we seek to do at the Chesterton Academy," he continued, "is to provide an integrated education and to teach our students that there is a whole truth of things, and in knowing that we are happy." The project to establish the academy, he said, began some two years ago when a group of parents started discussing secondary schools and saw the need for a high school that not only taught the faith, but taught all subjects through the lens of

the faith, and how they are all interconnected.

"From my experience as a theology teacher in various Catholic schools," DeJak said, "there are too often elements in place that have the effect of undermining the faith, and this new endeavor is a chance to build up the faith and introduce it in a holistic way to our students."

"Parents in the Twin Cities are looking for a school that will be academically rigorous and will offer spiritual formation through daily Mass, frequent Confession, and an emphasis on articulating great ideas through the arts."

The board is currently recruiting students by word of mouth, giving presentations at parishes in the area, and visiting with interested families. "We're especially reaching out to the various home- schooling groups, which is quite a large enterprise out here," he added.

Strong Academics

The academic program at The Chesterton Academy is a solid, traditional, liberal arts program that, over four years, will educate students in the story of civilization, as well as provide them a solid foundation in math, music, art, science, and literature.

Freshman year will cover ancient history, from the Egyptian through the Greek and Roman civilizations. Students will learn the background against which the Old Testament was written and how classical philosophy, with attention to Plato and Aristotle, developed. Sophomore year will cover early Church history through the High Middle Ages, which, said DeJak, is probably one of the most important periods in world history and yet most neglected in other schools.

Junior year will cover the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, and show students how the renaissance in art and literature was accompanied by the rise of the Church Militant.

Senior year will cover the Modern "Revolutionary" Era: the American and French Revolutions, the Industrial Revolution, the Communist Revolution, and the Sexual Revolution (which led to the acceptance of contraception and abortion). The Catholic Church lost its temporal power but developed its religious and moral authority on a universal scale.

The study of literature will be tied closely to the study of history and the rest of the humanities.

During freshman year, students will be introduced to the classic epics of Homer and Virgil. As sophomores, they will be exposed to early English classics such as *The Canterbury Tales*, as well as modern literary renderings of medieval history. During the junior year, students will get healthy servings of Shakespeare. As seniors, they will read American literature, Dickens, Dostoyevski, and Hugo. And Chesterton.

Also in their senior year, students will be introduced to modern economic thought by reading Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*, Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, Hilaire Belloc's *The Servile State*, G.K. Chesterton's *The Outline of Sanity*, and Joseph Pearce's *Small Is Still Beautiful*.

Art education will also be a major component of the academy's curriculum over four years. As the founders of The Chesterton Academy explain: "A complete education must include the development of the child's creative nature and must provide him with the tools and the technique with which to express his ideas, his feelings, and his love. It must also include the analytical skills with which to judge a work of art and therefore must provide the continuous exposure to great art. Most importantly, the mechanical skills and the aesthetic aptitude must be put into the proper context of eternal Truth. A good artist is a complete thinker and vice-versa. Chesterton says that in order to be a good artist, one must be a good philosopher: 'A man cannot have the energy to produce good art without having the energy to wish to pass beyond it. A small artist is content with art; a great artist is content with nothing except everything'."

There will also be an equal emphasis on music. Over four years, students will learn music fundamentals (theory, performance, ear training, music analysis and appreciation) but also music history, where they will see music in the context of the times and philosophy of the period in which it was created, with special attention to the role of music throughout Church history and specifically its role in the Catholic Mass.

In science studies, freshmen will study astronomy and geology; sophomores biology; juniors chemistry; and seniors physics.

Thanks to a donor in Chicago, DeJak told *The Wanderer*, the new academy's library is off to a good start.

The academy is also forming a lay board of advisers, and has already attracted three big names in Catholic circles: Notre Dame law professor emeritus Dr. Charles E. Rice, Chicago's pro-life activist Joe Scheidler, and Minnesota pro-life activist Mary Ann Kuharski.

For more information about The Chesterton Academy, *Wanderer* readers can contact Dr. DeJak by telephone: 952-831-3096; or by email: academy@chesterton.org. Also, visit the academy's web site: www.chestertonacademy.org.

[John DeJak](#), in addition to being a good friend and all-around Great American, is one of the blog contributors at [Some Wear Clerics](#).

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