



"The one thing that is never taught by any chance in the atmosphere of public schools is this: that there is a whole truth of things, and that in knowing it and speaking it we are happy."
—G.K. CHESTERTON



FAITH REASON CULTURE OF LIFE



CHESTERTON ACADEMY

Chesterton Academy

by Emily de Rotstein

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More than one hundred years ago, G.K. Chesterton pointed out that education was in a state of decline and disarray, and that everyone knew it. The astonishing thing is that schools were in far better shape at that time than they are now. Most students studied Latin and the Classics. They were amazingly well-versed in Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare. They could write coherent essays with good grammar and sophisticated literary allusions. They could solve complicated math problems on paper, or even in their heads, that would cause most of today's students to look around for their calculators.

The inability to imbue even general knowledge to students has been compounded by an increasing emphasis on specialization, as students become narrower in their focus at very early ages. If a student shows an inclination toward the humanities, he is steered away from the sciences and vice versa. Subject matter has become increasingly fragmented and students are learning smaller and smaller bits of it.

Unfortunately, our schools suffer from serious problems beyond the lack of content in the curriculum. We have moved from a mere absence of moral unity to a more or less open assault on morality. One wonders if even the far-seeing Chesterton could have imagined high schools with metal detectors at the entrances and contraceptives openly provided to its students. What Chesterton certainly did see is that the entire educational system was bound to keep falling apart because there was nothing to hold it together.

During the all-important high school years young people are going

through physical and emotional changes and grappling with life's biggest questions.

It is a crucial time to learn the "permanent things," the genuinely unchanging standards by which everything else is measured and against which they can test every idea they encounter both now and later. The vast majority of today's high schools are doing nothing to serve young people in this giant task.

Rather than sit around complaining about this problem, two men decided they had to do something about it themselves. They had all the motivation they needed: they were parents.

Dale Ahlquist, President of the American Chesterton Society, and small business owner Tom Bengtson got together and founded a new high school. As Catholics, they knew first of all that the faith must be the foundation of learning, that all knowledge must have an eternal reference point, and every truth is connected to the ultimate Truth. They also knew they wanted to restore classical learning

and create an integrated curriculum, to put back together what the schools had put asunder, so that students could learn how to be complete thinkers (and speak in complete sentences). They wanted to counter the prevailing cultural trend that was anti-life and anti-family. And finally, they wanted to solve one of the most scandalous problems of modern education: its catastrophic costs. The Chesterton Academy was the result.

Naming the school for G.K. Chesterton was an obvious decision for many reasons, not just because one of its founders is more than a little connected to Chesterton. In Chesterton's prophetic view of education he represents the ideal of the complete thinker. He is also a defender of the Faith, and of the very traditions that we have neglected to the point of our present demise. G.K. Chesterton epitomizes Catholic joy.

The school opened its doors in the fall of 2008 with just ten students; the following year it had twenty. In its third year, it had forty-two students. This year, over sixty students will be enrolled, and the school is drawing national and even international attention. People from around the country have contacted us because they want to start similar schools. And we want to help them. The goal is to transform education on a grassroots level because, as Dale Ahlquist says, "It is a



Chesterton Academy: Changing the Face of Education



Chesterton Academy student artwork

Chestertonian principle that any true revolution must be from the bottom up, not the top down.”

What is the Chesterton Academy model? It begins with a classical, integrated curriculum. At the risk of name-dropping, here are some of the people its students meet: Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, Virgil, Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Teresa of Avila, Dostoyevsky...and G.K. Chesterton. They study the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, with some helpful exposure to the Church Fathers. History, literature, philosophy, and theology are braided together. But the sciences and the humanities are also intimately connected, so that the logic of math is seen in philosophy, and God’s handiwork is seen in the sciences. Faith and reason meet in every class. Equal emphasis is given to the arts, so that every student learns to draw and paint, sing in the choir, act on the stage, give speeches, and debate. And learning Latin helps one learn English. Each year of studies builds on the previous, so that by the end of senior year, students are articulate, clear-thinking, well-rounded, and, very importantly, joyful human beings. As Chesterton says, “There is a whole truth to things, and in knowing it and speaking it we are happy.”

Each day at Chesterton Academy begins with Mass, and the year’s

calendar includes religious pilgrimages, spiritual retreats for the faculty, pro-life activities, and fascinating guest speakers.

The academy’s ultimate responsibility is to the parents of its students; we administrators in turn rely heavily on their participation in the school. Sports and other extracurricular activities are all initiated and run by volunteers. Parents help with college

counseling and preparation for standardized tests as students look ahead to college. The unity of purpose, the underlying delight in life and learning, the pervading sense of family in the whole operation, and the obvious and fruitful results of our efforts are, in a word, thrilling.

How do we do it? We have a clear idea of what we want. We know there

CHESTERTON ACADEMY AT A GLANCE

The result of a grass-roots movement of parents, Chesterton Academy is a pro-family, independent high school offering an integrated, college preparatory curriculum centered on the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Focusing on the classics, the school develops complete thinkers who learn to draw on faith and reason for the purpose of building a culture of life.

CHESTERTON ACADEMY OFFERS:

- ; Well-defined integrated core curriculum with classical emphasis
- ; Catholic-centered teaching
- ; Emphasis on general knowledge, not specialization
- ; Training culture warriors – defending the Faith and the family and actively engaging the culture of death
- ; Mixture of Socratic Method and Lecture format
- ; Regular and committed involvement in pro-life activities and strong ties to established pro-life organizations
- ; Daily Mass
- ; Affordable tuition

OUR PURPOSE

The purpose of Chesterton Academy is to nurture the minds and the souls of our children through an integrated education. We believe that all truths are related to the central truth of the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Faith and reason do not contradict one another, nor are they to be segregated from one another. Through the study of art, music, literature, language, history, mathematics, science, philosophy and religion, we want to prepare our children to think both rationally and creatively, to defend their faith, to contribute positively to society, and promote a culture of life.

We are called as faithful Christians to build a Culture of Life, which means going against modern trends

and fashions in almost everything, especially in our approach to learning. As G.K. Chesterton said, “A dead thing goes with the stream; only a living thing can go against it.”

G.K. Chesterton represents the ideal of a complete thinker but also of a modern cultural warrior. At the beginning of the 20th century, he foresaw and addressed many of the destructive trends that have continued into the 21st century. As a recognized defender of the faith, a literary genius, and a stellar example of Christian charity, Chesterton is a perfect model on which to develop an integrated education.

We are preparing our children for both temporal life and eternal life: to be good citizens and to be saints.



The juniors and seniors stage "La Madre," a magnificent play about St. Teresa of Avila by Mother Mary Francis

is nothing more important than the souls of our children. We know that whatever we do must be done for the glory of God.

How do we make it affordable? We have a commitment to frugality. We do not spend money that we don't have. We keep parents actively involved. We have developed a large network of volunteers. We pay a core faculty full-time salaries, and we supplement this with part-time teachers who are willing and able to share their talents for less. We are also developing "Teach for Christ," a program for recent college graduates to give of their time for a year, so that we are teaching teachers, as well as students. The mix of full-time, part-time, and volunteers provides a constant freshness, as they all have to stay in close communication with each other to maintain the integrated curriculum. And all teachers take the Oath of Fidelity to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church..

We rent classroom space from a school district in a first-ring suburb of Minneapolis, where, as demographics would have it, there are now more



The upperclassmen on a thrilling pilgrimage to Rome in March, 2011



The Chesterton Academy Choir consisting of the entire student body

curriculum we want. And we hope that by delivering impressive results, it will prove to be a model that others can follow.

But, yes, we need your help. We invite you to participate in this vital project. Visit our website—chestertonacademy.org—where you can learn more about our curriculum or contact us with specific questions. You will also be able to track our exciting venture and see the smiling faces of Chesterton Academy students.

G.K. Chesterton once observed that “we are children of light, and yet we sit in darkness.” It is time to start bringing light to what is today the darkest of all places: the classroom. Please support us in this wonderful mission. ☸

classrooms than students to fill them. We have found, too, that a science lab can be outfitted for hundreds, not thousands, of dollars.

What lies ahead? Our plan is to develop textbooks and teaching plans that can be used by other schools around the country, including home schools. Textbooks do not need to weigh forty pounds and cost \$200 each. And they do not have to be Godless.

We have already begun adding evening classes (Chesterton University!) that not only provide adult enrichment but extra revenue for the school and the faculty.

We keep our tuition low but we do provide financial assistance to those with proven need. And while we keep our costs low as well, we still need to supplement our revenue with donations. We are a completely independent school; we receive no financial support from the State or from the Church. This independence, of course, gives us the freedom to implement exactly the kind of



Alea Florin and Joe Barron enter history as Chesterton Academy's first graduates. June 3, 2011

To inquire about the Chesterton Academy model of classical education or establishing a school in your area, contact Emily de Rotstein, ederotstein@chestertonacademy.org, or call 952-378-1779.

To make a donation to support Chesterton Academy, please visit [www.chestertonacademy.org/support] .