



ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Nascantur in Admirazione

"Let Them Be Born in Wonder."

A Classical Catholic School

Constituit Anno Domini 2018 on the 150th Anniversary of St. Thomas Catholic School



The Educational Plan

Our Mission:

In partnership with Catholic families, St. Thomas seeks to nurture future Catholic scholars, leaders and saints. Assisted by the Holy Spirit, we inspire students to grow intellectually through a classical Catholic curriculum, forming confident youth leaders grounded in virtue. We guide children to become friends of Jesus—to love as He loves, and join our Catholic community's rich tradition of proclaiming the Kingdom and bettering our world.

"There is one thing that is never taught in public schools, that
'There is a whole truth of things and that in knowing it and speaking it, we are happy.'"

G.K. Chesterton

"Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians 4:6-9



The Relevance of a Classical Catholic Education in the 21st Century

Education in the 21st Century is undergoing a significant transformation as our culture continues down a path of fragmentation caused by secularism—i.e. the attempt to build a society independent of a public discourse and commitment to God. For example, secularism's fragmentation of thought caused by its denial of truth--replacing it with relativism's 'each one's truth', destroys the basis of human reason's search *to know*—ultimately, to know the one God in which all creation is synthesized in one truth.



This cultural fragmentation has similarly fragmented the *purpose* of modern education into that of 'equipping' the child with particular knowledge and skills used to perform a specific task. Education thus becomes methodized and measured, with curricular texts, pedagogy, assessments, and grading being characterized by the principle that knowledge is a means to an end. In the 21st Century when truth is valued for what *it does* over what *it is*, education becomes mechanized as does the learning child.

The Catholic Church has always been the source of a revolutionary leaven that challenges our world. And so it is with education today. Drawing from centuries of wisdom, learning, educating and informing culture—thus the term *classical*--the Church today offers an alternative to 21st century principles of education.

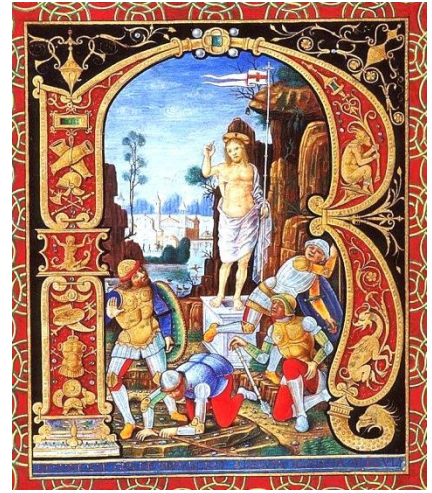
As *Catholic*, a Catholic education is not merely religious instruction, or the availability of the sacraments, nor an environment of children with a shared Catholic heritage. **A Catholic education is in its essence a worldview that understands learning as the development of a relationship between the child, the created world, and God.** This relationship is nothing less than what a child was created for—their soul is meant to learn in an environment where their unity with the world and with God is continually spoken, demonstrated, encountered and explored throughout the school day. This unity is revealed in a classical Catholic education through encounters with *truth, beauty and goodness* in which learning becomes a *joyful end in itself*. In a relationship of wonder and awe with truth, goodness and beauty, in a vulnerability to being *inspired* by them—a child is lead to God.

In a truly Catholic education of mathematics, of reading and literature, of nature studies and history, of each of the arts, of socialization and service, the revelation of an eternal unity in the temporal is always on the horizon. Its curriculum, pedagogy, spoken and visual environment, and organization are all intentionally dedicated to bringing a child into an ever growing awareness, experience and appreciation of the holy unity of their self, the world, and God. Creation is sacramental, and education is meant to lead a child to encounter God within and beyond it. Through an education grounded in inspiration, a child's heart comes to desire the good, their reason seeks the true, and their imagination delights in the beautiful. When education leads a child to participate in this unity, through disciplined thought, creative imagination and a courageous heart, a child can become who they truly are: *Human*. This is the relevance of a classical Catholic education in the 21st century.



What is a Classical Catholic Education?

The authentic education of a child is ordered towards their happiness. True happiness is achieved when a child knows who they are and achieves the end for which they exist. A classical Catholic education is dedicated to forming a child to understand his or her self, the world around them and to respond to the voice of God who created them and calls them to Himself. *This* nature and purpose of a child's life must be the foundation of their education—the depth and breadth of the *humanity* of a child. A classical Catholic education is thereby dedicated in its method, content, and structure to respect and nurture this humanity, to awaken a love for truth, to desire to experience clarity, and to perseverance in seeking knowledge and understanding. The classical Catholic learning environment, while promoting these habits of mind, is also enriched with the profound Catholic understanding of reality, inspiration from a rich cultural heritage of heroism and beauty, and sacramental grace which together form a child's conscience, virtue and prayer. The learning environment of a classical Catholic education therefore:



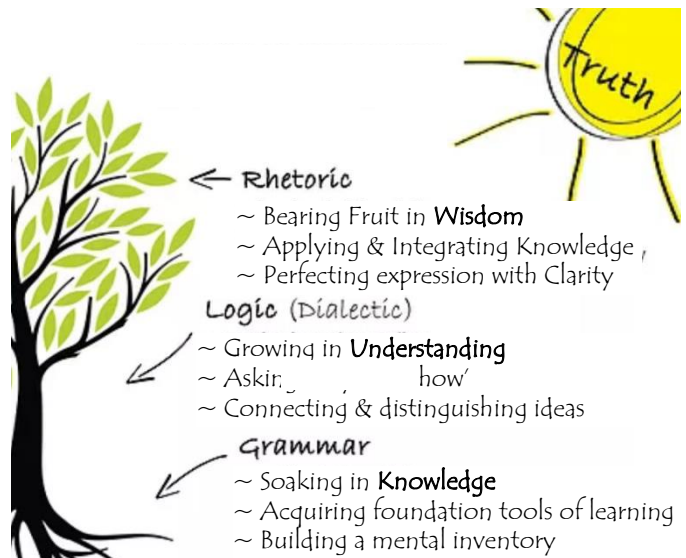
1. **Intends the integral formation of the whole human person**--body, mind and spirit in the dignity of being created in the image and likeness of God.
2. **Seeks to understand objective reality** and to recognize the good, true and beautiful as revelations of reality's origin and end in God.
3. **Attains a synthesis of faith, life and culture** incorporating the child into Christ and His Catholic Church.

The Classical Stages of Learning

A classical education partitions the goals, activities and content of a child's learning into three fundamental *stages of learning* which are aligned to the natural development of a child's inclinations and cognitive capacities.

Grammar Stage (Kindergarten – 5th Grade):

This age's distinguishing cognitive capacity is *memorization*. Children at this age love to memorize and they are good at it! In this stage the 'grammar of learning' or, the verbal, written and conceptual building blocks of future thought and understanding is built up through memorization strategies involving repetition, rhyme, song, etc. The fundamental elements or tools of reading, writing, mathematics, history, linguistics and the study of nature are put into place to be built upon in a child's succeeding stages of learning. The three cognitive goals in this stage of learning are: 1) *Paying attention* as a willful activity of attending, 2) *Memorization* as an exercise and development of this faculty, 3) *Imitating* as an ability to recognize key elements and being able to replicate them afterward, both in the correct sequence and accurately.





Logic Stage (6th – 8th Grade): This age's distinguishing cognitive capacity is to *experience meaning* or to *understand*. These students love to argue from a point of view (have you noticed?!) Students at this stage are guided by the educator *posing essential questions*, which promotes key habits of deeper thought, including: organizing, comparing and contrasting, conducting research, ordering ideas, and writing from another's perspective. This approach comes to include an introduction to the elements of argumentation, formal logic and debate. Students are trained in creating written exposition that is organized, carefully worded and informed. There are three cognitive goals in this stage of learning: 1) *Prioritizing and summarizing details* by identifying the few, key elements that define the content, 2) *Identifying similarities and differences* through comparing and contrasting key ideas and essential details, 3) *Making and evaluating inferences* based on partial evidence and prior knowledge.

Rhetorical Stage (9th – 12th Grade): This age's distinguishing capacity is to *apply, judge and express learning*. In high school classical education settings, students are guided in analyzing, synthesizing, deriving judgements and communicating persuasively their positions.

How a Classical Education Teaches--Pedagogy

The second quality of a classical Catholic education seeks to engage *the heart* of a child--their motivation, self-confidence and capacity to care. Who is the Classical Educator who can do this? A classical educator is one who communicates a love for learning by loving to learn—who reflects on and explores questions deeply. Who fosters the development of a child's understanding of their identity, in the world and beyond it, through a continual reflection on the virtuous life. Who employs pedagogy focused on the use of language, the connecting of ideas, and creative expression. Who leads students to an experience of wonder by studying classic works of excellence, which reveal to them the good, the true and the beautiful.

Sharing with students this adult experience of wonder, fascination, and a growth mindset is the basis for a teaching that develops learning from *open experience* versus from *closed activity*. For example, a classical classroom emphasizes *observing and responding* over *method and practice*. In classical education the child is not a passive receptor of knowledge which is then applied in practice—as most subject textbook-based learning involves. Rather, the classical education student is a participant in ongoing discovery and exploration, leading to new connections and experiences of the good, the true and beautiful in literature, history, mathematics, science, and the arts. Bringing these connections to life in the classroom is not easy, but a classical educator teaches just as a classical student learns, by exploring, comparing, discussing and imagining. This active, participatory educating and learning leads to the habits of thought by which a child *learns how to learn*. Examples of this approach to learning include:

Lower Stage Grammar (K – 2nd Grade): The basic learning temperament of this child is a natural excitement for learning! They enjoy games, stories, songs, projects. Although they have a short attention span, they are captivated by all their senses, and their ability to imagine and create. The lower grammar stage classical educator creates a learning environment for these children through:

- ✓ Memorization
- ✓ Guided exploration & discovery





- ✓ Finding things visually, physically
- ✓ Song, recitation
- ✓ Coloring, drawing, painting, building
- ✓ Use of body movements
- ✓ Short, creative projects
- ✓ Show and Tell, drama,
- ✓ Hear/read/tell stories
- ✓ Games

Upper Stage Grammar (3rd – 5th Grade): The basic learning temperament of this child is being able to make personal connections with ideas. This age of child is excited to learn facts, to make connections through making and organizing collections. This age enjoys relating their own experiences to a topic, or just telling a story. They continue to enjoy to memorize while also be able to use what they learn to make connections to bigger ideas. They easily assimilate language. The upper grammar stage classical educator creates a learning environment for these children through:

- ✓ Collecting, displaying, modeling
- ✓ Observing, explaining, describing,
- ✓ Hands-on projects, activities
- ✓ Memorization & recitation of works
- ✓ Drills, games
- ✓ Acting out dramatic episodes
- ✓ Making cross curricular connections
- ✓ Gathering, summarizing research
- ✓ Oral and written presentations
- ✓ Field trips



Logic Stage (6th – 8th Grade): The basic learning temperament of a child at the logic stage is being able to make connections between ideas to understand the world around them. This age of child enjoys a challenge, making judgements, argumentation and debate, and looking for ways to improve things. This student enjoys showing what they know and can do, is curious about the ‘why’ of things—and wants to know ‘behind the scenes’ facts. These children can often act and speak with a misplaced confidence!

- ✓ Time lines, charts, maps, anchor charts
- ✓ Debates, persuasive reports
- ✓ Drama, reenactments, role-playing
- ✓ Evaluate, critique (with guidelines)
- ✓ Formal logic
- ✓ Research projects
- ✓ Oral/written presentations
- ✓ Guest speakers & field trips



What a Classical Catholic Education Teaches--Curriculum



While the specific content of each subject of the curriculum will draw from its specific standards, objectives, resources and classical instructional practices, these should all be means of capturing the following key principles at the foundation of each subject.

Religion – The subject at the heart of every other subject. The cosmos is an ordered unified whole as it is created in Christ “in Whom all things hold together” (1 Cor 1:17). This reality leads us to worship which is the highest form of knowledge. Religion class is intended to lead the student into a union of faith, prayer and adoration of God. Through daily religious instruction and Liturgy, with a consistent focus on service and growth in virtue, each student and the school is brought into communion with the risen Lord and with each other in the practice of that love Who is Jesus Christ. This reality of love is the true foundation for the entire human community and its development of culture, society and civilization. Students are to be introduced to the wealth of Catholic culture as the fruit of God’s revelation in the world and in the human person. This includes our vocation to love in marriage, religious and consecrated life. Upper school religion includes formation in the ‘theology of the body’ as a beautiful image of life and love. Through catechetical training students learn what the Catholic Church teaches, and how its teachings matter to our happiness on earth and eternal life with God. All instruction, experiences and activities should therefore ultimately seek to lead each child into a more sincere and personal faith, hope and love of God.



History— The entire setting of the human drama has been and remains the search for answers to the fundamental human questions and the human desire for God. In a classical Catholic curriculum students are provided the vantage point of Christian revelation which reveals the entire historical span of human activity and its fulfillment in Christ. From the pre-Christian cultures, whose works can be understood within their own setting, all is united in Christ who reconciles all things in Himself. History

is understood neither as a continual span of progress to the present, nor as a random sequence of events, but rather as a drama, a story of the relationship between Man and God. The historical development of civilizations, societies, personages, events, the works of literature, the arts and the sciences, are understood from the deeper human conflict with ourselves and the historical order brought to human history through divine providence. Students are guided to learn from the key epochs of human history, gaining an understanding of their character, motivations, works and lessons. The student then seeks to understand their own culture and their role in being a citizen of the church, their society and mankind—continuing to live for ourselves and our time answers to the questions Who are we? Why do we exist? What is our destiny?

Literature—The language arts are grounded in the art of reading well, speaking well and thinking well. Reading must become both efficient and insightful—the foundation of communication between one mind and another, between the mind and its cultural heritage. Students must both achieve reading fluency in the lower grammar stage (Kinder – 2nd), as well as a mastery of the English language through grammar (upper grammar stage and logic stage students).





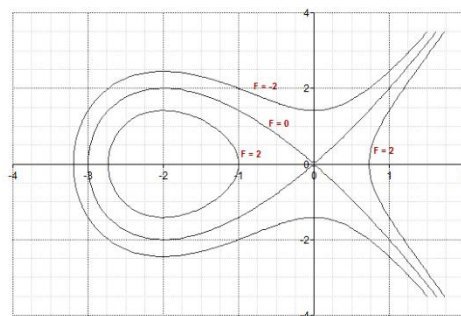
This development is continued in the study of Latin in upper school (by logic stage students.) Close ties are made between literature, history and religion. Through literary works students gain deep lessons on how to live, on the complexity of the human person and our story, and the creative work of written expression that allows us to express our humanity. Recitation of classic works bring students face to face with the drama, beauty and creativity which motivate further explorations in reading and inspires them in their own writing.



Composition— Students can naturally enjoy expressing themselves in with the written word. While being the most complex cognitive activity—requiring attentiveness, memory, imagination, organization, sequencing, vocabulary, grammar, and visualization—students can be brought to a natural pleasure and pride in being able to write well. Learning to do so goes beyond the writing stages of: pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. While helpful organizational steps, these do not actually help a train a child developing meaningful and coherent

text. Writing instruction must train students in a consistent pattern of thinking activity that is developed from Kindergarten through 8th grade, providing a reliable pattern of how to think when writing. With this foundation students can then enjoy learning to improve their writing through vocabulary, grammar, style, research and imagination. Writing instruction should lead all students to feel confident and proficient in expressing their thoughts in writing.

Mathematics—The study of the amazing patterns, order and relationships in the created world are a revelation of the intelligence of its Creator. The mathematical can be seen in science, music, language, art, and logic. In the grammar stage physical counting develops into grouping, place value, and combinations. This foundation provides for the developing in the logic and rhetoric stages the understanding of dimensions, operations, expressions and their applications. Through games, puzzles, codes, measurement and history, the depth of mathematics is kept in full view. All through the extension and application of these concepts, mathematics should be the occasion for experiencing beauty—beauty in the patterns and relationships within the mystery of quantification in creation.



Nature Studies/Science – Science should be studied first with a sense of wonder for the intelligence and meaning we see in the world. Then with our own intelligence we are able to cooperate with this order in the world, understand its complex change and become stewards of its well-being. This wonder is grounded in the presupposition that all reality is God's creation. While the act of creation is not an alternative to natural explanations, the doctrine of creation does state what the world is and not how it came to be. The classical Catholic science curriculum therefore understands nature from the perspective of the ultimate unity of its mystery revealed by faith, and its intelligibility known through reason. For example, life in nature is understood not as mechanical quality and the *result* of a



mechanistic process. Rather, the nature of life *precedes* the living creature, guides it, and is an end in itself. Science instruction is to reveal the natural order of the created world through observation, classification, and identifying natural patterns of development and change. The development of a comprehensive view of the created world is the setting for identifying the individual disciplines of science, the life sciences of plants, animals, and biology, and the natural sciences of physics, chemistry, earth science, and astronomy.

Visual Arts – The study of the visual arts are intended to foster a sensitivity and appreciation of beauty, not as a mere subjective preference or matter of taste, but as an objective feature of the created world both in reality and in man-made works. Beauty in both nature and human works is the presence of an objective relationship to the divine. The experience of beauty in art brings delight and inspiration to the student and moves them to create something beautiful for them self. This ability to render in different mediums is trained through observation of models of beauty, and in practicing their imitation--through attention to detail, shape, color and perspective. A student then builds upon these skills of observation and rendering by applying their own creative imagination to produce beauty. This study and development should be especially infused with the treasures of Catholic art which capture the mystery of the eternal in the temporal that is objective beauty. Throughout the grammar, logic and rhetoric stages of learning, a child is able to capture the beautiful in their age appropriate experience and expression of it.



Music/Choral Arts– The study and experience of the musical arts are to hearing what the visual arts are to sight. This experience should develop the power of listening—a form of attention that leads students to recognize the qualities of sound and appreciate musical beauty. Students can also experience the mathematical within music, in rhythm, harmony, and measure. Joy in music is provided to children through choral song, which is an opportunity to develop appreciation of the tradition of sacred music. Students singing the *Salve*

Regina for example, or other pieces for the liturgical seasons become a celebration of their faith. To grow their appreciation of music and song all students' will participate in the school's *schola cantorum* (school of song). If interested, a child can study an instrument and participate in the school orchestra which offers students the opportunity to perform some of the richest and beautiful works of music in the western tradition.

Physical Education – Play, like happiness, is its own end. Physical education allows students to enjoy the physical activity of play through six structured areas of physical formation: Movement, Coordination, Strength, Endurance, Cardio-vascular and Diet. These develop the human body, providing for its need of physical exercise and trains students in responsible, lifelong habits of care for the body as a temple of the human soul and Holy Spirit. This care is to lead students to take responsibility for their physical health and the body's need for exercise, an appropriate diet and rest.





Through physical education training, including repetition, practice and competition, a child also develops a sense of physical excellence--of strength, endurance, coordination and gracefulness. Team sports allow training in good sportsmanship and the focus beyond the individual to the good of the team. Mental focus, perseverance and high standards should characterize the physical education experience of the child.



Forensics – The ability to express thought in speech is a fundamental characteristic of our humanity and the educated mind. All students in the logic stage of learning receive forensics instruction to develop skills in public speaking, debate and dramatic presentation. 1) Students are trained in the art of spoken expression, developing a foundation of method, confidence and experience in communicating and persuading publically. Training in public speaking allows students to develop the skills of organizing thought, and communicating meaning with style. Students are able to test and improve their

skills through participation in regional forensic competitions. Students are also trained in thoughtful argumentation through lessons on logic—the right ordering of sound judgement. 2) Forensics includes experience in organized debate. Through debate students develop skills in research, organization of ideas and argumentation. Debate allows students to apply these skills in deepening their understanding and ownership of the issues of faith and reason that impact social life in our day. 3) Drama training allows students to develop the art of dramatic performance which leads students to an engagement in story, character and the technical skills of presentation. Plays should give students the opportunity to experience the drama of our human story, its heroism, virtue and emotion.

Technology – Technology is a critical tool that has equipped modern man with opportunities for communication, information flow and learning that are revolutionary and comparable to the invention of writing and the printing press. Technology in the school setting is to be a tool for learning, fully integrated into the classroom academic learning process versus a separate class. Classroom educators will lead the implementation of technology in their classroom, providing technology specific training in the skill base needed to use technology while planning how it is implemented into specific learning activities. Teachers will adopt an age appropriate sequence of skill acquisition including keyboarding, use of common applications and safe use. Students will learn that technology is a tool of human activity with a power that can either strengthen or weaken the human spirit. Students will learn how with discipline and wisdom technology can serve man in his care of the human community and stewardship of the earth.

