



# Holy Family Classical School

A CLASSICAL EDUCATION CENTERED ON CHRIST.

## Classical and Catholic

For centuries classicism has been the norm, not the exception, in Catholic education. St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. John Henry Cardinal Newman—each was classically educated, as was Holy Family’s own foundress, St. Katharine Drexel. So profound has been the influence of classical learning upon the Catholic tradition that the Congregation for Catholic Education itself refers to classical philosophy as the “perennial philosophical inheritance” of the Catholic Church. Returning to classical curriculum therefore goes hand in hand with revitalizing Catholic mission and identity.

## Why classical?

So, why does classical philosophy hold pride of place in Catholic education? As Pope Benedict XVI has observed, the culture of classical antiquity effectively laid the groundwork for the spread of Christianity in accord with God’s providential plan. The ancient notion that a stranger might very well be “a god in hiding”—*xenia*—led the Greeks to treat all guests as though they were gods in disguise. When these same Greeks encountered the preaching of Our Lord in Mt 25 handed on via the Apostles—“whatsoever you did unto the least of my brethren you did unto me”—the Word of God fell upon fruitful soil, a culture that was especially well prepared for the fullness of Revelation. The Word of God itself in the Septuagint, in the wisdom books, and in the New Testament bears the imprint of classicism in its very language, Greek. Pauline preaching was likewise strongly influenced by Greek learning. The

adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire in 325 accelerated a process of cultural synthesis which melded Jewish with Greek and Latin learning. The translation of Scripture into Latin in St. Jerome’s Vulgate further opened Christianity to Latin influence in the early Church. In fact, the Church’s administrative structure is based on the subdivision of the Roman Empire in late antiquity into “diocesan” provinces. When we return to the sources of our rich traditions as Catholics and as Westerners, we find there the rich wellsprings of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin languages, literatures, customs, and learning.

## So, what happened?

That’s a great question. In short, the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries brought with them a series of overhauls in how people thought about education. Freud and Darwin left aside Aristotle and Augustine for a new concept of human nature. Virtue and vice were abandoned for a new genealogy of morals. Schools were turned into “social experiments” by John Dewey. The classical philosophical view of how we come to know truth and goodness became shrouded in postmodern radical skepticism—the rebirth of the very same ancient errors which were first fought and defeated by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

Ancient skepticism had held three basic doubts about the world around us: first, its adherents argued that there is no truth; second that, even if there were such a thing as truth, it could not be found; and third, that even if the truth existed and could be found, language could in no way

communicate it. Altogether, these philosophical doubts led naturally to a denial of the ultimate meaning of things, and of existence itself. In a meaningless world, there is no right or wrong; there are only shades of grey, and pleasures.

## But that’s all in the past, right?

Sadly, no. Very few schools today are even aware of the ways in which the prejudices of secularism have infiltrated their ways of thinking about students, teachers, and learning. Most schools set aside Western culture’s best and most ancient learning, and many even militate against Christianity.

## The Antidote

Every venom needs an antivenom or else the patient will suffer the worst. Reviving what has been left for dead in education requires an intentional community singularly committed to restoring all things in Christ. This process of renewal asks of us a very simple initial declaration: that the truth is out there, and so too are goodness and beauty; that these can be found, and that they can be taught. This much was held by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. These ancient philosophers also taught that the person is a body-soul unity with a discoverable essence revealed in part by our biology. The three basic parts of the person are reason, will, and emotion, and these are subjects and objects of all learning. Such presuppositions are in fact the precondition of all science, ancient or modern.

As followers of Christ, we are able to proclaim even more: that the truth is a person, that the person of Truth is Jesus Christ. In Truth alone will learning set us free. In Christ alone will we find truly liberal, truly freeing learning.

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## HOLY FAMILY CLASSICAL SCHOOL

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### **In Practice**

Classical, Catholic education can take on many forms. Below are some of the highlights from our program of study from PK to 8<sup>th</sup>.

#### **PK and K**

Ages 3, 4, and 5 are taught via the classically inspired methods of Maria Montessori. The early childhood curriculum focuses on the practical life, sensory activities, grace and courtesy, mastery of the alphabet, phonemic awareness, minimal pairs, counting to 1,000, binomial and trinomial cubes, spheroids, ovoids, ellipsoides, and more. The current programmatic aim is to be AMI certified by 2023.

#### **History**

The chief history text in 2020-2021 is Tan's *Story of Civilization*. Beginning in 1<sup>st</sup> Grade, history is the backbone of the curriculum, taking students through the story of Western Civilization twice in eight years as follows:

- 1<sup>st</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Grade: Ancient
- 2<sup>nd</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> Grade: Medieval
- 3<sup>rd</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> Grade: Early Modern
- 4<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> Grade: Modern

Within each year, students study the literature, myths, art, architecture, music, and culture of the period—all recounted from a positively Catholic viewpoint.

#### **Science**

Following the sequence above, each year in science students focus on one of the following:

- 1<sup>st</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Grade: Earth Science
- 2<sup>nd</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> Grade: Biology
- 3<sup>rd</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> Grade: Chemistry
- 4<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> Grade: Physics

Astronomy is treated alongside earth science, with each year in the sequence covering the history of science and each epoch's most notable achievements.

### **Latin, Poetry, and Song**

Beginning at ages 3-5, students are taught the parts of the Mass sung in Latin. In grades 1-4, Latin is taught using the natural method, i.e., orally by word-recognition and dialogue. By 5<sup>th</sup> Grade students begin using Cambridge Latin. Successive years of study will take students through Units 2-3. Memorization of poetry and song is taught PK to 6<sup>th</sup> Grade.

#### **Math**

The math curriculum for 1<sup>st</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade is Saxon Math. Following an important Socratic adage—*no enforced study abides in the soul*—teachers are encouraged to let students self-pace through math so they can level up as interest and aptitude allow. Students complete one volume per year through Algebra I by the end of 8<sup>th</sup> Grade.

#### **Language Arts, Grades 1-3**

For Grades 1-3 we have adopted *First Language Lessons for the Well-trained Mind* and *Words Their Way*. Alongside these, students are read to daily and are accompanied from mastery of phonics through their first acquaintance with various authors in the *Classic Starts* series. Cursive is taught gradually from *Cursive Logic* through calligraphy.

#### **Composition, Grades 4-8**

In 2020, Holy Family Classical School became the first parochial school in the diocese to adopt the IEW or Institute for Excellence in Writing curriculum, a world-renowned method designed by Andrew Pudewa, a Tulsan. Classical to the core, this method is founded upon the practice of imitation as a means of perfecting grammar and the art of writing.

### **Music**

With song as their foundation in PK and K, students move on to study musicology in 1<sup>st</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade. This curriculum seeks to expose students to the development of Western music through today.

#### **Violin and Band**

All 4<sup>th</sup> Grade students are required to take up the sustained study of the violin. Several aims come together in this worthwhile pursuit: perfecting sight-reading of simple melody lines, ear-training, and competency in solfege. Beginning in 5<sup>th</sup> Grade, students have the option of joining band, the only such elementary-level program in our diocesan parochial system.

#### **Theology**

For ages 3-6, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is taught in the Atrium each week. Grades 1-4 study the Baltimore Catechism for their doctrinal formation. Sophia Institute Press's *Spirit of Truth* series is the doctrinal text for Grades 5-8. All students attend Mass and Adoration once weekly.

#### **Physical Education**

Because the person is a body-soul unity, physical education is combined at Holy Family with education in virtue and the theology of the body. The text currently in use is by Ruah Woods Press.

#### **Sacramental Preparation**

Beginning in 2020, the new norm at Holy Family Classical School is to offer students Restored Order Confirmation, confirming them and giving First Communion by the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade. Children need the graces of the Holy Spirit all the more urgently today before their years of adolescence arrive!