



An Open Letter to My Parents

"A Knowledge of What You Have Given Me"

By John Francis Jost ('17)



Dear Mom and Papa,

At one of our recent lectures, Dr. John Cuddeback remarked, "To understand what your father and your mother have done for you, to understand what it means that they have been your parents, is quite a task. It seems to me that there would be *very few moments in life*, like one wherein you can look at your father or your mother, and finally, to some real extent, begin to understand and express this in love."

I have come upon one of these moments, dear Mom and Papa, and I have only begun to understand all that you mean to me. Attending Thomas Aquinas College has made me recognize the great blessing it is to be your son.

Looking back, I am amazed that you did not do more to make me come here. As Papa is a graduate, and my godfather, Dr. John Francis Nieto, is a tutor, you must have known all along how marvelous this school would be for me. And yet, you let me choose it for myself.

Initially, I did not want to come here. As a state champion in swimming, my dream as a kid was to swim at Notre Dame on a scholarship. You supported me all the way and helped me pursue my dreams. You came with me to all my college visits and helped with all my various applications. Yet it was your loving example that ultimately led me to *this* school.

Mom, it was you who gave me the appreciation for literature and love of goodness that helped draw me to the College. I will always remember how mesmerized I was by the way you read to me as a kid, in particular the Greek myths, as well as how beautifully you described God and the saints. You surrounded me with heroes, and I wanted to be like all of them, especially like *you and Papa*. You never ceased to give me your time and attention, and you blessed me, over the years, with eight wonderful brothers and sisters.

"You must have known all along how marvelous this school would be for me. And yet, you let me choose it for myself."

Papa, you taught me a love of learning that I will forever treasure. When I was in high school, you organized discussions about the great books for me and a few of my friends. That was my first experience of classical liberal education, in which I saw what you always loved, and it was indispensable to my decision to come to Thomas Aquinas College. You showed me a type of education that the world did not. I became ever-intrigued by your love of learning through this method.

When I visited other colleges in high school, I noticed that something was missing. As much as I wanted to pursue my dream of swimming at a large university, I realized that I had an increasing desire to study the many *great* things found in a liberal education. A new, more important, and bigger dream had arisen in me because of you, Mom and Papa.

As it turned out, I even had the chance to follow my original dream of swimming in college on a scholarship. Instead, though, I chose to follow what I knew was best for me, because of your love and example. Now, three years into this program, I see that what began as a love of learning has transformed into something greater and more sublime than anything I could have imagined: a knowledge of what you have given me and all that I owe you. For all of this, I am forever thankful.

Love,

Always a Parent

From the pages of this issue of the *Parents' Association Newsletter*, an unintended but unmistakable theme emerges. In every story there is at least one Thomas Aquinas College parent making some sort of extraordinary or sacrificial effort to aid the College.

In his open letter to his parents on the issue's front cover, John Francis Jost ('17) describes how his mother and father, **Jennifer and Michael ('91)**, prepared his heart for this education ever since he was a small child. What's more, they shared the gifts of the College and liberal education with his friends, too, hosting great books seminars at their home during his high school years.

Inside the issue, we read about **Cathy and Charles Mires**, parents of Nina ('10), who have generously purchased a grand piano for the College's next building, the St. Cecilia Lecture and Concert Hall. We learn about the newly inaugurated "Dorm Talk Series" in the women's residence halls, for which the first speaker was **Suzie Andres ('87)**, mother of Joseph ('12). And we catch up on a recent campus career talk, for which **Steve Cotugno**, father of Sarah ('13) and Kevin ('16), brought two Orange County attorneys to campus to offer advice for students who are considering careers in law.

Finally, on the back cover, **John J. Guinee**, father of John ('18) and Caroline ('19), writes about the great gift that every parent makes to the College: entrusting their beloved children to our care. In the case of Mr. Guinee and his wife, **Kara**, that meant sending their son and daughter to our school some 3,000 miles from their Massachusetts home.

From this first gift, many more follow. I have been humbled to see, time and again, how parents of our students and alumni never cease to look for ways to support *all* of our children by supporting the College. As the father of three TAC students past and future — two graduates and a member of next year's Freshman Class — I share this yearning. We parents see firsthand the blessing of this education in our children's lives and, in gratitude, we want to help pass that blessing on to others.

In recognition of this desire, we are currently forming a nationwide Parents' Association Executive Committee to aid the College in its mission of providing an excellent Catholic liberal education to its students. Our hope is that this committee, working with other parents, Regents, and alumni, will introduce the College to new friends and supporters, assist us in raising the annual funds for our vital financial aid program, and help our students and graduates establish the professional connections that they need to prosper after they graduate. Stay tuned for more news about these efforts. Thank you!



May God bless you and your children,

Robert Bagdazian

Father of Daniel ('13), Gabriel ('14), and Samuel ('20)

Coordinator, Thomas Aquinas College Parents' Association

805-421-5927 | rbagdazian@thomasaquinas.edu

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A Grand Gift

Parents Cathy and Charles Mires Donate New Piano for St. Cecilia Hall

“We saw several student concerts over those years and always enjoyed them,” recalls Charles Mires, who, with his wife, Cathy, visited campus often when their daughter, Nina ('10), was a student at Thomas Aquinas College. “We admired the devotion of the choir director, Dan Grimm ('76), and the musical experiences he would create, drawing on what seemed an unusually high percentage of students who have extremely high musical abilities of one form or another.”

There was just one shortcoming in these productions — the performance space.

For the better part of four decades, the College's dining hall, St. Joseph Commons, has served as a makeshift concert facility, but its acoustics are poor, and musicians must compete with the hum of refrigerators and ice machines emanating from the food-service area. So the Mires were delighted when they learned that the Fritz B. Burns Foundation had granted the College funding for a new lecture and concert building, St. Cecilia Hall, which is scheduled to open in time for Convocation 2017.

The news got them thinking about ways they could help. “Philosophically, Cathy and I are more than happy to support an institution generally, but we lean toward targeted giving opportunities,” says Mr. Mires, a retired executive at Franklin Street Partners, an asset-management firm in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The couple has donated regularly to the College over the years and contributed significantly to the construction of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel. “When we see something very specific that we can give to, that resonates with us.”

“For that kind of performance space, you need a very good piano, one that can fill the hall with sound, but not overwhelm it.”

St. Cecilia Hall afforded just such an occasion. With its concert-hall acoustics, theatrical lighting, and 580-person stadium seating, the building will offer an ideal setting for the sorts of performances that the Mires enjoyed when Nina was a student. A family of recreational pianists — Mr. and Mrs. Mires both took lessons as children, as did Nina and her two brothers — the Mires immediately thought of equipping the hall with a grand piano worthy of the building's namesake, St. Cecilia, the patroness of music.

“Something just sort of clicked,” says Mr. Mires. “For that kind of performance space, you need a very good piano, one

that can fill the hall with sound, but not overwhelm it. You need an instrument that will support not only the musical activities of students and faculty, but which can also be available should the College host any outside musicians to provide entertainment to the community.”

He thus contacted Robert Bagdazian, coordinator of the Thomas Aquinas College Parents' Association, with an offer to purchase a piano for St. Cecilia Hall. “Naturally, I was thrilled,” says Mr. Bagdazian. “What struck me was not only the Mires' generosity, but the thoughtfulness that lay behind it. It was yet another example of how the parents of our students and alumni are attentive to the needs of the College, in much the same way that they are to the needs of their children. They seem to look for ways to support the school, even without being asked. It is humbling to witness.”

Mr. Mires then made it his mission to find the perfect piano, contacting retailers around the country, before settling on one close to his home in Raleigh. “It just so happens that there was a great opportunity right here in my backyard. It was the right quality of instrument, the right size, and in the right price range,” he says.

What he found was a 7-foot, 6-inch Schimmel K230 Konzert Tradition grand piano, a model renowned for its tone clarity and precision, designed for use in small concert halls, and beloved by accompanists. He consulted with Mr. Grimm, the choir director, as well as Mr. Grimm's brother, Stephen ('75), who is the artistic director of *Pasadena Pro Musica*. Both agreed that the instrument would well suit the new building. “The Schimmel is an esteemed make of piano, which will be a joy for our pianists to play and for our audiences to hear,” says Dan Grimm. “I am very excited that, thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Mires, the College will have a top-quality concert grand for performance in St. Cecilia Hall.”

For the time being, the piano remains in North Carolina, awaiting shipment to California upon the completion of the new lecture and concert hall. Mr. Grimm looks forward to that day eagerly. “I have hopes that the Mires' gift will attract some world-class pianists to the campus for recitals,” he says. “God bless the Mires for their generosity.”



Campus Life

Trivial-Quadrivial Pursuits



Every year on the Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas, students engage in a spirited contest of “Trivial and Quadrivial Pursuits,” a campus-wide quiz show famous for its extravagant costumes and over-the-top displays of creative gamesmanship. Pictured above is this year’s winning team, the Rhetoricians, who chose *Star Wars* for their theme.

St. Patrick’s Day



Members of the Thomas Aquinas College community gather in St. Joseph Commons for the annual celebration of St. Patrick’s Day. Above, right: Sophia Iacoviello (’18), Anna Conroy (’18), Sarah Williams (’18), and Jessica Pipes (’16)

Walk for Life

After the close of classes on Friday, January 22, more than 200 Thomas Aquinas College students departed for San Francisco and the 12th annual Walk for Life West Coast. The next day, clad in their blue sweatshirts — in honor of the Blessed Mother — they prayed, sang, and peacefully called for an end to abortion alongside more than 50,000 fellow walkers. At the request of the Walk’s organizers, the College’s students once again took on volunteer positions, directing traffic and crowds, as they helped lead the way through the city’s streets.



Rejuniorate

Marking the midpoint of the semester, members of the Class of 2017 took to the Ventura beach for an annual party known as “Rejuniorate.” Right: Genevieve Morlino and Maggie Conklin; below: Cristina Batt, John Anderson, Ian Mascari, Clara Diodati, Bridgette DeBates, Kateri Brown, and Julia Wall



Our Lady of Lourdes Procession



On February 11, the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, Chaplain Rev. Michael Chaberek, O.P., led a small group of students in a candle-light procession around the campus. Pictured above are sophomores Elizabeth and Theresa Gallagher.



“Chariots of Fire” Quad Run



Inspired by a classic scene from *Chariots of Fire*, the students of Thomas Aquinas College staged a “quad run” in March. Above: Josef Froula, Jr. ('17), Joseph Kucel ('16), Nathaniel Mason ('18), Thomas Ford ('17), Alan Bird ('16), Stephen Carey ('16), Bridget Collins ('16), Ryan Lockhart ('19), Matthew Loew ('19), Alexander Mason ('19), Sophie Collins ('16), Veronica Kuenstle ('17), Elizabeth Yanoschik ('17), and Richard Varadan ('16)



Home & Hearth

“Dorm Talk Series” Forms Hearts and Souls in Women’s Residence Halls

On a Tuesday evening at the start of the academic year, the women of St. Thérèse of Lisieux Hall came together for a talk about their patroness. The gathering marked the first in a new, yearlong “Dorm Talk Series” organized by the College’s resident assistant, Sarah Dufresne ('14).

“The intention behind the Dorm Talk Series is to provide a venue for the girls on campus to delve into the spiritual life as it pertains to women in particular, to encourage and nurture growth of the heart and mind, and to foster sisterly community outside of the classroom,” says Miss Dufresne. The Dorm Talk Series features female tutors, tutors’ wives, and other women in the Thomas Aquinas community.

“The men of the College are blessed to have priests living in their residence halls, which lends itself to all kinds of meaningful discussions,” says Miss Dufresne. “So I thought and prayed about how we could do more to form the hearts of the girls here, and this came to me. Being in the presence of female tutors and staff is an encouragement to the girls, as they have an opportunity to be around good and holy women.”

The informal talks, which usually take place at 7:00 p.m. on weeknights, consist of refreshments, a 45-minute presentation, and a question-and-answer session that has, on occasion, run well into the night. “I think there is something to be said for having the speakers come and enter into the residence hall, which is the girls’ home away from home,” says Miss Dufresne. “We make use of the common room, and we gather around the fireplace, our home and hearth. It’s different, more intimate than a coffee-shop talk or a Commons lecture.”

This year’s first speaker was Suzie Andres ('87), mother of Joseph ('12). The author of, among other works, the St. Thérèse-inspired *A Little Way of Homeschooling*, Mrs. Andres spoke on the subject, “Saint Thérèse and the Communion of Saints.” Over the course of the discussion, she urged students to pursue the French saint’s “little way” and to remember that they have advocates among the souls in heaven.



Suzie Andres ('87)

For the year’s second talk, held on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Miss Dufresne spoke about the consecration to Jesus through Mary, according to the method of St. Louis de Montfort. Titled “Chains,” the talk began by examining some of the metaphorical “chains” that often bind young women today, such as pride, anxiety, or low self-worth. Miss Dufresne encouraged the students to pray for the



Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal

grace to be liberated from such chains, and to be bound instead to Jesus. At the end of the talk, she presented small zinc linked chains to be worn as bracelets. The idea came directly from St. Louis de Montfort, she said, who urged the wearing of chains as a “tangible reminder of the One to Whom we

are indeed supposed to be bound.”

Two more, somewhat impromptu, talks took place during the spring semester, when members of two religious orders — the Sisters of Life and the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal, both based in New York — made separate vocations visits to campus. “Whenever we have women religious visiting campus, I will ask to see whether they might be able to participate in the series,” says Miss Dufresne.

The Sisters of Life, who visited in January, offered a presentation in St. Monica Hall about the desires of the feminine heart. Then, in April, the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal led conversations around the fireplaces in St. Thérèse and St. Monica Halls, at which they showed a new video from the Council of Major Superiors for Women Religious, *For Love Alone*.

“Whenever religious sisters visit campus, the girls’ hearts are ministered to in a way that helps them to see the beauty of their femininity,” says Miss Dufresne, who is planning additional talks with female members of the teaching faculty for the remainder of the year. Next up, Dr. Katherine Gardner will speak on what Pope St. John Paull II termed “The Feminine Genius.”

Liberal Education & the Marketplace

College Hosts Career Talks & Workshops for Students

“Our students and graduates are never at a loss for ways they can do good for the Church and the world,” says Mark Kretschmer, the College’s director of student services. “Where they need help is, first, in choosing the right path and, second, in demonstrating to potential employers the versatility and breadth of all they have learned at Thomas Aquinas College.”

To that end, the Office of Career Advisement, which Mr. Kretschmer administers, hosts several career events and workshops throughout the academic year. “We have so many parents, alumni, and friends who want to help our students with networking, job opportunities, and professional advice,” says Mr. Kretschmer. “It is a blessing for our students to make these connections and benefit from these professionals’ insights.”

Law

At the first of this semester’s talks, Wallace Wade, a former prosecutor now in private practice in Orange County, and Gregory Weiler, a 30-year partner of Palmieri Tyler in Irvine, visited campus to offer advice and encouragement to students who are interested in pursuing careers in law. “You’re at a great school, a great college. You will have a lot of the skills that, frankly — having taught law school — law students are often lacking,” said Mr. Wade. “You are going to have a leg up in many ways.”

The February 12 meeting, which covered topics ranging from the LSAT to law schools to areas of practice, was made possible by Steve Cotugno, the father of Sarah (’13) and Kevin (’16), who arranged for the two attorneys to visit campus and even joined them on the 110-mile trip from Orange County.



Career Strategies

Two weeks later the College hosted a Career Strategies Workshop on the subjects of job discernment, networking, résumé and cover-letter writing, and interview preparation. Leading the discussion were three graduates of the College who — having worked in several of the country’s most prominent corporations — were able to share their wisdom about how to apply the benefits of a Catholic liberal education in the marketplace.

The first presenter was none other than Mr. Kretschmer, who, prior to coming to work for his alma mater, was the youngest branch manager for Kinko’s, Inc., in the Los Angeles market. Mr. Kretschmer initially focused on discerning the right career path, before turning to the elements of a well-constructed résumé. Next, Kayla Six (’12), a strategic sourcing manager at Anthem, Inc., gave a detailed presentation about writing cover letters. Finally Paul Lazenby (’10), who worked for Google and DHL before recently returning to the College as the director of its Annual Fund, offered students suggestions about how to make a favorable impression during interviews.



Entertainment

Hollywood actor, producer, and director David Henrie — best known for his portrayal of London Busbee in *Little Boy* — visited the College on April 3, where he spoke about the TV/film industry, answered questions, and treated students to a preview of his upcoming short film, *Catch*. “I had a blast and was inspired by the beauty of the campus,” says Mr. Henrie. “It’s no wonder how one can contemplate such lofty subjects at Thomas Aquinas College, when all a student has to do is walk outside, look around, and let the awe of nature calm his/her mind.”

LinkedIn

Alumna Maggie Tuttle (’10), who works as a lead for Talent Solutions Support Services at LinkedIn, returned to campus on April 17 to present a workshop about how students can use the professional-networking site in their career search. “You can leverage the LinkedIn network and the data we have there to better understand what career options are available to you,” Miss Tuttle told students. Her 30-minute talk focused on how to use the service to discern a career, land a job, or select a graduate school. “Coming from Thomas Aquinas College, we have such a unique education and background,” Miss Tuttle said. For graduates, she stressed, “letting those unique strengths and qualities come out [in one’s user profile] is really important.”



Parents' Corner

Of Ptolemy and Empty Nests

By John J. Guinee

People cannot believe my wife and me when we say that our house feels empty ever since our first two children, John and Caroline, left home for California and Thomas Aquinas College. “You have eight other kids!” they say. “How can your house possibly feel empty?”



And yet, it does. Our younger children, all the way down to Veronica, age 1½, are at a loss without their big brother and sister around. For their part, John and Caroline, now in their Sophomore and Freshman Years, have adjusted to college life pretty well. But they, too, have their moments.

One day last fall I received a call from John, which eventually turned to his Ptolemy studies. “It’s really complex math,” he groaned. “And it’s *wrong*.”

Ptolemy, a 2nd century mathematician and astronomer, constructed a geocentric model of the universe that was the scientific standard for 1,200 years, until overtaken by the heliocentric models of Copernicus and Kepler (which TAC students study later in their Sophomore Year). “Even though the model is *wrong*,” John grumbled, “I still have to work through it.”

“John,” I told him, drawing on my 25 years’ experience in the financial-services industry, “*every* model I’ve ever worked with in finance is wrong. What matters is not that the model is wrong, but what it says about the data you’re working with, what it tells you about what you know and what you don’t know, how it can set you up to design the next model, which may be better, but will still, at some level, also be wrong. This is how we learn.”

“Well,” he said, the air of frustration leaving his voice. “I never thought of it like that!”

At the College, John and Caroline are not just learning about models, or reading great books, or contemplating profound questions. They are learning how to think, how to reason, how to build on the work of others, how to communicate and cooperate. These are skills that will serve them for life.

My professional field is all about assessing risk, making decisions, and convincing people of your decision. The

employees that we all want to hire — the best investment banks, the consulting firms, the top corporations — are the intellectual athletes, those who are versatile enough to quickly adapt to changing circumstances and learn new skills. In a volatile world where information is coming ever faster, if your training is too specialized, or your learning is too rote, you’re going to be easily replaced.

When I tell the people in my industry that, rather than going to conventional colleges or business schools, John and Caroline are studying the liberal arts, they are shocked. But when I tell them about TAC and its curriculum, they say, “Wow, I would love to go to a school like that.” They can see the value of this program.

“I have no doubt that the education John and Caroline are receiving will prepare them for any career path. But that is not why Kara and I prayed fervently, as they considered other schools, that they would choose TAC.”

I have no doubt that the education John and Caroline are receiving will prepare them for any career path. But that is not why Kara and I prayed fervently, as they considered other schools, that they would choose TAC.

We first learned about Thomas Aquinas College five years ago, when our children began attending Trivium, a classical high school here in Massachusetts whose founding headmaster was once a tutor at the College. There we met some other parents who were TAC graduates, and we immediately saw that there was something different about them. They talked differently, joked differently; they were thoughtful, intellectually curious, deeply faithful.

As we learned more about the College, we saw that it would be the best place to prepare our children not only for adulthood in this world, but for eternity in the world to come. They would be prepared for whatever life could throw at them, and no degree that is technical or vocational could ever do that.

So far, it has turned out beautifully. John and Caroline have grown in their knowledge. They have grown in their faith. They have developed great friendships. The things we hoped that they would embrace, they have embraced.

We couldn’t think of a better place for them to be, other than closer to us.