



Parents' Association Newsletter

THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE

Spring 2015

An Open Letter to My Parents

Thanks to Your Example, I'm Busy and Thriving

By John Parker Wilmeth ('15)

Dear Mom and Dad,

Life sure is busy here. This morning I sang the National Anthem with our barbershop quartet for the local girls' softball league; tonight I turn in my thesis, which I've been working on for more than seven months. On Wednesday I was accepted into the architecture program at Notre Dame, for which I am extremely grateful. I am singing with the College Choir at a concert in April, and I am directing a choir of my own, Chrysostomos, which is performing on Palm Sunday. On Tuesday nights I teach catechism at a nearby church with several friends from the College.

You have always shown me that activity is more satisfying than inactivity, no matter how desirable laxity may seem to be, and I have come to live a life as busy as y'all's back home in South Carolina.

Dad, your perseverance and dedication with a difficult and tiring job, and indeed your love for helping those in need, have done more than just keep my brother and me fed, clothed, and schooled. The example you set has called me to be a man as you are, responsible and firm with the important things, but also generous and selfless in love. You did not raise me to be some person pre-formed in your mind, but asked me to search in my heart for what I truly love, and to pursue it with my whole being.

Somewhat paradoxically, this gift of asking Philip and me to be our own persons is what allowed us to convert to Catholicism, a decision that I know has been, at times, a source of tension. Though we may not yet be on the same page on everything, I want you to know that I converted partly because I see the same things in God that I experienced to be so good in you: He is hard, firm, and just; but He is so gentle and loving to His children that He will never let them come to any harm. He will provide for us even through His own suffering.

It was our conversion that led us to Thomas Aquinas College, to learn about our new faith, to discover its perfect integration with reason, and to prepare for a life which, I hope, will be filled with continual discovery of new knowledge and love. This program, with its rigorous philosophical and theological treatment of the world I have always wondered about, was exactly what I desired. In the seminar I was led by the greatest artists and thinkers to see how our understanding of things affects our understanding of our own lives and destinies. And through the sacramental life at the College and in spiritual direction with its priests, I have attempted to exist always in relation to God — although there is still much work to do!

Mom, your vibrancy and sheer love of life have inspired me to reach for the very best in all that I do. Your humility in learning about the Faith through your children, and then coming into the Church, is amazing. Your example is an important reminder to me that even the wisest among us are still under the tutelage of God.

I want to thank both of you, as much as I can, for a gift which I can never repay. Thank you for everything you have done, and for supporting me in coming to Thomas Aquinas College. I know you will continue to do so as I embark on my imminent voyage to become an architect!



“I want to thank both of you, as much as I can, for a gift which I can never repay.”

Love,
John Parker

Supporting Our Students

This issue begins with a thoughtful letter from senior **John Parker Wilmeth**, in which he thanks his mother and father for preparing him for his time at Thomas Aquinas College and beyond. John Parker's words are just one example of the profound gratitude that all our students have for you, their parents, reminding us of the great honor and responsibility that you have bestowed by entrusting us with their care.

We at the College try to live up to that honor and responsibility in many ways. First we offer a truly excellent liberal education that is grounded in and nurtured by the Catholic faith. We also seek to surround our students with mentors and role models, such as the chaplains and Resident Assistant **Sarah Dufresne ('14)**, who is profiled on the next page. In addition to offering advice, encouragement, and support to the students, Sarah works closely with the assistant dean to create a vibrant social environment on campus.



We are mindful that your children will be with us for only a short time, so we also try to support them in their transition to post-college life. The College's Director of Student Services, Mark Kretschmer, organizes numerous workshops and forums to show students how their education can be an asset in the job market, provided that they work hard and take the initiative. On page 7 we look at ways that the Office of Career Advisement, which Mark oversees, and the Parents' Association are working together to promote **student internships** and career networking.

So, how well does this multi-level support network for our students — starting with their formation at home, and continuing through the College and beyond — work? One answer to that question can be found in the back-page testimony of **Dr. Keith Marotti**, the father of four Thomas Aquinas graduates and a member of the Parents' Association Executive Committee. "When we look back over all the decisions we have made over the years," Dr. Marotti writes, "sending our children to the College stands out as one of the best."

Our hope and prayer is that, through God's grace, all Thomas Aquinas College parents will feel the same way. To that end, we are always looking for ways to improve the experience of our students and to further engage parents in the life of the College. If you have any suggestions, please let me know — I am always glad to hear from you.

God bless you and your children,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Bagdazian".

Robert Bagdazian

Father of Daniel ('13) and Gabriel ('14)

Coordinator, Thomas Aquinas College Parents' Association

805-421-5927 / rbagdazian@thomasaquinas.edu

E-Mail Resources for TAC Parents!

- Get "Letter Home," the Parents' Association Electronic Newsletter
- Join the TAC Parents' Discussion Group
- Send us your prayer requests

Just send an e-mail to
rbagdazian@thomasaquinas.edu.



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In Loco Parentis

Sarah Dufresne ('14) Works with Students & Parents as Resident Assistant

“This is my daily prayer,” says Sarah Dufresne ('14). “What are the needs of our students, and how can I, in a small way, respond to them?”

As the College's resident assistant, Sarah is responsive to those needs, day and night, in ways both small *and* large.

From her apartment in St. Monica Hall, she acts as the “dorm mom,” offering young women advice, companionship and, when necessary, late-night rides to the emergency room. “My vision for this position is, more immediately, to help the students with their day-to-day concerns and, more broadly, to strengthen their hearts, causing a ripple effect that helps the campus at large.”

The College first established the resident assistant's position in 2003, says Assistant Dean Steven Cain, “to make sure things are going well for our students, to keep a protective eye on them, and to provide someone they can talk to if they're having difficulties.” Among the RA's responsibilities are running campus activities, acting as a liaison between the assistant dean and the students, and serving as an on-campus contact for parents. The position is “particularly aimed at the young ladies,” observes Mr. Cain, as the College's chaplains serve a similar mentoring role in the men's residence halls.

“It's not uncommon for me to have six or seven girls in my apartment, all talking about various issues, or maybe we take off on a hike,” says Sarah, who models her service on the “mentorship/discipleship” model that FOCUS missionaries employ on secular campuses. Having worked on her high school's campus ministry team, and more recently with Justice for All's pro-life campus outreach, she understands that being “radically available” is key to forging relationships with young adults. Her door is open, figuratively speaking, 24-7.

A “typical day,” says Sarah, begins with answering parents' phone calls and e-mails. She then checks in with the assistant dean's office and, after visiting with students or preparing for upcoming events, goes to extracurricular events in the afternoon before attending the 5:00 p.m. Mass in Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel. On Wednesday evenings she joins the women prefects for adoration, where they pray for the students' intentions.

Of course, Sarah's real work begins after dinner, when her nocturnal visitors begin stopping by to chat. “I'll talk to anywhere from one to five girls,” she says, noting that the topics can range from schoolwork to homesickness to roommate



issues. “A lot of it has to deal with boys,” she adds, “and how to negotiate that.”

To help facilitate healthy campus relations, the resident assistant works to create fun and wholesome recreational activities, both the College's regularly planned events, such as dances and parties, and more spontaneous or casual gatherings. This year Sarah has hosted Bible studies, a women's campout, a pancake breakfast, and a “Sunset at the Cross” visit to Ventura's historic Grant Park overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

Given the intimate role that the resident assistant plays in students' lives, the position is, by necessity, always held by a recent graduate. “Our community is unique,” explains Mr. Cain. “It has its own customs, traditions, feeling, and spirit to it. It's really important that the resident assistant be someone who has a sense of what the community is like.” Having graduated from the College just last year, Sarah finds that she is “still close to the joys and the struggles of being a student here,” and thus more aware of the students' needs.

Although most resident assistants move on after one year, Sarah has graciously agreed to stay for a second. “I have enjoyed working with Sarah,” says Mr. Cain. “She has a good seriousness about her, and she is deeply concerned and caring. That has really been true of all the resident assistants that I've worked with. They are great young ladies.”

For her part, Sarah says, she is eager to return next fall. “I love doing this.”

Parents can reach Sarah by phone at 805-421-5946 or by e-mail at RAAssistant@thomasquinas.edu.



Resident Assistant Sarah Dufresne ('14) with Clara Diodati ('17), Emily Sanchez ('17), Rosie Simonse ('17), Rachel Beck ('17), Bridgette DeBates ('17), and Molly Sullivan ('18) at Ventura's historic Grant Park Cross

Campus Life

Spring All-College Seminar



The subject of this semester's campus-wide seminar was "Father Sergius," by Leo Tolstoy. Above, left: Serena Lessard ('18) and Liz Krestyn ('17); right: Jorge Moncada ('18), Bridget Collins ('16), and John Jost ('17); below: Mary Bridget O'Hara ('17) and Michael O'Hara ('15)



Women's Camping Trip



In late March Resident Assistant Sarah Dufresne ('14) led a group of women on a weekend campout. Pictured above is a group of freshman campers. From the left, back to front: Anna Conroy, Sarah Williams, Siobhan Heekin-Canedy, Maria Brown, Maura Collins, Sophia Iacoviello, Marie-Barbara O'Brien, and Suzanne Urbancic; right: Laura Weber

Walk for Life

More than 200 Thomas Aquinas College students traveled to San Francisco in January for the 11th annual Walk for Life West Coast. Left: Misha Johnston ('18) and Zoe Appleby ('18); right: April Shonnard ('16), Peter Covington ('17), Sophie Macik ('15), John Parker Wilmeth ('15), Sean Phan ('17), Nicholas Gartonzavsky ('18), Pat McCann ('17), Alex Sebastian ('17), Michael Zepp ('17), and Joseph Quackenbush ('17)



St. Thomas Day



The College celebrated its patron's feast day this year in its customary manner. Photos, clockwise from top left: Mass in Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel; a mid-day lecture ("The Three Titles of St. Thomas Aquinas," by Rev. Romanus Cessario, O.P., of St. John's Seminary, Boston); and the campus-wide game show, Trivial & Quadrivial Pursuits (pictured, Jack Grimm '15 and Madeleine Lessard '16)



Cookie Cook-Off



The rules of Thomas Aquinas College's Cookie Cook-Off are simple: Teams get one evening to bake their confections, working entirely from scratch. Left: Gabrielle Aranas ('17), Teresa Riccio ('17), and Chris Burnham ('16); right: Paul Grimes ('15)

Mardi Gras Dance

Students celebrated Mardi Gras a few days early this year with a Venice-themed dance in St. Joseph Commons. Right: Zoe Appleby ('18) and Westin Roseberry ('18); below: William Meany ('18) and Micaela Stoutz ('18)



Othello



On March 21 the St. Genesius Players treated Thomas Aquinas College students, faculty, and families to a production of *Othello* by William Shakespeare. The directors of the performance were Caecilia Shapiro ('16) and Thomas Trull ('15). Top, left to right: Brendan Davidson ('16), John Turrentine ('16), and Rocky Brittain ('15); right, above: Anthony Maza ('15) and Zoe Appleby ('18); right, below: Carmel Richard ('15) and Thomas Trull ('15)



¡Felicitaciones 2015!

Alumni & Parents' Associations to Host Second Annual Taco Dinner on Eve of Commencement

“To the Seniors, we want to say, ‘Congratulations.’ To the parents, ‘Thank you.’ And to Seniors and parents alike, we hope to make it clear that graduation need not mean goodbye.”



THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Those sentiments, says Thomas Aquinas College Vice President Paul J. O'Reilly, are the reason for a special event that will take place at the College this May — the second, he anticipates, in a long-lasting tradition. On the evening before Commencement, the Thomas Aquinas College Parents' and Alumni Associations will jointly host a celebratory dinner for graduates and their families.



“We can toast the Seniors for their hard work, commend the parents for their sacrifices, and give thanks to God.”

up to four free tickets to all seniors, who can purchase extras in advance for \$8 apiece.

For the Alumni Association, the event serves as an opportunity to welcome its soon-to-be newest members, the Class of 2015, and

to make known the networking and fellowship opportunities available to the College's graduates. Parents likewise get a chance to learn how their relationship with the College can continue, far beyond Commencement, through the Parents' Association and its community of faith.

“Above all else, the dinner allows us all to celebrate together,” says Dr. O'Reilly. “We can toast the Seniors for their hard work, commend the parents for their sacrifices, and give thanks to God for the many blessings of these last four years and those that are still to come.”

Members of the Class of 2015 and their parents can reserve their tickets at thomasaquinas.edu/tacodinner.

Commencement 2015: Schedule of Events

More information available at thomasaquinas.edu/commencement

Wednesday, May 13

- 9:00 a.m. Senior Theology Exam
- 5:00 – 9:00 p.m. President's Dinner
St. Joseph Commons
Seniors and their fiancés only
- 9:30 p.m. Senior/Faculty Bowling

Thursday, May 14

- 12:30 – 3:00 p.m. Senior Photos
Individual times vary

Friday, May 15

- 9:15 – 10:45 a.m. Commencement Practice for Seniors
- 4:00 – 6:00 p.m. President's Reception
Doheny Hacienda
Parents, seniors and their fiancés only
- 6:00 – 7:30 p.m. Alumni and Parents' Associations
Dinner for Graduates and their Families
Fresh-grilled tacos
Behind St. Joseph Commons,
under the canopy

The family of each graduate may receive up to four tickets free of charge, and additional tickets are available for \$8 each. Members of the Class of 2015 and their parents can reserve their tickets at thomasaquinas.edu/tacodinner.

Saturday, May 16

- 8:30 a.m. Baccalaureate Mass for Seniors and their Families
Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel
- 11:00 a.m. Commencement Exercises
Academic Quadrangle
Speaker: Sr. Regina Marie Gorman, O.C.D.
Vicar General of the Carmelite Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Los Angeles
Luncheon immediately following in St. Joseph Commons

Monday, May 18

- 12:00 p.m. Residence Halls Close

TAConnections

Students Tap into Network of Parents, Alumni & Friends for Career Internships

“It’s one thing for our graduates to tell potential employers about the value of their education, how they are well prepared for any line of work,” says Robert Bagdazian, coordinator of the Thomas Aquinas College Parents’ Association. “It’s another thing for them to *show* it, to prove just how good they are. That’s where the internship comes into play.”

Since the College established the Parents’ Association in 2013, Mr. Bagdazian has worked with the Office of Career Advisement to develop a network of parents, alumni, and friends of the College to help students make connections and find internships in their desired career fields. “Internships are a great opportunity for employers and our students alike,” he says. “They let employers see for themselves what liberally educated workers can do, and they allow students to get solid workplace experience to complement their academic credentials.”

• One student who has taken advantage of this informal network is **Joseph Stack** (’17) of Murrieta, California. Early in the summer between his freshman and sophomore years, Joe was visiting campus when he mentioned that he wanted to find a summer job in venture capital or investing. A friend suggested that he contact Justin Schneir, senior vice president at Arthur J. Gallagher & Co. and a member of the College’s Ventura Board of Regents. Mr. Schneir had spoken at one of the College’s career panels the previous year, where he encouraged students to contact him if they needed job contacts or advice.



“I reached out to Justin, and he was more than happy to help me,” Joe recalls. Mr. Schneir put Joe in touch with another of the College’s regents, Dan Peate, the owner of Peate Ventures and “chief evangelist” for Hixme, a startup health benefits company. “I explained my background and my interest in venture capital,” Joe continues, “and Dan made it happen.”

For the past two years, Joe has worked part-time for Peate Ventures and Hixme during the academic year and fulltime during the summers. As an intern, he says, he’s “worked in every department, doing whatever they need,” acquiring price-less experience.

Although Joe came to the College having already earned a bachelor’s degree — he graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 2013 with a concentration in inter-

national development — he credits the College with helping him get his start in venture capital. “I think the TAC network reaped more benefits for me than UCLA’s because it’s so tightly knit and everyone really cares for TAC’s students,” he says. “The introduction that got me this job was due to the College, and my critical-thinking skills from the College helped me to do a really good job during the interviews and afterward, enough so that they wanted me to come back.”

• **Catherine Birri** (’16) likewise made use of the TAC network, landing herself an internship with a prominent NGO at the United Nations in New York. “When I was discerning what to do after college, and what my interests are, one thing I thought of was writing,” she reflects. That reminded her of a visit that Mr. Bagdazian had recently made to her family’s home in Metuchen, New Jersey, where he mentioned internships that were available through the Center for Family & Human Rights (C-Fam), a Catholic organization that monitors and contributes to international social-policy debates within the U.N.



Catherine soon applied and was awarded one of C-Fam’s yearlong writing internships for its college blog, International Youth Coalition (iycoalition.org). Since January she has been writing two articles per month, on topics of her choosing, regarding issues of life and the family. “It’s great to be part of an effort to inform young people about current events, and to engage the college demographic on important matters,” she says. Best of all, thanks to the powers of the Internet, she can participate in her internship, and get her works published to an international audience, without having to leave the campus.

“I feel blessed to do it, and it’s a good challenge,” says Catherine. “The education here prepares you well to write, to formulate your ideas, to put together a structured and ordered essay, and to look for the truth. Getting to apply the tools and skills that I’ve learned here to something beyond this education is a nice foretaste of what may lie ahead for me. And it’s fun.”

Know of any summer-internship or job possibilities for the College’s students or alumni? Please contact Mark Kretschmer, 805-421-5917 or mkretschmer@thomasaquinas.edu.

Parent's Corner

“The Best Decision We Ever Made”

By Dr. Keith Marotti

In 1997, when our eldest son, Richard ('03), went to TAC's High School Summer Program, my wife, Hope, and I knew little or nothing about Thomas Aquinas College. Little did we know that by 2012 all four of our children would have graduated from there.

Just having Rich decide to attend the College was nothing short of a miracle. At the age of 18 he was incredibly rebellious. He stopped going to Mass. He had been accepted at five other colleges, one of which even offered him a full scholarship. Thomas Aquinas was at the bottom of his list, he said, because it was “too Catholic.”

The likelihood of Rich's attending the College was slim, but Divine Providence intervened. First he attended the Summer Program, which greatly improved his attitude and made him open to considering TAC. Then, while he was visiting the various schools that had accepted him, I prayed and fasted for his college choice. Much to my delight, he came back from each of these visits disappointed. None of the schools seemed to live up to his hopes, and in the end he chose Thomas Aquinas College, despite himself.

Our other three children would all go on to follow in Rich's footsteps. Francis ('07) and Rosemarie (Lindsey '05) would not even think of going anywhere else. When Marie ('12) briefly considered enrolling at another university, none other than Rich called her and convinced her to go to TAC. Yes, miracles do happen!

When we look back over all the decisions we have made over the years, sending our children to the College stands out as one of the best. Actually, we are not convinced that “we” made the decision at all. All of our children chose to attend Thomas Aquinas College on their own — through the grace of God and the direction of the Holy Spirit.

As parents we are grateful that the College taught our children to think logically and to present coherent and compelling arguments. It schooled them in the classics and confirmed them in their faith. They received a foundation that prepared them for any career and any situation — which is evidenced by the careers that each has chosen.

Our children have entered quite varied vocations and professions. Rich is now a husband, a father, and a lawyer living in Sacramento. Rose is a wife, a mother, and a pastry chef in Las Vegas. Francis is now Fr. Francis, a priest here in our home diocese of Kalamazoo. And Marie is just starting nursing school.

All four have an intellectual foundation that has increased their appreciation for all that is true, good, and beautiful — such as theology, philosophy, literature, music, science, rhetoric, and art. During their time at the College, they also had the privilege of making true and lasting friendships — friends that have been there for them through good times and bad.

More important, our children's experience at the College built upon the underpinnings of faith that we tried to give them in their formative years at home. In so doing, it set their moral compasses to direct them on the path to true happiness.

While many parents send their children to colleges where they lose their faith, we were blessed to send ours to one that helped them rediscover and deepen their love of God. Our children now have not only an intellectual understanding and appreciation of their Catholic faith, but also a depth of spiritual commitment that goes beyond pure intellect. We are grateful and most proud that we have four children who are active in their Catholic faith and are now passing that faith on to our (so far) seven grandchildren. We even have a daughter-in-law who has entered the Church.

Yes, sending our four children to Thomas Aquinas College was the best decision we ever made as parents. The education and formation they received is a true “pearl of great price.” I would strongly encourage all parents to consider the College, and I would assure them that they will never regret it. We look forward to the day when we will see all of our grandchildren graduate from TAC.



From top to bottom: Dr. Keith Marotti and his wife, Hope; Richard ('03), his wife, Christina, and their children; Rosemarie ('05), her husband, Daniel Lindsey, and their children; and Fr. Francis ('07) and Marie ('12).