



# ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA

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## ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

March 2, 2022

Dear Parents,

When I arrived here at St. Catherine's as pastor six years ago, I quickly began to receive requests for a Catholic high school in the area. Although there are a few options for Catholic high schools in the archdiocese, the commute to these schools can be quite a burden. The archdiocese indicated to me that there were no plans to build a Catholic high school in this area in the near future, so I began to look at the possibility of opening an independent (or non-diocesan) Catholic high school. About three years ago, I began that process, but, for several reasons, I decided to pause the project (particularly the transition with our archbishop and superintendent of Catholic schools as well as the pandemic). However, recently, I have felt the Lord calling me to consider moving forward again.

Three years ago, I, along with the board of directors I formed, were exploring the possibility of partnering with the Chesterton Schools Network, and this is the direction we have decided to take again. This partnership will basically allow us to purchase a franchise and open a local Chesterton Academy which will give us access to the resources and expertise of the organization which has been in operation since 2007.

I recently met with Archbishop Hartmayer to speak to him about the plans for the school, and he very graciously encouraged us to move forward and has even allowed us to use parish facilities to open the school for the first year (I have some classrooms in the parish office building that are not used during the week). The plan is to open the school, which will be called Chesterton Academy of Atlanta, with one (freshman) class in August of 2023. After the first year, we will add an additional grade each year and will ultimately need to find a more permanent facility near St. Catherine's that could accommodate about 150 students, which is the target size for the school.

For those not familiar with G.K. Chesterton, he was an English convert to the Catholic faith who was a very saintly man and one of the most brilliant and prolific writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and he was extremely influential in the lives of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. The founders of the first Chesterton school were inspired by the life and teaching of G.K. Chesterton and, as their website states, they had a very clear mission when they opened the first school: "to offer a classical, integrated high school education that was faithful to the Catholic Church and affordable for families of average means." A few years after opening the first school, they decided to offer the model for others to replicate and formed the Chesterton Schools Network. There are currently almost 30 Chesterton schools around the country with several more opening next year.

In some ways, Chesterton schools are different from many other Catholic schools in that they promote a classical curriculum and focus a great deal on the arts. For those who may be unfamiliar with classical education, I invite you to read [this helpful article](#).

Since the school will not be an archdiocesan school, it will operate under the authority of an independent board of directors, which I will initially chair. Nonetheless, I plan to work in concert with the Archbishop and archdiocesan office of Catholic schools to ensure that the school has a solid Catholic identity and strong academics, and we will be seeking accreditation through the Georgia Independent Schools Association and Cognia.





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To be sure, Chesterton schools are unequivocally Catholic. However, with independent schools, there is a process whereby the Archbishop must give approval for the school to be formally identified as “Catholic,” so we will not initially be referring to the school as a “Catholic school” but rather a “classical high school grounded in the Catholic faith.”

I anticipate that there will be many questions regarding the plans for the school. You can submit questions to [info@chestertonatl.org](mailto:info@chestertonatl.org), and I or one of the other board members will respond to you. You can also visit our website at [www.chestertonatl.org](http://www.chestertonatl.org) or you can visit the Chesterton Schools Network website at [www.chestertonschoolsnetwork.org](http://www.chestertonschoolsnetwork.org) where you will likely find many of the answers to your questions. We will be hosting parent information sessions and will be updating our website regularly. Please check back frequently for updates. In the meantime, I ask you to please keep this endeavor in your prayers.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. Neil Dhabliwala  
Pastor

