

Johnson: Chesterton Academy offers fresh take on classic education

G.K. Chesterton was a British writer of vast influence in the early 20th century, penning plays, novels, poems, and hundreds of articles and essays.

He employed humour, intelligence, and humility in defense of sanity, of Christianity, and particularly of his chosen faith: Catholicism, and his work remains in wide circulation today, in many languages, touching Catholics and other Christians around the world. His writing trains the mind, challenges our preconceptions, and brings many closer to Christ.



Stefan Johnson

St. Isidore Learning Center in Elk Island Catholic Schools, is a relatively new online school, and in some respects we were still looking for our particular charism when, in the fall of 2019, we started talking with some folks from the Society of Gilbert Keith Chesterton in the United States about their network of Chesterton Academies.

The Chesterton Schools Network delivers a joyful, Catholic, classical curriculum through which students explore literature and history, from the ancient to the modern, along with theology, philosophy, Latin, and the fine arts.

A classical education, but in the Chesterton spirit: faithful, full of wonder

and humour, without the stuffiness many would assume comes with such subjects.

“Are any of your schools online?” we asked. The answer was no. “Would you be open to the possibility of working with a publicly funded Catholic, online school from Canada?” we wondered. Yes indeed!

Conversations ensued and relationships grew, and in time we submitted a proposal, which was in essence a concordance of the two curricula, ultimately a way to deliver Alberta Education courses, meeting Alberta outcomes and requirements, but doing so in a Chestertonian manner that met all the knowledge outcomes and the sequenced approach employed by Chesterton Academies.

That led us to this year. We launched as a school within a school, the Chesterton Academy of St. Isidore, with a cohort of over 60 students from across the province, a truly joyous and invigorating group of teenagers who are keen to learn and laugh together, studying online.

We recently placed students in the traditional House system, a joyous occasion, in their Houses of Ambrose, Augustine, Athanasius, and Chrysostom. We’ve chosen Prefects, and started our first extracurricular club (a Philosophy club, and initiated by teenagers!) We’re already hearing from new parents, interested in next year.

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Alberta is a place of educational choice, and among Alberta schools one can find sports academies, fine arts academies, outdoor-based education, academic excellence and vocational training – all manner of programming. And now, in a public separate school, we have a classical Catholic school: a Chesterton Academy.

-Stefan Johnson is the assistant principal at St. Isidore Learning Center in Sherwood Park and is the lead administrator for the Chesterton Academy of St. Isidore. His love of history, literature, and theology led him to the teaching profession, where he has served faithfully as a teacher of Latin, English, and religion for the past 20 years. This column was originally published by Faithfully, the blog of the Diocese of Calgary.