



The Institute for
**CATHOLIC LIBERAL
EDUCATION**
The Truth Shall Set You Free



The Spreading Renewal of Catholic Education
A Guide for Parents

Q. What is Catholic liberal education?

A. The term “Catholic liberal education” is simply a description of the full vision of human formation according to the mind of the Church. It is desirable and accessible to everyone who has a soul. This approach is catholic with both a large and small “c,” meaning that it is universal. It is liberal, in the classical sense of the term drawn from the Latin *liber*, which means *free*. Authentic Catholic education frees us to see the truth of things, and to order our lives and our loves to that truth. With a 2,500-year proven track record, this gold standard of education produced many of the keenest minds and the holiest saints in history. It works.

Q. How does Catholic liberal education relate to Catholic classical education?

A. Different term, same idea. For millennia, education was seen not as mere job training but as a search for wisdom and virtue. The Catholic Church took up this classical tradition in the liberal arts and sciences and ordered it toward Jesus Christ. “Classical” education is a kind of shorthand that speaks to the origins of the tradition; “Catholic liberal education” speaks to its end—freedom in Christ. Different schools choose different labels, but they are all reclaiming the same path to human flourishing. These schools are at the forefront of an exciting renewal of Catholic education across the country. What began in small pockets is now spreading to entire dioceses.

Q. Why is this change desirable for children?

A. Modern educational approaches have degenerated into a factory model driven by standardized testing. Cram, test, forget. By emphasizing fragmented facts and skills over rich content, they fail even by their own metrics to form students who can think well, speak well, and write well. Education becomes a dull chore rather than an adventure of discovery. By contrast, Catholic liberal education engages children in a lifelong love of learning by teaching them to investigate the meaning and purpose of all created things. With the ancients, we recognize that wisdom begins in wonder. Children become motivated to hone the skills needed to pursue knowledge, and to see all things through the eyes of faith. They gain confidence and hope.

Q. What changes can we expect to see in our school, and for what purpose?

A. Parents can expect to see their children find new joy in learning, because learning to think is actually fun. Only an engaged learner can truly grasp and incorporate new knowledge to see patterns and connections that will propel her to delve deeper. Teachers help children to see all subjects as part of the human story, from language to mathematics, history to science. The focus is not simply on conveying information, but also on cultivating each child’s intellectual faculties, including the ability to observe, to listen, to remember, to make connections, to speculate, to calculate, to persuade, and to love that which is worthy of loving. By reading stories aloud and discussing them, teachers are developing those abilities and they are also forming the children’s imagination. By examining and drawing objects in nature, children are developing their powers of attention. You can expect lots of history, fewer worksheets, more creative assignments, more writing, recitation of poetry, and memorization of key building blocks of learning, such as math facts and parts of speech. Less homework does not mean less learning!

Secular Education

Ordered toward material, temporal ends

- fragmented, industrialized
- focus on practical skills
- emphasis on information
- ignores the moral imagination
- one mile wide, one inch deep
- lectures + testing = passive learning
- susceptible to indoctrination

Q. How long will this transition take?

A. Most schools plan for a two-year transition of their curriculum. In year one, we recommend bringing in history to replace social studies, choosing high quality literature to complement the history sequence, and implementing a strong writing program. In year two the focus is on bringing the same kind of wonder and deep thinking into the math and science curricula, fully integrating them with all other learning. Most schools also add the study of Latin for its deep formation in the order of language, its usefulness in many other areas of study, and its role as the unifying language of the Church.

Q. What about STEM education? Won't my child be left behind?

A. Absolutely not! This education prepared brilliant scientists and mathematicians throughout history because it gave them mastery of “the language of number” and trained them to see patterns and connections in their studies and experiments. Trained in logical thinking, they were pioneers of scientific discovery.

Q. Is this too rigorous for every kind of learner? What about children with special needs?

A. Every child can benefit from this deeply human formation that proceeds along an age-appropriate path. Often, we see that children who struggle to learn become more engaged and motivated by the clear stepping stones, the rich content, and the spirit of inquiry in these classrooms. Also, there is built-in differentiation that allows all kinds of learners to find success.

Q. Will my child be college and career ready?

A. Superbly. There is no better formation for the human mind, heart, and soul. When we aim at human flourishing in faith, wisdom, and virtue, we certainly attain—and far exceed—the aims of “college and career readiness.” These students are prepared to be the moral leaders of the future.

Q. How can I support these expanded learning opportunities at home?

A. Read with your children and ask questions about the stories, including the ones they are reading at school. Wonder aloud about the things you see in nature. Delight in their ability to learn wonderful poems by heart, and see if you can do it as well as they can. (You can't!) Don't ask, “What did you get on that test?” Instead, ask, “What was the most interesting thing you learned today? Tell me about it!”

Q. What are the expected outcomes of the transition to this approach to education?

A. Students develop precise tools of thinking that are the foundation of a nimble mind. They have a greater mastery of language and mathematics because they have learned in an ordered, comprehensive way. Children come to love what is good and true and beautiful. This formation protects them from the anxiety and skepticism of the culture. Most importantly, Catholic liberal education unites faith and learning. Children can see God's creation in all its beauty, complexity, and mystery. They can see themselves in the story of salvation history. In this way, children are drawn more deeply into a trusting relationship with Him. Only this will make them truly happy in this world and the next.

Catholic Liberal Education

Ordered toward eternal happiness

- integration of subjects, knowledge, faith
- restores meaning & purpose
- awakens wonder
- nurtures the moral imagination
- cultivates habits of rigorous thinking
- constant discussion = active learning
- develops intellectual freedom

The Top Ten Differences Found in a Catholic Classical Liberal Arts School

1. Children are excited, happy, and hungry to learn. Their parents report that they enthusiastically share their new knowledge and discoveries at home and that they have longer attention spans.
2. The content is richer and deeper than one would expect for any given age group.
3. Because instruction is ordered toward the nature and development of the child, it is natural and enjoyable.
4. Children develop keen skills of long-term memory because all learning is integrated into other things they know, so it sticks. Knowledge is no longer stored in short-term memory, to be forgotten after the test.
5. Children become attuned to pattern, order, and relationships between things; this ability is a fundamental building block of thinking in every discipline and in every career.
6. Children grow in understanding by looking deeply into things, rather than by skimming the surface. They master the art of thinking, which equips them for life.
7. Children are intentionally nurtured on examples of intellectual and moral virtue across the curriculum. Because all humans learn first and foremost by imitation, the students strive to form these habits and internalize them.
8. Children are inspired by immersion in things that are good and true and beautiful. They see not just what is, but also what ought to be. They are protected from the skepticism of the modern world.
9. Children are engaged by the dramatic, chronological story of history as salvation history; they better understand today's world and they learn to see themselves and their earthly vocation in light of this reality.
10. This is the formation that truly equips children with the confidence and joy that comes from seeing the meaning and purpose of things through the eyes of faith. It is the education for *discipleship*.

