

My daughter, Teresa, was scheduled for surgery yesterday. However, when the anesthesiologist heard Teresa's cough, the surgery was promptly cancelled. After explaining the situation and discussing rescheduling, the doctors and nurses turned to my daughter and asked what she would like to do that day since her schedule had just opened up. Teresa turned to me and asked, "Do you think I could still go to school?" We grown-ups looked back and forth between my seven-year-old and each other, not sure whether she was joking, and ultimately concluded that Teresa was sincere in her request. Teresa left her doctors speechless, and the surgeon finally declared that she had never heard a child ask to return to school before. I smiled and thought to myself, "Well, Aquinas Academy is a small school. This might be the first time they've ever cancelled an Aquinas student's surgery."

Teresa's words didn't surprise me quite as much as they surprised the doctors. This is Teresa's fifth year at Aquinas, and this is not because we haven't looked to place her elsewhere! It takes about forty minutes to get to school every morning, so we've searched for schools that might be closer or might be less of a financial burden. However, in studying the formation provided and the atmosphere of schools in our area, we've decided that what Teresa gains by being nurtured at Aquinas is far more valuable than a shorter commute or a smaller tuition. We just have not been able to find a school that can compare to Aquinas.

What makes Aquinas Academy so unique? The educational standards are very high. We've seen that Aquinas seeks to instill a classic, liberal arts foundation, rooting in students not only the fundamental skills necessary to become logical, critical thinkers, but also an intense desire to pursue a greater understanding of the world and a passionate love or, and respect for, knowledge and insight. Of course, there are other schools that provide an excellent education and instill this love of learning, but Aquinas offers something more. Aquinas Academy not only provides religious education, but seeks to foster in the hearts of these young ones a deeper understanding of faith and a burning love for God. The singularity of Aquinas Academy lies in the mission of the school not only to educate the mind, but to form the heart and soul of each individual child, to shape the whole person, keeping in mind the unique characteristics and gifts of each child.

How does Aquinas accomplish this? Rather than keeping a checklist of items to be covered in the school year, Aquinas' skilled and attentive teachers focus instead on the formation of each child. Aquinas teachers are trained to leave no child behind, not by bringing knowledge to their students, but rather by bringing their students to the knowledge. This educational method sounds very abstract, but our teachers are trained in formation and practice this method with an overwhelming love for each child at the foundation of everything they do. This mindset allows for a wonderfully unique atmosphere to exist at Aquinas Academy; the happiness felt by each child secure in the knowledge that his teacher truly loves and cares for him is felt by all who enter the school.

It is amazing what can be accomplished with love and passionate commitment. This comment sounds trite, but in light of our daughter's academic achievement, understanding of the world around her, and profound love of virtue, my husband and I are continually amazed by how this statement is proven to be true at Aquinas. We have watched Teresa in amazement as she reads to us from advanced texts, we have marveled at her ability to interpret her world, and we are overwhelmed by her growing understanding of the faith and her virtuous practice of it in everyday life. Our hope is that as Teresa blossoms into adulthood, she is able to progress in this same nurturing environment, surrounded by a community of close friends, teachers, and family who have experienced this same cultivation. We work to turn this hope into a reality, not only for Teresa, but for as many children as Aquinas Academy can support.