

## **BCL ep378 What is Education Actually For? with Ali Ghaffari**

What is education actually for? Is it to prepare students to get into college and get a job, or to form the kind of person who will flourish in all aspects of their life and faith? Today's guest has trained leaders in some of the most demanding environments in the world, teaching ethics and leadership at the United States Naval Academy, and flying F-18s from aircraft carriers. But after a profound conversion, he and his wife asked a different question. What if education isn't mainly about information and college and career, but formation? They didn't just search for a better school, they actually went out and started one, Divine Mercy Academy.

Join us for this episode and be encouraged as we raise up the next generation in our homes and in our schools. Welcome to another episode of Base Camp Live. Davies Owens, your host here with you on the journey of raising up the next generation.

It's always a joy to be able to meet so many of you. I've been recently at a Herzog training on parent engagement, met with many school leaders, and excited to have many of you joining Base Camp Live, listening for the first time. Big shout out, as always, to those who are partners with us at Base Camp Live and Zipcast.

Brian Dow, head of school at Liberty Classical Academy in Newcastle, Colorado. Brian, thank you for being a part of this great community that is growing all around the world of people who are raising up the next generation and partnering together between homes and schools and churches. And Jack Hummel, head of school at Cedar Classical Academy in Lansing, Michigan.

Again, a big shout out to you and your parents and your teachers and your community. We're not alone. Sometimes we think we're in our individual schools.

We're just that little odd school here in the community doing things a little differently, maybe a little bit more old fashioned. In reality, we're part of a growing movement that God is stirring up all around the world. In this episode, I want to just say thank you for those who come alongside and partner with us.

And before we do, just a quick mention about Zipcast. As most of you know, my full-time work is actually running this amazing organization that I started almost three years ago. We have about 10 people who work alongside me that are passionate about connecting schools and homes.

And we have Basecamp Live. We've been doing this now for 10 years, which is amazing, actually 10 years coming up in November. And the whole vision has always been how do we co-labor better together, lock arms, raise the next generation together.

We launched Zipcast as just a resource to do that even more effectively and giving you the microphone at the school level. I was talking recently with a head of school who said something that really stuck with me. He said, it has never been easier for me to share my voice with our

families.

Using Zipcast, we can send out these weekly quick updates, stories from our campus, testimonies, and even be able to include helpful content that we were able to pick from the Zipcast library on parenting and understanding our school better. With Zipcast, parents get a simple text each week that they can simply tap. They can listen on the go.

Everybody's on the go these days and it's a great way just to listen and get caught up with things that are happening at your school while being encouraged with weekly tips and guidance and this important work we do of raising the next generation. If you want to see how Zipcast works, let me encourage you just to sign up for a short demo at [zipcast.media](http://zipcast.media). In addition to our own partnership with Zipcast, we're so grateful for those who sponsored this episode, Life Architects Coaching, Wisdom and Eloquence. That's Robert Littlejohn and Chuck Evans.

It's a great book that they've written, Wisdom and Eloquence, for parents. Of course, the Herzog Foundation, our great partner there, and Wilson Hill Academy. They have a phenomenal resource for online classical education.

Even if you just need them to cover one class, they have that ability or a full classroom experience for your child. All that to say, we had an amazing conversation with Ali Jafari. He joined the St. John Henry Newman Institute back in 2022, not that long ago.

After three years, he was named the Executive Director. Ali and his wife, Mary, founded Divine Mercy Academy. It's a K-8 Catholic school in Pasadena, Maryland.

They were inspired by the beauty and truth and goodness of the church's educational tradition, and they wanted it for their own children. Ali, as I mentioned in the opening, is a career naval officer. He's flown a variety of aircrafts, most notably the F-18 from aircraft carriers.

When he was at the U.S. Naval Academy, he taught leadership and ethics to midshipmen, faculty, staff, and coaches. He holds a master's degree in philosophy and theology from Holy Apostles College and Seminary. Without further ado, here is our conversation.

Ali, welcome to Base Camp Live. Thank you. Great to be here, Davis.

It's so good to have you here. I'd love for you to take a few moments and tell us your story, because you have a very fascinating story. The road to becoming a leader in this great classical movement was not typical for you, and I think it's incredibly inspiring.

Tell us a little bit of your story. Certainly. I was born in Vermont, a small town in Vermont.

My father was an immigrant from Iran. He came over in his youth, seven, eight years old. My mom, a French-Canadian family, they met in high school.

She got pregnant for me in high school at 15 years old. He was 18, and then life got really serious at that point in time. They got married.

They tried to make a go of it for about three years, and then their marriage fell apart, unfortunately. A single mom, my mom was, I guess she was 18, a 19-year-old single mom now with my brother and I, my younger brother, doing the best that she could at that tender age. Things went sideways, as you would expect.

She ended up in some really dark places, but thanks be to God. She had the right people in place at the time to help pull her out of that, and then God, obviously, was there. For a whole year, my brother and I went to live with an aunt and uncle and their kids while my mom recovered in rehab.

Shortly after she came out, she met a man who became my stepfather. He was a tremendously strong, stabilizing influence. For him, education was really important.

My mom provided the unconditional love, which was really important, and he provided the structure and the presence there to provide me a way towards success. Education was the thing that I latched onto. In fact, he coached me in ice hockey and Little League.

He said, if you don't get good grades, then you can't play on the weekends. I had this incentive to do well in school. We were a poor family.

We were on government assistance and just kind of eking our way through life. Thanks be to God, the education worked out well. All that effort, I was able to get to a private high school for the last couple of years, a really advanced school, and then go to college.

Then from there, I joined the Navy. In that process, I really launched myself from my family into a far more comfortable existence and success. It could have gone sideways any number of times, but thanks to my parents, it went well.

In that time, God was not really part of my life. I should say that correctly. God was part of my life, but I didn't embrace Him as part of my life.

He was always there carrying me along the way. It wasn't really until college that God entered the conversation, at least in my consciousness. I was really good at playing the educational game where memorize, regurgitate, move on, what's on the test, flush it, and then bring on the next thing.

My track was to go to medical school. I wanted to be a doctor so that I would never have to worry about money again, but God was not part of that. I kind of put myself as the center of the universe.

I thought very highly of myself as a result of my education. It was coming into contact with two mentors who really changed the trajectory of my life in that sense. One was a Navy SEAL turned

eye surgeon and a really amazing and impressive man who was also Christian.

He got me talking about God and the existence of God. I started to become more open as a result of him. I could not dismiss Christianity as the opium for the masses.

I just could not dismiss it anymore. Then I had another neighbor who challenged me on faith. Between those two men, I really had to re-examine my entire life.

That set me on a path to being open to God and then eventually embracing Him through the Catholic faith and coming into the church. That was in my early to mid-twenties after I had joined the Navy. That is quite a journey.

What an amazing testimony to God's providence and favor in your life. Now to see where you are, which we're going to talk about in a moment, but to realize your own discovery through education and the importance of your walk with God through Christ. What a beautiful story.

I'm curious from your time as a Naval officer. I'd love to hear a little bit more about that. I mean, obviously, big adventure flying F-18s and even, I guess, having a stint there of teaching.

Maybe you're still involved in some ways in teaching leadership at the academy level. You've got a really bird's eye view of leadership as well. Talk a bit about your experience there.

Yeah, absolutely. The Navy was very good to me. I really enjoyed and appreciated my time there.

I did 20 years in aviation. I was blessed to be able to. My dream when I was a kid was to fly X-Wing starfighters like Luke Skywalker and save the universe.

I got to live a version of that by flying F-18s. We were deployed to spend some time in the Middle East and in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan predominantly for combat operations. That was some of the most fulfilling missions I had in my life.

Along the way, I learned a lot about leadership. Early on, you learn from the really good leaders. You learn from the really bad leaders.

One of my really good leaders was an admiral. I worked for Admiral Bill Sizemore. He was the commanding officer of Top Gun at one point in time.

He ran a carrier air group. I got to be his personal aid, which was just a privileged place. I learned a lot about him and the care he took with each person that he was with.

Then I went into a situation where it was a very difficult situation where actually, I fell flat on my face and I failed as a leader. I was a middle management. We call them department heads in the Navy.

I was charged with an increasing number of sailors under me. It was a situation where there was

just a lot of tension in the room. The leadership and the junior officers didn't get along very well.

I failed. Then I was trying to bring them together and also inject a bit of, hey, look at me in this. None of that worked very well.

It became a very difficult tour. Then as God would have it, his province, he put me at the Naval Academy to teach leadership in my next tour, which was a joke because I just failed at leadership. Here I was teaching it.

Wow. Just tell them what not to do. That's the whole course, right? Exactly.

It's so good. It's such the case that when you have to teach something, that's when you actually learn it. Having to teach leadership at the Naval Academy.

Then I had some good mentors there that helped me reflect on my failures in my previous tour and to incorporate those and to become a much better leader as a result of that. There was a process there of rapid growth and leadership, which really helped me along the way. It's so encouraging to have someone coming into the classical Christian school movement with your perspective and your background because so often when you're the fish in the school waters all the way through your journey, it's hard to get fresh perspective.

I want to get your assessment because I know that so much of what you're doing at the institute is really bringing renewal into the Catholic movement, but even broadly just across the schools today. Before we get into your assessment of it as a leader, what is happening in the Catholic school renewal movement? It's something that I hear about all the time. Like so many sectors of broadly classical education, everything's on fire.

It's very exciting right now, but what are you seeing? I'm very excited. I think we're probably a decade behind you guys, maybe more, but we're seeing little. C.S. Lewis' ass lands on the move.

We see the melting of the snow and signs of hope. We see closures of parochial schools around the country. We see a mass exodus of children from our Catholic schools to homeschooling and to public schools.

That's good and bad. If there's no change, if there's no impetus for change, nothing's going to change. Those are putting pressure on our diocese and archdiocese to look at something else.

That is broken through. Some entire dioceses have transitioned to this classical Catholic education, this classical model. We're also seeing a lot of independent schools popping up all over the country.

That's very exciting as well. Our work is to support all of that. My own experience, I founded a school because I really cared about this type of education when I heard about it from my own children.

I've got the experience of starting one of those little tiny independent schools. I had no support, no idea what was going on, just trying to figure it out. We want to support those types of schools.

Those other schools that are parochial schools that want to make a transition and say, hey, we love that model. That's what we want to do. We're helping those schools as well.

We're trying to accelerate the movement in that way. You've got a lot going. Divine Mercy Academy is a K-8.

You guys are how old right now? Seventh year. You're right. There is a renewal movement underway in a significant form.

What I find in going back 20 years ago and you asked somebody about classical education, more often than not, people would think of it in terms of a Catholic education because the Catholics carried the torch for so many decades of teaching Latin in school. That always was associated with a Catholic education. And to your point, it's quite interesting because the Protestant renewal movement has maybe jumped on a bit earlier, but it is beautiful to see in many ways, you guys, the original torchbearers of a classical education coming back and say, wait a minute, we used to do this for a reason.

Let's go. Let's hit reset here on this one. So it sounds like it's really spreading in part because there is such a crisis.

In fact, your website has this term born out of crisis, which I love that term. Absolutely. And it's great.

I think that the church is waking up and saying, you know, what we've been doing the past hundred years or so, it's not working. And it's an exciting time to be here. And in fact, I'm not sure if you've had Dr. Michael Naughton on your podcast or not, but he's up at the University of St. Thomas Catholic Study Center.

And he talks about this from the perspective of history. And he basically says every 500 years or so, roughly, the church does this. It goes this educational system.

There's a launch and then there's like an arc and it comes back down and it comes to a crashing, burning, crashing end. And then we go back to the sources and then we begin again. And this has happened multiple times in the history of the church.

And so it's really exciting to be at that moment where it's crashing and burning, but also launching again. And so we're in a privileged place. I always cite that C.S. Lewis quote, paraphrasing it was basically when we've lost our way, the fastest way home is to turn and come back, go back from the direction from which we've come.

And there's a lot of U-turns happening right now of schools that have beautiful buildings and

historically deep traditions that are saying, wait, there's something about this that we want to re-adhere or reconnect to. And in terms of just terms, because I hear the term liberal arts and classical and what term are you most commonly using when you describe the renewal? Yeah, we find there's some, each of these terms has a different connotation and some baggage with it. So we try not to use a classical exclusively because that denotes the roots of it.

And that's good and that's part of it. We use liberal arts. Some people start to think that, I went to a liberal arts college, but that really wasn't had anything, didn't have anything to do with classical education.

So we've adopted the term perennial Catholic education, which is really the education of the church throughout since it's found since the incarnation. And so we use perennial, but we're not so strict about it that we don't also flip into classical liberal arts. Well, I think perennial is a fascinating word.

It's a little more complicated word, but it's a word that is fresh and it doesn't cause an immediate stereotyping of classical means, people who play violins and older music. It's just hard to find words today that don't evoke confusion, but are also provocative and challenge somebody to think differently. So I love the idea of perennial is a fresh term to use.

I want to take a break and when we come back, I want to have you explore a little bit from your leadership experience. When you look into the movement, where do you see some needs with leadership and where are you helping to address that issue? Be very curious, your thoughts on that. We'll be right back after the break.

Hi there, classical Christian parents, students, and teachers. This is Robert Littlejohn, co-author with Charles Evans of *Wisdom and Eloquence*, a Christian paradigm for classical learning, published by Crossway Books. We want you to know about our new book with well-known family counselor, Keith McCurdy, published by Classical Academic Press.

The book is titled *Wisdom and for Parents, How Classical Christian Education Can Transform Your Children, Your Family, and the World*. We have written this shorter, parent-focused book specifically as an admissions and parent education resource for schools and families. We're excited to be proud sponsors of Zipcast and Basecamp Live, and we hope you are enjoying these two great resources for classical learning as much as we are.

And we would invite you to visit our website, [wisdomandeloquence.org](http://wisdomandeloquence.org). Explore the various services offered by the authors of *Wisdom and Eloquence for Parents*, and to let us know how we can best serve you. We look forward to hearing from you soon. Ali, as you were describing some of your time in the Navy, and inevitably some of the challenges of trying to manage a huge group of people as a leader, it is not easy.

I know for school leaders, the statistics are not encouraging. I think the average tenure of a head

of school today is under three years. There's a lot of burnout, a lot of turnover, and there's really not a clear path to being a school leader, whether you're a head of school or an administrator or even a teacher in some capacity.

In some cases, I think for a lot of our schools, it's, who was the last one left standing? Oh, that board member. You'd be the head of school. And it just leaves a lot of room for encouragement and support.

So talk about both what you're seeing kind of with fresh eyes coming in, with your leadership background, and then what are some of the initiatives you're putting in place to address those needs? Yeah, that's a great question and a great point. Leadership in and of itself is difficult. It's a difficult skill to have.

No one's born a leader. It requires some learning. It requires mentorship, being mentored by good leaders to see them.

And then it also requires practice and a feedback loop. And as I look at education, education in particular is a very difficult area to lead in, even if you had that training, because there's so much involved in it. That's one of the things that I didn't appreciate starting up a school as a school leader.

You are, not only are you setting the vision, the things you generally think of a leader doing, setting the vision, delegating, assigning tasks. Okay, we're going to go take that hill. We're going to do this.

But you're recruiting, right? You're doing admissions work, right? You're recruiting faculty and staff. You're handling disputes between faculty members. You're handling disputes around happiness among parents, right? You're handling behavior issues among children.

You're making decisions on curriculum. You're making strategic board level decisions on finances, right? And how to run a business, right? And all of these things are not the skill sets of the teachers who have come up through the ranks, who tend to be the people that we tap to be the leaders, right? Generally, and this is not just only in education, we tell people who are really good at a particular thing, hey, you're really good at this, let's promote you to be a leader. But it's a very different skill set leadership than the thing that they were doing, whatever it was, it could be making widgets, it could be teaching kids, but it's very different.

And really, leadership is managing people, right? It's managing relationships. And that's messy. It's messy work.

And it's very hard to do and hard to do well. And so providing, how do you one, find people who can be great leaders? How do you train those people? How do you get them in the educational movement? If they're not already there, right? How do you get people from the military in or how

do you people from industry or other industries in? Because I think having that fresh perspective is really helpful as well. And I think for me coming in as with a leadership background and without an education background, frankly, other than attending school, I was able to, I wasn't beholden to this is the way we've done it.

And this is the way it's traditionally done in schools. But my question was, does it work? And what is the best way to do this? And I don't really care about how it's been done in the past. I just want to know what the best way is.

And so that was freeing for me. And I think would be for others coming in. But with that said, you can't come in and just throw everything out.

There are reasons why we do things the way that they're done and having that background understanding of how classroom manager works and how teachers need to be cared for and educated. Those are all really important things to know as well. And so how do we bring all of these elements together to really form strong leaders of schools so that schools can be healthy? And that's the work that we're doing at St. John Henry Newman Institute.

I mean, you listed quite a number of duties. I kept thinking as you were saying that list of a day in the life of a school leader, only Jesus should apply for this job. This is quite significant.

Are there a couple of more common weaknesses, pitfalls that you see school leaders falling into as you look globally across the movement? Yeah, I think one is relationships. I think relationships and the quality of relationships are the bedrock of leadership. And oftentimes, people, if they're new leaders, they kind of gloss over that and say, okay, I've got this power.

I need to exercise that power. I need to be a strong leader. I need to set down policies.

But really, leadership is about trust. And it's building trust among the people. It's building consensus.

It's getting people on board. It's about delegating. Another common error is people try to do it all themselves.

And they get burned out. And we're not well rounded enough. Nobody's well rounded enough to do it all and to do it all well.

And so understanding people's skills and what they're bringing to the table and then delegating to them and just getting out of their way and just saying, hey, not micromanaging them. I think that's another big error that people have as leaders, particularly as new leaders. And so those are a few common ones for you.

I mean, there's certain people that just shouldn't be leading schools that maybe are, like you said earlier, maybe they're really just a gifted classroom teacher, but they were the last one left

standing. And the board needs to say maybe this isn't the right position for this person. Absolutely.

I think that, you know, we need great teachers and a great teacher doesn't need to be a headmaster or a principal. So we need people with that skill set to be in charge. So I'd love to, I want to hear more.

So get into a bit specifically to what you're doing in the John Henry Newman Institute and the work of the Perennial Catholic Educational Network. So you've put quite a number of new initiatives in place to address broadly leadership. And then I'd love to understand those initiatives and then some of the specific resources that are coming through that.

Yeah, absolutely. So the first thing is, so this comes from my perspective as someone who had no idea what was going on, is very new to classical education and didn't know, you know, one thing from another coming into it. And from other members of our organization, come from the perspective of a parochial school that's making a transition.

It was basically one year out from dying and we have no, our backs against the wall. We have no other choice either close the school or do something differently. And they chose to go in the classical direction.

So from the, from all of our experiences, we've come forward with this, this idea. One, the first thing we have is a school leader summit. And that's every year, the third week of June with the backdrop of Acton University in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

It's a fantastic world-class event there. A thousand people from around the world, but we have a track for educators there for school leaders who are new to classical education, who don't, maybe they're interested, they're open. It's for leaders, priests, you know, key influencers.

We want to bring them in and we want to introduce them to what it is that we're doing across the renewal movement. So that's, this is, this is informing them and empowering them and exciting them to join the renewal. Say, Hey, I'm going to bring my school in, or I'm going to bring my diocese in or whatever it is.

We want to get them excited to do, to take the next step. So that's the first event that we offer. The second event that we offer is we call school accelerator.

And we offer a couple of these a year at Augustan Institute in St. Louis, Missouri. We invite leaders of schools and their teams to come. And then we put on two and a half days of workshops.

We're bringing in industry experts. It's not just our staff. It's people who are around the industry, who are offered the best advice and thought on fundraising, on curriculum development, on resources, materials, coaching, you name it.

We want to bring it in and we want to bring these people in contact with the school leaders. So they understand, okay, what is the latest thought? What are the, who's doing great work in this area? And so that's part of it. And the other part of it is forming community among all the school leaders, because leadership is lonely oftentimes.

And so we're, we get into the trenches, but oftentimes the buck stops with us as school leaders or with the board. And that's difficult if you don't have a community, a strong community built up. And so, so we, we encourage them to build relationships.

So we have socials every evening for everybody. And it's, it's just an electric place to be because they're swapping stories. They're giving each other advice.

They're forming friendships. They're forming this community of school leaders and leadership teams that are now moving forward together and can call each other up, you know, at the drop of a hat and make something happen. Yeah.

I mean, building the community in and of itself is so critical. I mean, the old adage about it being lonely at the top is so true, which no doubt leads to that burnout. So that ability to, I think I've always said, I think we should be more Chick-fil-A, like more franchisee.

I mean, it's kind of crazy for everybody to be off on their respective schools or stores making their waffle fries with no common shared instructions. So I think that sounds like a really important work of just assembling, gathering the people and giving them common vision and common resources. Absolutely.

And it's fun. It's a lot of fun too. I'm exhausted by the time it's done because early morning, we're not going to bed to 11 or 12 o'clock at night and then early the next morning doing it again.

But it's a lot of fun. So. So are these all, I mean, international is growing.

Is this primarily domestic or do you have an international presence as well? We are growing rapidly internationally. So we're working in Uganda with schools there. In fact, we're putting on an event in early June, which we anticipate having all of their bishops, all 19 bishops in the country will be there along with a large swath of their priests and school leaders.

So that's exciting. And we're bringing people from Ethiopia and I think Kenya will be coming to that event. And we're also working in Slovakia.

Our president, Father Robert Sirica, will be out there giving a talk as a precursor to us putting on a more formal event in Bratislava next year in the fall, I believe. We're also working up in Canada. We've got an event going up there in April with hopefully we're hoping to gather and to galvanize the movement of Catholic schools up there.

And we've got schools, one in Italy and one in Ireland that we've been working with as well. So, so yeah, lots going on internationally. That is, that is super exciting.

All right. So I'm curious if I'm, if I'm a leader of a school that's been around for decades and floundering a bit, main crisis, to use your terms, and I've come to this gathering and you're up on the stage, give me a sense in the first few minutes of how you cast that vision and even how you articulate what this is different from maybe what I would have thought I'd been doing at my more traditionally classical type of school. So can you give me a sense of that, how you tell that story? Yeah, for sure.

You know, as we talk about education, we talk about it as the passing on of the best from one generation to the next, the best of cultures, the passing on of culture. But you know, the classical education with the Greeks and the Romans is fantastic. You know, they wanted to know what is it to be a great human being.

And they focused on rhetoric and, and on politics. But in the incarnation, Christ said, no, no, the end of this is not the Roman state or the philosopher, it's salvation. Right.

And so for us, as we talk about it, the end of this education is the salvation of souls, the salvation of our children and the preparation of them to, to take on their individual or particular vocation, the reason, their reason for being, their vision, God's vision for them to embrace that and to be able to play that part in their life, the best of their ability and to be a light for others as well. And so that's the purpose of education. And oh, by the way, they become well qualified to be doctors and lawyers and politicians and bankers and all of those things.

But in this path, they're fulfilling God's will, which brings them joy, right? And brings goodness wherever they go in light. And so that is the purpose of education. That's what we're doing here is creating saints.

That is, I mean, that is, there's no better goal than that. I don't know how you improve upon that. That is the ultimate vision.

And it's certainly so different from the way so many schools have de-evolved down to just get them into college. It's all about the test. It's just a kind of a technical education as opposed to soul forming education.

So that's, you can really see where the idea of renewal is, is, is the lead story in what you're talking about. It's beautiful. Yeah.

Let's take another break. I want to come back in a similar question. I'll, I want to set up as just with parents because so many parents have not had a classical education growing up.

And for them in these discoveries that they're making, they go to a school that's in renewal and

they have to also be brought into this vision. So I'd love to hear how you, some words of encouragement to parents, but we'll be right back and continue our conversation. During this short break, I have a special invitation to all school leaders, administrators, and teachers.

I want you to imagine for a moment, stepping away from your everyday routine at school and diving deep into the rich foundations of Christian education surrounded by world-class scholars, seasoned classroom teachers, and administrative experts with years of experience running schools with a lot of wisdom to share. That's exactly what the Herzog Foundation's Institute is offering. I've had the joy of serving as a training coach for the last few years, leading their two and a half day training on spiritual formation and another one on parent engagement.

They offer close to 50 unique training events, ranging from board governance to marketing to classroom best practices. They even offer a training on how to teach the great books and the best part of all, well, thanks to the generosity of the Herzog Foundation, these training events, including lodging, are completely free for Christian educators. Institutes are located around the country in beautiful locations, including at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., and the Reagan Library in Santa Barbara.

Don't miss this incredible opportunity. Check out the details at [theherzogfoundation.com](http://theherzogfoundation.com). If you're seeking an education that helps your child thrive academically and spiritually, Wilson Hill Academy has spent years developing a model that I want you to know about. In their free guide, you'll see how their thoughtfully sequenced curriculum prepares students for college and how a biblical worldview helps them understand the world around them with clarity and how their discussion-based classes teach them to think critically, not just what to think.

You'll also discover how their teachers equip students to live purposefully for Christ. With accredited live online classes, your child can learn from master teachers anywhere with an internet connection, all within a community that has transformed families like yours. Download their free guide today at [wilsonhillacademy.com/slash/guide](http://wilsonhillacademy.com/slash/guide) or in the link in our show notes.

Allie, a lot of our listeners are parents and they are grateful for individuals like yourself who have said, let's raise the standard and the bar of excellence when it comes to leadership. But as parents, what are some things that you would encourage us to consider when you think about renewal and really owning and discovering maybe for the first time the depth and the richness of a classical education? From my perspective, I was one of you. I was a parent who just, I brought my kids and I want them to get a great education.

I drop them off and just expect that it was going to happen. And in most places, in many places it did, but paying close attention to what's going on in your kids' classrooms, first of all, if you're unfamiliar with all this is really important. And the second thing is raising your bar of expectation about what's possible for your children.

So for example, in founding our school, Divine Mercy Academy, we have our kindergartners.

They're so cute, four or five years old, they're running around. But those children, and we bring visitors in to see this, but each day they memorize a new historical event in the course of salvation history.

And so by the end of the year, those young kids who at the beginning of the year, you couldn't get them to stand in a straight line, all of those kids can recite salvation history, the most important moments of salvation history. We're talking about 100, 120 different events in a row with dates and a hand motion to go along with it. And they love it.

They absolutely love it. And it brings me to tears even to this day, every time I see it, I've been watching it for five years or so as we've been doing it. And so what children are capable of doing is absolutely amazing.

And the content that they're learning and things they're learning shouldn't be boring. It should be exciting for them and they should love it. They're learning poetry, they're reciting scripture, they're investigating and learning about the nuances of birds and bird calls, and all of these just incredible things that historically and just with God's creation, it's so beautiful to see.

And so I say raise your bar of expectations with your children's school. And if you're not seeing those indications, find a school where you are going to find those things because that's the best formation for your children. In the church, we have the statistic that kids make their decision to stay Catholic or to leave around age 12.

That's sixth, seventh, eighth grade. They've just begun to live and yet they're making a decision with that gravity at that level. So I would say start as soon as you possibly can because before you know it, it's too late.

They've already made up their mind. And then it's a long way back after that if you haven't formed them properly to begin with. And then last thing is just partnership.

Schools and parents ought to partner. So don't let someone else take care of your children's education. You are their greatest advocate for their education.

They don't know what they're looking for. They don't know what to ask for. And even if you don't know exactly what you need, you need to be there and champion.

And if that's getting on the board, if that's starting a school, if that's just being engaged with your child's teacher, be there and be present and be engaged and be informing and inform yourself if you're lacking in knowledge. And our kids are counting on us to do that. Those are some great words of encouragement.

I think just in light of our conversation about leadership, the blessing of having parents that are leaning into the school inevitably provides greater strength and momentum to the leader who is

not shouldering everything with parents with sort of an outsourced mindset. It's a huge strength across the board to the school. So those are good words to the parents for sure.

Thank you. And I was going to say is parents are so critical. In our school, at one point in time, we had 75% of our teachers were parents.

That's an accurate education, but they were parents nonetheless. And so that creates a strong, tight-knit community where a lot of people were all in. And so it's beautiful to have parents involved.

Well, and we probably overused the three-legged stool analogy, but clearly that's critical to have the home and the church and the school all leaning together to create this cohesive experience. And what a gift to a child when they leave their school, and they go to their home, and they go to their church, and the messages are all consistent, and the love and the grace that they're experiencing is consistent. And I mean, what a gift to them.

As you said, really by age 12, that cement starts hardening a bit in terms of their own ownership of their identity and their beliefs. And so all of that is setting a child up for great success. So I love, again, the vision there.

Just as we wind our time down, for those who are listening that would love to hear more about the work you're doing, I know you're principally working in Catholic renewal, but there's a lot of resources that would benefit those who are not, you know, part of the Catholic church. Share a little bit of, again, how folks can find you and avail themselves of your resources. So for the St. John Henry Newman Institute, that's [jhni.org](http://jhni.org), [jhni.org](http://jhni.org). They get to our website and get to learn about what we're doing and access some of our resources there.

Divine Mercy Academy, that's [divinemeracy.md](http://divinemeracy.md), [divinemeracy.md](http://divinemeracy.md). We're also working arm in arm, really, and we're being mentored in many ways by the Society of Classical Learning and the Association of Classical Christian Schools. Fantastic people in both of those organizations. And so I've been very, very blessed to be in that position where we're getting a lot of help in there, in those areas.

But we're all on, you know, we all have the same goal in mind. And I love that. And I love the camaraderie in the movement and just really, really amazing people have been very, very impressed with it.

So we're happy to help in any way we can. But you guys have some really strong, strong organizations already established in the movement. Yeah, it's just great to see what you're doing.

I mean, everybody together moving in this direction. It's exciting. I think, you know, it's a lot of bad news out there.

But you think, gosh, where are we going to be in 10 years when you've got a generation that has

come through these renewed schools that are now walking out into life with, I was thinking about the Jonathan Edwards image of he stood on the shoulder of his father who stood on the shoulder of his father and sort of that generational blessing effectively that you're pushing forward. That's what I hear. You're really setting students up and educators up and leaders to be able to impact the generation exponentially more.

So we'll have to have you back in 10 years and go, okay, Ali, look what happened. Yeah, I'd love that. It'll be amazing.

Well, thanks for your time and the great work you're doing. We are super encouraged. Thank you so much.

Thank you. God bless. Thank you for listening to this episode of Base Camp Live.

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