

An Open Letter to My Parents

By John Parker Wilmeth ('15)



Dear Mom and Dad,

Life sure is busy here. This morning I sang the National Anthem with our barbershop quartet for the local girls' softball league; tonight I turn in my thesis, which I've been working on for more than seven months. On Wednesday I was accepted into the architecture program at Notre Dame, for which I am extremely grateful. I am singing with the College Choir at a concert in April, and I am directing a choir of my own, Chrysostomos, which is performing on Palm Sunday. On Tuesday nights I teach catechism at a nearby church with several friends from the College.

You have always shown me that activity is more satisfying than inactivity, no matter how desirable laxity may seem to be, and I have come to live a life as busy as y'all's back home in South Carolina.

Dad, your perseverance and dedication with a difficult and tiring job, and indeed your love for helping those in need, have done more than just keep my brother and me fed, clothed, and schooled. The example you set has called me to be a man as you are, responsible and firm with the important things, but also generous and selfless in love. You did not raise me to be some person pre-formed in your mind, but asked me to search in my heart for what I truly love, and to pursue it with my whole being.

Somewhat paradoxically, this gift of asking Philip and me to be our own persons is what allowed us to convert to Catholicism, a decision that I know has been, at times, a source of tension. Though we may not yet be on the same page on everything, I want you to know that I converted partly because I see the same things in God that I experienced to be so good in you: He is hard, firm, and just; but He is so gentle and loving to His children that He will never let them come to any harm. He will provide for us even through His own suffering.

It was our conversion that led us to Thomas Aquinas College, to learn about our new faith, to discover its perfect integration with reason, and to prepare for a life which, I hope, will be filled with continual discovery of new knowledge and love. This program, with its rigorous philosophical and theological treatment of the world I have always wondered about, was exactly what I desired. In the seminar I was led by the greatest artists and thinkers to see how our understanding of things affects our understanding of our own lives and destinies. And through the sacramental life at the College and in spiritual direction with its priests, I have attempted to exist always in relation to God — although there is still much work to do!

Mom, your vibrancy and sheer love of life have inspired me to reach for the very best in all that I do. Your humility in learning about the Faith through your children, and then coming into the Church, is amazing. Your example is an important reminder to me that even the wisest among us are still under the tutelage of God.

I want to thank both of you, as much as I can, for a gift which I can never repay. Thank you for everything you have done, and for supporting me in coming to Thomas Aquinas College. I know you will continue to do so as I embark on my imminent voyage to become an architect!

Love,
John Parker

is issue begins with a thoughtful letter from senior **John Parker Wilmeth**, in which he thanks his mother and father for preparing him for his time at Thomas Aquinas College and beyond. John Parker's words are just one example of the profound gratitude that all our students have for you, their parents, reminding us of the great honor and responsibility that you have bestowed by entrusting us with their care.

We at the College try to live up to that honor and responsibility in many ways. First we offer a truly excellent liberal education that is grounded in and nurtured by the Cy the Cs

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Bagdasarian". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small flourish above the letter 'i' in "Bagdasarian".

In Loco Parentis

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“This is my daily prayer,” says Sarah Dufresne (’14). “What are the needs of our students, and how can I, in a small way, respond to them?”



As the College’s resident assistant, Sarah is responsive to those needs, day and night, in ways both small and large. From her apartment in St. Monica Hall, she acts as the “dorm mom,” offering young women advice, companionship and, when necessary, late-night rides to the emergency room. “My vision for this position is, more immediately, to help the students with their day-to-day concerns and, more broadly, to strengthen their hearts, causing a ripple effect that helps the campus at large.”

The College first established the resident assistant’s position in 2003, says Assistant Dean Steven Cain, “to make sure things are going well for our students, to keep a protective eye on them, and to provide someone they can talk to if they’re having difficulties.” Among the assistant’s responsibilities are running campus activities, acting as a liaison between the assistant dean and the students, and serving as an on-campus contact for parents. The position is “particularly aimed at the young ladies,” observes Mr. Cain, as the College’s chaplains serve a similar mentoring role in the men’s residence halls.

“It’s not uncommon for me to have six or seven girls in my apartment, all talking about various issues, or maybe we take one on a hike,” says Sarah, who models her service on the “mentorship/discipleship” model that FOCUS missionaries employ on secular campuses. Having worked on her high school’s campus ministry team, and more recently with Justice for All’s pro-life campus outreach, she understands that being “radically available” is key to forging relationships with young adults. Her door is open, *generatively speaking*, 24-7.

A “typical day,” says Sarah, begins with answering parents’ phone calls and e-mails. She then checks in with the assistant dean’s office and, after visiting with students or preparing for upcoming events, goes to extracurricular events in the afternoon before attending the 5:00 p.m. Mass in Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel. On Wednesday evenings she joins the women prefects for adoration, where they pray for the students’ intentions.

Of course, Sarah’s real work begins after dinner, when her nocturnal visitors begin stopping by to chat. “I’ll talk to anywhere from one to five girls,” she says, noting that the topics can range from schoolwork to homesickness to roommate

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issues. “A lot of it has to deal with boys,” she adds, “and how to negotiate that.”

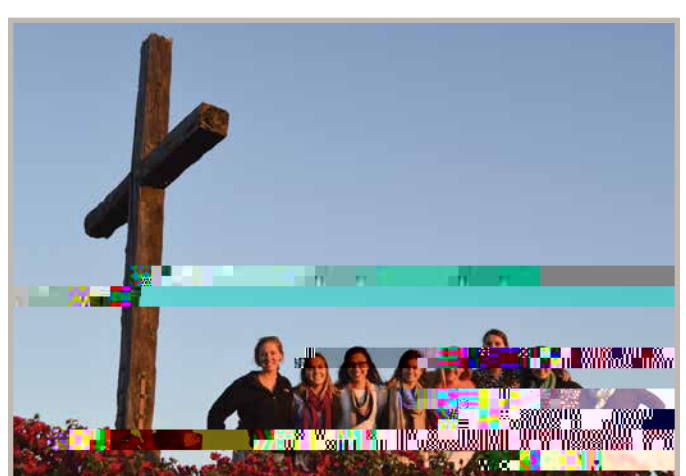
To help facilitate healthy campus relations, the resident assistant works to create fun and wholesome recreational activities, both the College’s regularly planned events, such as dances and parties, and more spontaneous or casual gatherings. This year Sarah has hosted Bible studies, a women’s campout, a pancake breakfast, and a “Sunset at the Cross” visit to Ventura’s historic Grant Park overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

Given the intimate role that the resident assistant plays in students’ lives, the position is, by necessity, always held by a recent graduate. “Our community is unique,” explains Mr. Cain. “It has its own customs, traditions, feeling, and spirit to it. It’s really important that the resident assistant be someone who has a sense of what the community is like.” Having graduated from the College just last year, Sarah finds that she is “still close to the joys and the struggles of being a student here,” and thus more aware of the students’ needs.

Although most resident assistants move on after one year, Sarah has graciously agreed to stay for a second. “I have enjoyed working with Sarah,” says Mr. Cain. “She has a good seriousness about her, and she is deeply concerned and caring. It has really been true of all the resident assistants that I’ve worked with. They are great young ladies.”

For her part, Sarah says, she is eager to return next fall. “I love doing this.”

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Campus Life

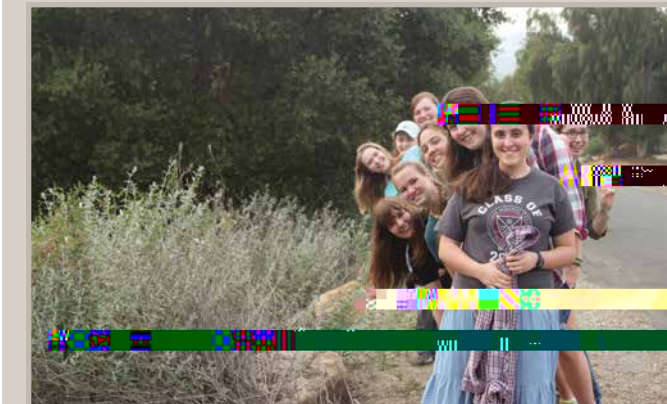
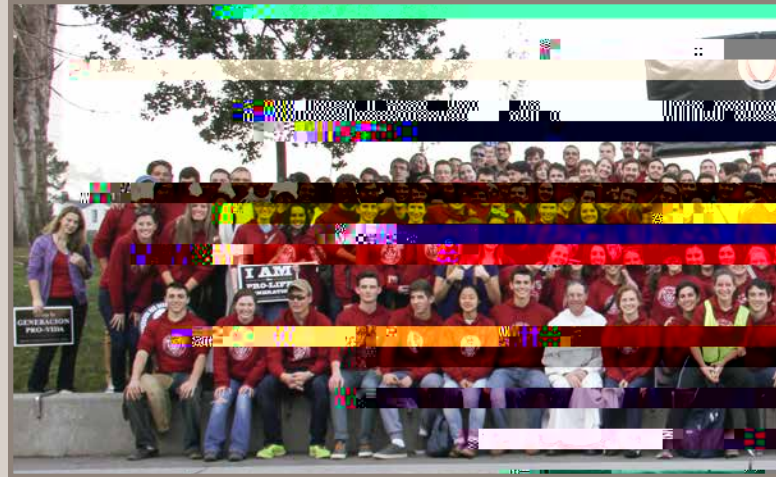
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The subject of this semester's campus-wide seminar was "Father Sergius," by Leo Tolstoy. Above, left: Serena Lessard ('18) and Liz Krestyn ('17); right: Jorge Moncada ('18), Bridget Collins ('16), and John Jost ('17); below: Mary Bridget O'Hara ('17) and Michael O'Hara ('15)



More than 200 Thomas Aquinas College students traveled to San Francisco in January for the 11th annual Walk for Life West Coast. Left: Misha Johnston ('18) and Zoe Appleby ('18); right: April Shonnard ('16), Peter Covington ('17), Sophie Macik ('15), John Parker Wilmeth ('15), Sean Phan ('17), Nicholas Gartonza-vesky ('18), Pat McCann ('17), Alex Sebastian ('17), Michael Zepp ('17), and Joseph Quackenbush ('17)



In late March Resident Assistant Sarah Dufresne ('14) led a group of women on a weekend campout. Pictured above is a group of freshman campers. From the left, back to front: Anna Conroy, Sarah Williams, Siobhan Heekin-Canedy, Maria Brown, Maura Collins, Sophia Iacoviello, Marie-Barbara O'Brien, and Suzanne Urbancic; right: Laura Weber

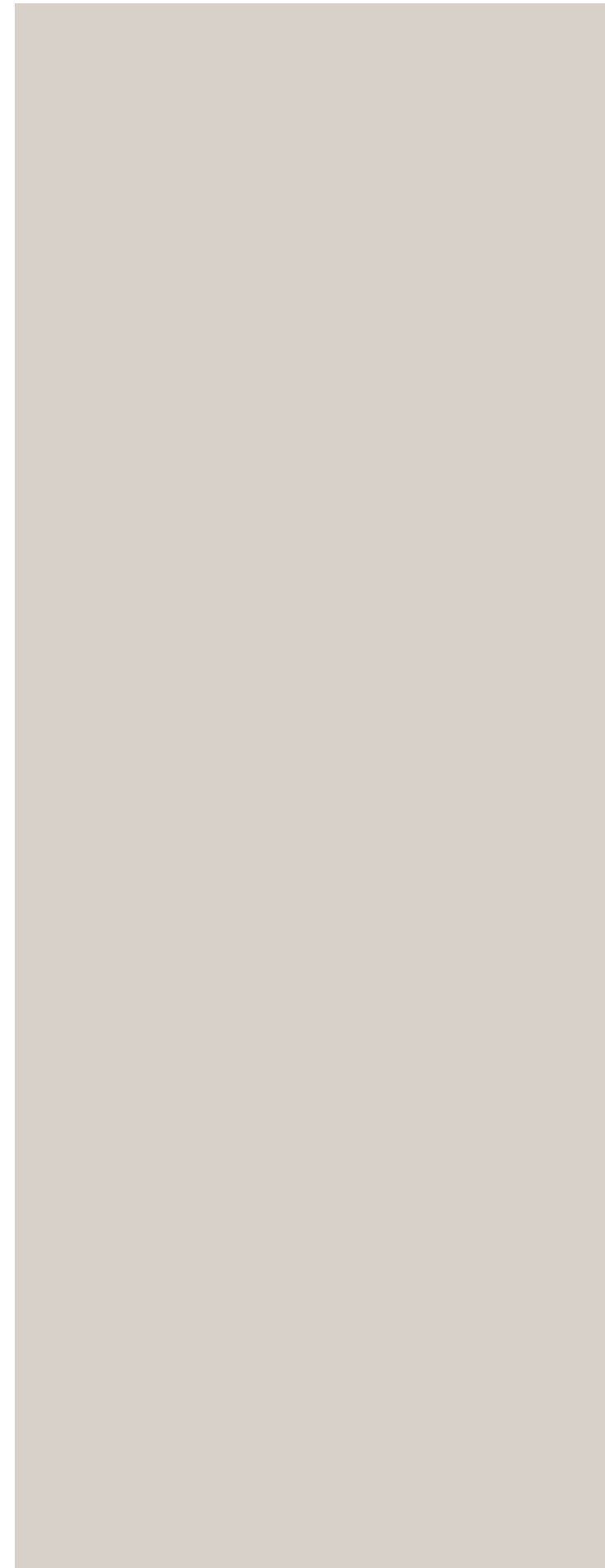


The College celebrated its patron's feast day this year in its customary manner. Photos, clockwise from top left: Mass in Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel; a mid-day lecture ("The Three Titles of St. Thomas Aquinas," by Rev. Romanus Cessario, O.P., of St. John's Seminary, Boston); and the campus-wide game show, Trivial & Quadrivial Pursuits (pictured, Jack Grimm '15 and Madeleine Lessard '16)





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Parent's Corner

