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by Kristine Goodrich/Editor |

Classrooms at St. Pius X Church won't be empty next school year. Liberty Classical Academy is moving into the space being vacated as St. Pius X School students move to a new merged school.

Liberty Classical Academy is a small private pre-K through 12th grade nondenominational Christian school. Its elementary school currently is located at Christ the King Lutheran Church in White Bear Lake and its preschool, middle school and high school programs are located at First Evangelical Free Church in Maplewood.

Liberty's new joint campus at St. Pius X will open next fall. School, church and Archdiocese leaders signed a five-year lease on New Year's Eve. The academy, which has 165 students, will utilize St. Pius' classrooms, library, gymnasium, playgrounds, cafeteria and more.

"Absolutely everything we could ever ask for in a school building is there. We know that this is going to be a great next step for us," said Liberty Headmaster Rebekah Hagstrom.

School leaders have been searching for the opportunity to move to a merged campus for two years, Hagstrom said.

Liberty was founded 11 years ago by Hagstrom, a Dellwood resident and parent. Class sizes are 20 students or fewer. Athletic programs and after-school child care are available. Tuition for first-graders and above is \$8,100 to \$9,000, with partial donation-funded scholarships provided to approximately one-third of students attending.

The school is the only metro area member of the Association of Classical Christian Schools. It uses the classical model, which claims to capitalize on children's natural development stages and includes unique components such as logic and Latin classes.

"Classical education is a proven method that uses engaging classroom techniques geared to a child's natural progression of cognitive development," Hagstrom said. "It goes beyond the teaching of mere knowledge and develops the advanced skills of analysis, synthesis, writing and public speaking. Classical students become confident leaders because they can think broadly and deeply, formulate original ideas, and persuasively communicate those ideas to others."

Of the academy's future home, the headmaster said she's most looking forward to the opportunities for her older students to mentor her younger students, the reduced travel time for herself and several other staff, having a large library, and having access to a full-size gymnasium with locker rooms, bleachers and a stage.

Hagstrom lauded the churches where the school currently is located as "extremely gracious hosts" and said leaders at St. Pius X have been "extremely welcoming."

St. Pius X Rev. Joe Bambenek noted the benefits of the partnership in a letter to parishioners.

“This lease will provide us with a modest stream of income, as well as prevent the difficult circumstances of having a building sit empty. In doing so, we are renting to a school that I do not believe will compete directly with our regional school.”

The parish will continue to use the gym and other portions of the school area for faith formation classes, summer Bible School and other activities.

As the school moves, Hagstrom said she hopes to grow enrollment. St. Pius X provides sufficient space to double the size of the student body.

The lease with St. Pius X includes an extension option for up to another five years. During that time frame, Hagstrom said she hopes to purchase a facility as a permanent home for the school.

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