



CAPSTONE Classical Academy

2025 State of the Academy Script

Good evening, Capstone! What an honor it is to host you all this evening to share with you the state of the academy as we see it today. Just three years ago, on January 20, 2022, we held our first press conference and opened admissions, truly not knowing what to expect. At that time we had 5 founding board members, four founding team members, and one employee. God has brought us a long way in such a short time, but we have many miles to go. We have only just begun building our vision. Any illusion that moving into the new building means that we have arrived is truly that—an illusion. Tonight we want to share with you both what we should rightly celebrate about what has already been accomplished and to inspire you to press on to take hold of that for which we believe God has established our school. Our vision is greater than what we see today.

I'd like to ask our board members and founding team members to please stand so that we can thank them for their faithful stewardship of the Capstone vision from its inception. I cannot say enough about the faith and humility of this group. They continue to serve tirelessly (okay, they get tired!) Behind the scenes with no recognition. They don't desire any, but they have been faithful conduits of God's grace to me and to all of you through their faithful service.

Next, I'd like Sheri Fisher to stand, and I'd ask Isaiah Fisher to stand, but he's in Oklahoma. During the long winter of 2022 and the run-up to the start of Capstone, Sheri volunteered for the school on a nearly full-time basis, preparing lists of equipment and supplies needed, scouring Facebook Marketplace and running around in the weather to pick up items. She ordered curriculum and classroom libraries and was baptized into spreadsheets for the first time. She used the house as shipping and receiving and staging for the school and made sure teachers had their classroom materials, orienting them at our house as they stopped by to pick them up.

As a senior in high school, Isaiah served as ghost writer for me for admissions inquiries, programmed our online applications with conditional logic, set up much of FACTS, eventually wrote our primary HR and operations software, and served as the gopher for me and our volunteer tech support for nearly three years.

These two served countless hours as volunteers in helping to launch the school. We've never publicly recognized them, and I am negligent in that! Let's give them our thanks.

Nick Bakke—would you stand? Nick was the very first parent I met, online, from Pittsburgh, where I started my first couple of months of work on Capstone. Nick and Xiaomei were the first admissions visit. In both the summer of 2022 and this fall and winter, Nick spent countless hours configuring and setting up our networks. His expertise and selfless service have been a remarkable gift. Would you thank him for his quiet, previously anonymous labor on behalf of all of us?

Would Sue Sikkink, Jana Solhjem, and Kelley Peterson stand up? These three, along with Sheri Fisher, who joined the team as an employee with them, signed on as our first employees in late March of 2022. There were no systems or processes, no forms, and no previous roadmap for them to follow to do their jobs save what I provided to them, which was minimal. They took their roles courageously and worked tirelessly to lay the administrative groundwork so that we could receive our teachers and the rest of the team later that spring and summer. I will always be grateful for those early days of prayer and sharing with this bunch. All worked harder than any of us anticipated and far more than their compensation should have required. They, with the board and founding team, are truly founders of Capstone. Let's express our thanks to them.

Kelley, would you stand back up? I ask Kelley to stand because of the moment we are in as a school. In just 29 months, Kelley has orchestrated the provision of over \$2 million in furnishings, equipment, and supplies, physically procured deals all over the region to stretch our campaign dollars, has managed multiple warehouses for us, directed moving crews, and somehow made certain that all of our physical needs were met as a department of one. We only recently added her first full-time staff member in Simon Ell, who's been great for us in the last month. Folks, we would not be where we are today without Kelley Peterson. She has done far more than what was asked of her and has led with a servant's heart. Kelley, we are deeply grateful for your loving and sacrificial service. Let's all thank her.

Would Kaylie Young please stand? Kaylie teaches English classes in our upper school. She was our very first teacher hired. Her vision, faith, and imagination for what could be—her restlessness from 12 years of teaching in the public schools—have been a great gift to us. It takes tremendous courage to leave an established career and the retirement benefits of public education to join a school that was just an idea at that time. She has been a great ambassador for classical Christian education from the beginning. Would you all express your gratitude for Kaylie's faith and courage in breaking the ice and paving the way for all future teachers at Capstone?

Kaylie, please remain standing. Would the following members of the faculty and staff please rise. Roxanne Madson, Signe Edison, Patti Tucker, Rachel Rebeschke, Emily Malingen, Courtney Young, Anne Peterson, Lindsay Peterson, Kara Orcutt, Shannon Archer, Sean Rebeschke, Brittany Zinter, Lynette Schock, Becca Wunderlich, Remi Vannett, and Whitney Friesen. These bold souls, restless pilgrims—if you will—all applied to Capstone when not a single day of classes had begun and when there were no classrooms to show them. There were no employee testimonials, no salary schedule to review, and truly, no guarantee that this would even succeed. Remi and Whitney

started after in-service training and had to jump into a raging torrent of activity. This group together had to learn a new way of teaching and thinking about education, entirely new curricula across all content areas, and to travel together as virtual strangers to Michigan, and in some cases, Virginia, to begin their journey as classical educators. They braved the mad rush and late start at the north and south campuses in August of '22 and never showed any signs of complaint or despair as they worked to clean up construction dust and debris as they set up their classrooms what felt like minutes before opening to students. These are your founding teachers.

Please stay standing. Would all of the faculty and staff please stand? We have a remarkable team here. All of these folks left another land for the promise of a better one that was not yet realized. I've been in private school service in one form or another for some 28 years, and I have never been more proud of a collective group than I am of this one. Let's thank this founding faculty and staff for their courage, vision, and faithful service.

Would the following parents please stand? Amy Mueller, Nick and Xiaomei Bakke, Dustin and Kaylie Young, Austen and Heidi Dahmes, Jeremy and Tashie Wehrman, (David and Rebecca Walker—moved to TN), Alan and Annie Fowler, Tim McConnell, Bill and Emily Brooks, Lance and Annie Thorson, Chris and Rachelle Lee, Eric and Amy Dyrdaahl, Alex and Jenn Ellis, Troy and Jana Solhjem, Kerri Motacek and Will Thom, Matt and Melissa Bishoff, Josh and Sarah Krieger, Doug and Sue Sikkink, Jake and Molly Rodenbiker, Brandon and Cassie Schmidt, Josh and Kay Holte. These parents applied to Capstone in the first four months of our admissions office being open. All of these parents knew that their children deserved something different, something better than what they saw around them, and for a land not yet visible, they set out on the admissions journey with Capstone, trusting that a school would be what only my words could picture for them. Without the momentum that their step forward created and the word of mouth that they used to recruit others to Capstone, we would not be where we are today. In truth, all of you who were first year families are to one degree or another in this category. Would those of you whose children started at Capstone in August of 2022 please stand?

The board, founding members, faculty and staff, and I would like to thank you for your faith and courage that made all of this possible. You will always hold a very special place in our hearts. You are founding families, and I hope that if the Lord blesses you with long years, that decades from now, you will find joy and satisfaction in knowing that your step of faith blessed generations through this school.

Our school is premised upon parent partnership and the making of a particular kind of culture conducive to classical Christian education. The Capstone Parent Fellowship pioneers from the spring of 2022 provided exemplary leadership and service to create school spirit, fellowship, and culture that would otherwise have taken years to develop. I'd like Annie Thorson, Arielle Peterson, and the rest of the first CPF board to stand so that we can recognize their leadership and founding contributions.

Please remain standing. Would all of those who have served on the CPF board a tiny time please stand that we may thank you for the way you are building even today the foundations of future Christian fellowship and spirit at Capstone. We are deeply grateful and very blessed by your service and the spirit with which you render it.

Even now, all of you in this room are still pioneering together. You have demonstrated a kind of courage, tenacity, hopefulness, and faith as you have left long-established ways of doing school and living life to join us in building Capstone. History will look back on those of you who were here before we even graduated a class and before this campus was completed as founders and pioneers.

And I've yet to speak to the kind, hopeful, visionary, generous support of the over 200 donors who have committed to over \$55 million to make Capstone possible. Most of you are a part of that group. Many more are not here to share in this this evening. They have shared silently, behind the scenes, and unseen, paving the way with the resources the Lord gave them. They could just as easily have said no. They could have failed to see the necessity and deep goodness of what we are seeking here, but they came alongside this project and invested their wealth in you. They could have supported any number of good ideas in our community, but they chose to join you in your vision and hope.

Thanks to their generosity, our Capstone families do not have to shoulder the burden of paying for this facility, nor for all of the associated costs with starting a school of this quality and magnitude. They made this accessible to a wide variety of families of all kinds and incomes, and continue to do so through their visionary philanthropy. May God bless you and those donors who are not here this evening with great satisfaction in the work He is doing through your and their empowering gifts.

This is a special room living in a special moment for the Fargo-West Fargo-Moorhead area. Decades from now, when the legacy that your children—our graduates—leave for this region and beyond is culture-defining and redemptive, Capstone will be a household name and will be viewed as one of this community's longstanding and greatest assets. It will be hard to imagine a Fargo without Capstone. In those days, many will wonder, what would we do without Capstone in our community? This because in this moment, you wondered and believed before they.

I speak these words not to puff up but to help you to feel the gravity of what we believe God is doing in our community through the collective faith, tenacity, and singularity of purpose the Lord has given us to cultivate wisdom and virtue in a new generation that will lead this region in a revived pursuit of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty to the glory of God and a joyful, abundant future for a land and a people that we love.

Before we start our buffet line, Mr. Aaron Zinter, our director of choirs, will lead us in singing "Let All Things Now Living," followed by a prayer from Mr. McGuire, our upper school dean.

Before Mr. Zinter leads us, please participate with me in this doxology to our God:

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen!

State of the Academy Address

Capstone Classical Academy exists to engage students to acquire wisdom, cultivate virtue, and pursue rigorous academic study within a Christian worldview. Our students study what is Good, what is True, and what is Beautiful for the purpose of glorifying God and benefiting their community.

As we begin this evening, I want to take a few minutes to unpack our mission for us using the physical space in which we now enjoy this meal together. Last year we sat at these tables with C.S. Lewis and St. Augustine. I cannot improve upon my words from last year in this regard, but tonight I will add to them the words of four individuals who are featured prominently on the front of our building and in Founders Hall: Jesus of Nazareth, Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, and St. Paul.

So now for a few words of mission-clarifying and inspiring import from this very building, which was designed in probably hundreds of ways to speak Goodness, Truth, and Beauty to us:

Ego veni ut vitam habeant. These words are etched into limestone atop the columns that adorn the front of the main entrance. Translated, this Latin declaration, is the words of Christ himself, when he declared in John 10:10, “I have come that they may have life.”

I have come that they may have life. When you went through the family interview process at Capstone, you were asked to express your deep hopes for your children. Do you remember what your answer was? In most cases, I’m sure neither Mrs. Solhjem nor I can recall what you said, though our notes might remind us.

Jesus answers the question for Capstone. Our deep hope for your children is that they will have abundant life. Not scarce, not paltry, not ordinary—abundant. Our minds are quickened, inspired, and delighted with visions of your children living in the glorious freedom of the children of God—freedom from the control of oppressors and despots, whether political, spiritual, or within their own flesh. Freedom from fear, sin, hopelessness. Freedom from greed and its accompanying disillusionment. Pride and its subsequent predictable and terrific fall. Freedom to love deeply, to give with abandon, to be spent on endeavors that delight the soul and enlarge their humanity—their God-image bearing.

We have this hope and strive to minister through our school such that this hope is realized because of the words that are on that front lintel. For our building, the lintel is decorative, but symbolically, the lintel supports the rest of the structure above the front doors. It is no small thing that the words that support the structure above as you pass into Founders Hall are “I have come that they may have life.” In its biblical context, it is finished with these words, “and have it to the full.” Some translate it, “I have come that they may have life—and have it abundantly.”

In its context, Jesus has just pointed out the spiritual blindness of religious experts. He then gives them a metaphor about himself to express the way to spiritual sight and abundant life.

Hear the words of Jesus from John 10:1-20:

10 “Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” 6 Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

7 Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.^[a] They will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

All of us seek safe, luxurious pasture, a place to be safe from those people or things that would harm us and to feast on ample provision of all that we need. Those good desires for blessings that God does indeed give his children, often get preyed upon by false ideas, false promises, false teachers, false gods—that are illusory—they come to steal, kill, and destroy, but they climb over the fence to get to us. They try to do a run around around the Good Shepherd, who is also the gate through which all who would find good pasture and a safe place of rest must go. That, or we try to get in to the blessings stored up for God’s people by going around Christ—as though we could have them without him.

At Capstone, we believe that all learning and knowledge of what is Good, True, and Beautiful—all wisdom—points to the Good Shepherd, through whom, if our students will enter to find their rest—their deep hopes—they will find life to the full. We also believe that if they seek to find pasture through any other gate, they will have abundant life stolen from them. We believe that there are those who would invite and even seek

to push your children through deceptive gates that promise life but bring confusion, disillusionment, loss, and spiritual death.

We believe there are false shepherds—leaders, authorities, and even internal desires of our own hearts—that promise to lead us to the good life but lead us down to the depths. Our role in partnership with you is to present your children, our students, with the very words, teachings, and example of Christ in our words and deeds, so that they know his voice from all others and can distinguish their Good Shepherd from the sweet-talking wolves who sound sweet but come to steal, kill, and destroy.

At Capstone, as we build and teach curriculum, as we coach and discipline, as we practice habits of heart with our students, and as we shape campus life, this declaration of Christ, “I have come that they may have life,” holds the weight of all that we dream of in our deepest hopes for our students, your children. No curriculum, no teacher, no great thinker provides abundant life.

What sits above the lintel? What is upheld by the grace of Jesus—two great men—Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas—who apart from Christ offer us nothing of ultimate value.

At the very top of the chapel sits an architectural lantern crowned by a 10 ft-high gold cross. You may be saying, “I haven’t seen that.” That’s because it will be installed this spring.

In John 10:15, Jesus’ words, “I lay down my life for my sheep,” and later in verse 18, “I take it up again,” are captured in the cross atop the lantern on the apex of the chapel. One can either approach campus looking at the cross and then scan down to the words of Christ on the lintel as he passes through the front doors, or one can start with Christ’s declaration that he has come that we may have life, and look up to the sky to see the instrument of his death by which he purchased life for us, but covered in pure gold—redemption—and reaching to the sky—where he took his life up again!

Our partnership is based upon the Capstone Community Covenant, which you read (hopefully) and signed when you enrolled. In it, the first declaration after the mission statement is that we are a Christ-centered school. Tonight, as we reflect upon the last year and look ahead to the next, we do so united by what is symbolized in these two features that frame our entrance into this hallowed ground in which we serve together.

What does Christ-centered mean at Capstone other than that at Capstone, we enter through the Gate which is Christ, and we follow as the Good Shepherd—who is Christ—leads.

But let’s turn our attention back to the main pavilion of our building. Between the cross and the words of Christ, there are two stone figures who keep watch over our comings and goings—over students, faculty, staff, and parents. Who are these two mysterious

figures, and what do they speak to us this evening as we take stock of our shared mission together?

St. Thomas Aquinas, a 13th century monk and priest who predates the Protestant Reformation by roughly 300 years, is historically considered for students and teachers a saint and model for the love of truth. He dedicated his life to prayer, study and teaching and has left for posterity a fundamental philosophical work of essential theology, *Summa Theologica* (literally a summary of theology). Our students read from it, and we house it in our theology classrooms and library. It is for this teaching that the Catholic Church considers him Doctor of the Universal Church and both Protestants and Catholics alike look to him as a great father in the faith.

St. Thomas Aquinas appreciated all reason and did not despise any of the contributions of classical antiquity from Muslim and Jewish thinkers: “what matters is the truth, not who says it.” For this reason he was interested in all disciplines. He built upon the work of Aristotle in subscribing to the correspondence theory of truth, which seems to have taken a beating of late: Namely, that if a thought or statement is true if it conforms to reality. And that if it doesn’t conform to reality, it isn’t true.

But above all, he showed that faith does not destroy reason, but on the contrary, elevates and perfects it; that’s why his is a mind enlightened by faith. According to St. Thomas, all serious and rigorous study leads to God, and the knowledge of God helps us approach any discipline more accurately and profoundly.

His Student’s Prayer, which I read now, informs the way we aim for God to shape our students’ dispositions toward learning:

Come, Holy Spirit, Divine Creator,
true source of light and fountain of wisdom!
Pour forth your brilliance upon my dense intellect,
dissipate the darkness which covers me, that of sin and of ignorance.
Grant me a penetrating mind to understand,
a retentive memory, method and ease in learning,
the lucidity to comprehend, and abundant grace in expressing myself.
Guide the beginning of my work, direct its progress,
and bring it to successful completion.

This I ask through Jesus Christ,
true God and true man,
living and reigning with You and the Father,
forever and ever.
Amen.

Aquinas watches over our comings and goings, reminding us that “Revelation does not destroy the light of reason, but rather completes and perfects it.” For Aquinas, revelation, and particularly the revelation of the Gospel of Jesus, perfectly illuminates

all of the liberal arts studied in the great schools of the West, of which Capstone aspires to be included.

Aquinas' adjacent partner above our front doors is Aristotle, the Greek philosopher— simply, the Greek lover of wisdom— who identified good character or virtue as the key to living a fulfilling life and achieving happiness. He was a proponent of developing virtuous character through practice and rational deliberation. Any Capstone parent can see his influence in our habits at Capstone. You can read his *Nicomachean Ethics* to do a deep dive into his groundbreaking work on virtue ethics.

God's common grace no doubt empowered Aristotle and led him, though a pagan, to great redemptive work in human society and framed the eventual arrival of Christ for the Greek and Roman world into which he came. The human happiness or well-being to which Aristotle aimed was and is only realized in the work of Christ, but God gave Aristotle keen insights into human nature and the nature of Truth.

Aristotle believed that reason or logic was crucial for identifying and practicing virtues, allowing individuals to make informed choices about their actions. He broke ground in the study and development of reason itself—of logic—and then taught incisively on how to express truth in a persuasive manner through his development of rhetoric. Knowing Capstone's commitment to the search for truth and to logic and rhetoric, you might see why he is a figurative guardian of Capstone.

He is the father of science, having developed something we today call the scientific method. He provided much of the categories into which we divide our studies in traditional Western education as a father of the liberal arts. He taught that the purpose of government is to promote virtue in its citizens so that they can live together under common laws. Five wonderful quotes from him that inform us at Capstone:

“The high-minded man must care more for the truth than for what people think.”

“It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.”

“Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.”

“All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth.”

“The best way to teach morality is to make it a habit with children.”

Apart from the work of Christ on the cross, which overshadows both of these men on our building, no human logic or knowledge is sufficient, nor habits so perfect, we can flourish. This comes by Christ, the light of life incarnate in him, and the indwelling of his Spirit, who refines us and turns our hearts in a new direction—toward the goodness,

truth, and beauty we can reason through but cannot love most of all without being born again in Christ.

At Capstone we gather the jewels of wisdom passed down to us by the likes of Aristotle and Aquinas through the ages, and as their integrating, translating, and illuminating core we present Christ and Him crucified, buried, and raised. This is the lintel that holds open the gate to a Capstone education—one with an eye toward life to the full. He is the Gate itself, and the crowning masterpiece over and through all that is done down here below.

The predominant method of education in our community and in our nation is hesitant to recognize the greatness of these men upon whose shoulders we stand and who illuminate our path today but will certainly be quicker to embrace the scholastic contributions of Aristotle, Aquinas, and the men in Founders Hall than it will be to embrace the offensive cross atop our chapel and Christ's words on the lintel below. But for us, these precious features of our school are symbols of the power of God in our ministry to our students, your children, and they frame Aristotle, Aquinas, and all who would teach our children ideas that match reality.

But let us not think that everyone in Fargo would love to come to this school. The teachers perched on the outside of our building, though life-giving to us, appear foolish and trip up the majority who would otherwise consider this school.

For as St. Paul would write after Aristotle and Jesus but before St. Aquinas, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.’”

“Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? . . . But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power and wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than men's strength.”

We aspire to provide for your children, our students, an education that is wiser than that available in any other kind of school, and that provides a strength that withstands the mightiest forces in the confused circus of popular culture. The world will not applaud nor aspire with us, but the foolishness of God is wiser than the world's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than the world's strength.

As we reflect upon the year behind us and look to the year ahead, we do so as a Christ-centered school, confident in his wisdom and strength, and giving Him glory for all of the grace he has lavished on us as we look forward to his grace expressed in new and surprising ways in the trials and victories ahead.

We've had an extremely fruitful year.

We have continued and grown in our partnership with Hillsdale College. Our monthly calls with the teacher support team at Hillsdale, my monthly meetings with Hillsdale Academy's headmaster, our professional conferences at the college each June, the excellent scope and sequence of our carefully curated curriculum, and our ongoing mutual sharpening through the Hillsdale school network, expand the capacity of our faculty and leadership team and are a distinctive strength of our school.

Our membership in the Association of Classical and Christian Schools and the Society for Classical Learning has provided a broad network and access to centuries of experience found in the minds of classical Christian colleagues from around the country. This year our faculty and staff attended conferences with these classical school colleagues and thought leaders in Washington, D.C., Dallas, and Hillsdale. This June they'll do the same in Dallas and Hillsdale.

I've been blessed and am able to multiply within Capstone the wisdom and encouragement I receive by being one of 20 heads of school nationwide — all better than I — who are Society for Classical Learning fellows, who together wrestle with best practices and strategic planning for our growth as a movement.

This June our new faculty for the 2025-26 school year will have the opportunity to be trained in Capstone's content and methods at Hillsdale College. All of our faculty are subscribed to an online learning and professional development platform called Classical U and have 24/7 access to the Hillsdale K-12 Library of teacher resources.

Capstone continues to have a significant footprint in the local church. Our families come from some 43 churches in the FM area. It is our desire to reach more churches so that Capstone is a household name throughout the Kingdom of God in this area. You are key evangelists for our school as you speak about your Capstone experience with your friends and neighbors.

In March we took our second year of standardized tests. We selected the Comprehensive Testing Program (CTP) by ERB for grades 1-2 because The Classic Learning Test is not available in primary grades. The CTP is still the standardized test of choice by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). This allows us to compare our primary grades student achievement to the highest achieving schools nationally.

For grades 3-8, the ACCS has officially jettisoned the CTP due to its move toward a left-leaning educational agenda, so we implemented the Classic Learning Test (CLT) for

grades 3-8. Unfortunately, at the moment, this has left us without an apples-to-apples comparison of our student performance in grades 1-2 with other classical schools. It only gives us comparison with high achieving independent schools, which is still quite informative. The CLT in grades 3-8 is exciting because it compares student performance with peers in mostly classical schools, which are the highest performing subgroup of schools nationally.

The CLT is a rapidly growing college entrance exam that is starting to compete with the SAT and ACT but is designed for better alignment with the rigor and content excellence of the classical model. The CLT 3-8 is poised to become the new standard for classical schools across the nation.

As might be expected, Golden Gryphons who enroll in Capstone in 4th grade or earlier perform in the top fourth of the top schools in the nation. The classical foundation is powerful. Students who enrolled in Capstone in 5th grade or later score as a group in the average range for classical schools taking the CLT. This is encouraging news given the high caliber of the norm group and the late start that these students received.

Enrollment is at 228, falling short of the goal we set a year ago, of 243 students this year, but our early admissions numbers for 2025 are the highest we've had in our history, and we are on track, Lord willing, to reach 300 students for the 2025-26 school year. With current enrollment projections, the school should be fully funded by tuition and fees by as early as the 2027-28 school year. The target for August is 305.

We will be adding a second fifth grade section in August, completing our lower school expansion, and will expand grades 6 and 7 to two sections as enrollment demands.

Determining how quickly to grow enrollment depends upon:

- Carefully managing student culture
- Measuring the needs of new students against the capacity of the faculty
- Evaluating the quality of teaching applicants
- Keeping pace with the strategic financial plan so that we become fully funded by tuition and fees by the 2027-28 school year.

The new tuition schedule is provided to you in your annual report, and it will be posted on the website by the end of business tomorrow. For the last two years at this dinner I presented to you a multi-year plan for tuition through the 2027-28 school year. This year the board approved the same 6% tuition increase that was forecasted for you in advance for the last two years. It is our commitment to always plan a tentative tuition schedule 5 years out for both your and our strategic planning of stewardship of our resources. We could outperform or underperform those plans and miss those projections, but this year, the projections were spot on. You'll see what that 6% increase is in dollars on your report. We hope to increase tuition by only 5% in 2026-27.

Please note that just as we announced one year ago, starting with the upcoming school year, tuition for grades 6-8 is the same. When Capstone started, we planned for 6th grade to be taught in the grammar school model, but in the fall of 2023, we moved the 6th grade to the upper school model, so the tuition levels are Pre-K, K-5th, 6th-8th, and 9th-12th.

So that we can plan well in our teacher recruitment and hiring, our budgeting, and our acquisition of curriculum and supplies for 2025-26, we ask that you let us know by February 28 each year if you do not plan to return to Capstone for the next academic year. We automatically charge the enrollment fee of \$250 for 2025-26 to your accounts the week of March 10. If you notify us by Feb. 28 that you do not plan to return, we will be able to cancel that fee for you. This fee holds your spot in your class and tells us how many new students we can give seats to as we begin enrolling new students in empty seats on March 1 each year.

If you are struggling with your decision due to disappointment with your Capstone experience or due to financial stress, I would very much love the opportunity to serve you by meeting with you to learn about what I can do to help you to continue as a member of our community. We believe with every fiber of our being that what we are doing here is remarkably good, if imperfect, and we want to be certain that we have done all we can to help you to experience all of the best that the Capstone experience ought to offer your children. Your experience, your feedback, and your open sharing of concerns make us better, and you deserve our best efforts.

The priority deadline for financial aid, which we call tuition support, is April 15. You can find the application on our website. This year, 70 students from 44 families were able to attend Capstone due to fully funded need-based support. If finances are your challenge to returning in the fall, we hope you will complete an application for tuition support.

The school calendar for 2025-26 has 170 instructional days and returns to the basic format of 2023-24. The first day of classes will be August 27, and the last day May 29. It features a Christmas break from December 24 through January 4 and a spring break from March 16 to 20.

We will distribute the calendar by the end of February so that you can plan your schedules accordingly.

Regarding the Advancement Program at Capstone, there are four primary legs to our development stool:

Capital Campaigns, The Golden Gryphon Fund, Special Designated Gifts, and Planned Giving.

Capital Campaigns are special efforts to raise support for campus improvements, endowments, and larger-scale opportunity growth within the school's advancement.

Our first capital campaign is now at over \$53 million out of \$55 million goal raised. We have received over \$1 million in new gifts and pledges since our last annual report, and we are working behind the scenes to realize the last \$2 million to fully fund our launch and permanent campus. Our next capital campaign is not yet upon us, but quiet planning will begin at the close of Phase I, which is close at hand. The board will share more about Phase II in the coming year. As you know, our campus is not complete—even when the chapel and library are finished. There are three more buildings in our campus development plan—the fine arts building, which will feature an auditorium for theatre and music productions and large school assemblies, a varsity gym with more floor and spectator space, and a refectory for dining and events.

The Golden Gryphon Fund. The Golden Gryphon Fund is our effort to secure funding for need-based scholarships. Without need-based scholarships, Capstone's growth would be severely limited. Scholarships provide access to families who are invaluable members of our community but who simply do not have the same earning potential to pay full tuition. Solid school management practices require us to fund all of our financial aid so that no "seat" within the school is discounted. Our commitment is to pay 100% for the expense of every child's education through tuition payments and the Golden Gryphon Fund. A successful GGF slows tuition increases by providing a larger, fully-funded student body for the academy. Last March we launched the Golden Gryphon Society, which is a fellowship of individuals and families who make a regular commitment to the Golden Gryphon Fund. Many of you are Golden Gryphon Society members, for which we are deeply grateful, and roughly 1/3 of our students are blessed by the Society and its Fund annually.

As of today, God has provided \$440,000 for the Golden Gryphon Fund, exceeding our goal of \$350,000 for scholarships for 2024-25—Praise God! Our next goal is \$100,000 through Giving Hearts Day so that we can build our scholarship reserve fund for unexpected family needs and for potential shortfalls due to higher needs in the 2025-26 school year.

The Legacy Circle will be initiated this spring and is a group of individuals who through planned giving seek to secure a strong financial future for Capstone primarily through estate planning. Planned giving will primarily fund the endowment but based upon donor wishes may also fund special projects that would typically be part of capital campaigns.

Special Designated Gifts. From time to time, we may ask donors for specific help with initiatives or projects, or they may suggest them to us with an accompanying gift. In 2024, anonymous donors contributed \$3.3 million to program development and the cost of education at Capstone so that we could keep our tuition increases in check for you. This support was separate and apart from the capital campaign.

What we have experienced at Capstone with the vision of our founders and generosity of our donors is exceedingly rare. We have been able to offer a robust and mature school experience without passing startup costs on to the parents. Tuition has been

lower than our actual expenses would have otherwise dictated, the campus expense has not been included in tuition, and we have been able to expand offerings before tuition dollars were there to fund them. We ought all to thank our donors and praise God for their vision and generosity. Capstone is a national story in this regard, and we give all praise and glory to God for his generous provision.

We are all humbled by this grace and motivated to be excellent to honor the Lord and those He has chosen to partner with us through financial blessings.

Capstone will be a school whose advancement office seeks to be a leader for other Christian schools. We endeavor to implement best practices in relationship development work, valuing each donor as a friend and partner in our work, and sharing what we learn from our successes with our colleagues in other schools. We believe that to whom much is given, much is expected.

The Capstone Community has had a busy year of growth in campus life and expanding opportunities to have fellowship with one another through several growing programs and communities within our community.

The great work of the Capstone Parent Fellowship has been one of our greatest success stories in the early going. The CPF mission is rooted in Ephesians 4:16, which reads, "From him [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." The mission of Capstone Parent Fellowship is to build community among Capstone families, faculty, and staff through prayer, service, and purposeful events that develop lasting ties among the Golden Gryphons.

CPF's planning and hosting events like the fall fellowship, back-to-school class picnics and parties, end-of-year picnics, skating parties, service projects like this month's Feed My Starving Children, faculty and staff encouragement through cards, food, and gifts of appreciation, and monthly times of prayer and planning for how to best involve every family in our growing community in ways that make for lasting, God-honoring and soul-nourishing relationships is exemplary and invaluable.

Capstone Parent Fellowship is thriving as we had our first fruitful transfer of leadership in the office of President and Vice President. Katy Swenson, Kay Holte, and their incredible board of parent volunteers have provided another great year of building school spirit and fostering God-honoring fellowship within the Capstone Community. CPF is a hallmark of the Capstone difference, and a pillar of our mission and growth into a very bright future.

We continue to deepen Capstone traditions while developing new programs on campus. Daily worship, recitation, and meditation are as central as ever in our hallways, classrooms, and activities. In Lauds, upper school students, faculty, and staff start each morning with historic Christian worship through the singing of the Psalms, rich older hymns, congregational reading of Scripture, and prayer.

The grammar school students begin observing Gryphon Gathering to start each morning—a time of devotion in Scripture and recitation of Capstone’s First Things.

Our students sing rich hymns and hear expository teaching of the Word of God in our weekly chapel programs at both campuses.

Through recitation, our students are committing to memory great words of Scripture, Christian doctrine, poetry, civics, and academic content. They almost effortlessly find themselves having internalized these words, having been shaped and trained by them, sometimes for postures of heart and mind, and sometimes for future application in academics and in life.

We believe in spiritual framing of our days, months, and years. Reminding ourselves of the context in which and purpose for which we gather. We started our year with Convocation and end our year with Thanksgiving. If you are not in the habit of attending these framing moments for our school, I hope you’ll consider joining us in the future. Lauds, Gryphon Gathering, Recitation, Prayer at lunch, the Pledge in history and civics classes—all of these liturgies shape student and teacher affections and frame the curriculum and stories we tell in the greater, larger stories of life. Most importantly, in the Gospel of Jesus.

Grandparents Day is in the spring this year so that we can host comfortably on our new campus, the Thanksgiving Feast and Poetry Exhibition (also in February this year so that we can host comfortably on this campus), and 119 Day (what a beautiful evening and school assembly that was!) remind us of the importance of feasting, pondering, fellowship, storytelling, and stopping to listen to one another and to the wise who’ve gone before us.

Our parent community gathers through Moms and Dads in Prayer, where the greatest battles are fought and won by expressing our surrender to God’s will and his provision, Well-Read Moms, where great stories on the human condition and the transcendent spur edifying conversations between Capstone mothers who are themselves engaging in a classical education practice of dialogue, sitting at the feet of a great book, and other study groups and small gatherings strengthen our mission and our resolve to see it through come what may.

God intended for his people to be a people of fellowship over food, of celebration of God’s goodness through feasting. Under the vision and leadership of Kelley Peterson, Emily Steenhout, and Rachael Seelhoff, our lunch ministry has been a great gift and comfort to the Golden Gryphons, faculty, and staff as we share in a common and delicious meal, feasting and friendship in our new space.

Our Campus Life, particularly for our older learners and scholars who tend to want more social outlets at school, has really taken off in its second year under the leadership of Mr. McGuire and the House Patrons (the faculty). House is not an ancillary

program but the heartbeat of virtuous civic development and discipleship of our scholars and future philosophers.

Now in its second year, the House program held its first draft and formal induction ceremony as returning members selected new members from the rising 6th grade. House Athens, Alexandria, and Nicaea competed in House Games and throughout the year in friendly competitions to elevate student culture in the formation of virtue. Eventually there will be seven houses. Houses provide learners and scholars a small community of peers with which to serve their school and to enjoy friendly academic, athletic, artistic, and social competition in the pursuit of the House Cup. On their journey, students learn leadership, teamwork, and mutual submission for the good of one another as they develop wisdom and virtue through the ups and downs of House work and play. House is an upper school program, serving grades 6-12.

Clubs have taken off. Math Counts, where students enjoy the wonder of the orderly and gorgeous world that God has created through mathematical inquiry and problem-solving, has been a big hit. Members of our Science Club participated in ND's Southeast Region Science Fair in last March. Friday afternoons were filled with laughter, fellowship, and lots of strategy at Ludus, our boardgames club, led by Mr. Zinter and Mr. Roughead but attended by other faculty as well.

Our band and choir programs are no longer simply off to an exceptional start but are an established and powerfully formative work of excellence. The work of Mr. and Mrs. Rebeschke and Mr. Zinter is outstanding. They make it easy to roll up our sleeves to get to work on support for a new arts building.

As a classical school, we believe that the arts belong in the core of our program. We don't see them as optional or less than. God made a musical, beautiful world, and appreciating it aesthetically, being moved by its beauty, having our imagination sharpened by it, and seeing its presence in all of our studies, is a hallmark of a Capstone education. The greatest art and music ever made finds its origin in the people of God. We are so pleased that God has provided such fine leadership and vision to our arts programs.

Last year Mrs. Rebeschke and her theatre troupe entertained and moved us with their presentation of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, building upon their exploration of scenes from William Shakespeare in their inaugural season. This year they turn to great stories of classical civilizations in a showcase of mythology that shaped the early West and informs the imagination today.

With four high school freshmen this year and likely twenty in the fall with a small sophomore class ahead of them, we are just over three years away from the first Capstone Classical Academy alumni. In the next two weeks, you will see on our website the high school course offerings, including an exciting selection of elective courses designed with our unique classical and Christian vision, mission, and framework in mind. The high school program blends the rigorous, thoughtfully

integrated, and delightful Hillsdale K-12 core content with a complement of more specialized courses that allow students to take a deep dive into subjects of interest to them and that provides access to the best theological education in our region.

We already have key high school faculty in place, and we have begun securing an excellent faculty of scholars who are gifted teachers to help lead the burgeoning departments in our new high school. We believe all of our new high school positions will be filled fairly early this winter and spring and that we can begin introducing them to you early so that you, like us, can enjoy anticipating the gifts they will bring to your children, our students.

Our sports program is developing ahead of our early expectations thanks to the great work of the sports boosters last year, exceptional parent initiative, a motivated group of student athletes, and the early work of Jonah Lange, Brady Nash, our Associate Head for Athletics, and Kelsey Jensen, our activities director. We committed to hiring an AD before having any junior high or high school teams. We are deeply committed to building a sports program worthy of our mission. We are working to have the most intentionally classical and Christian program in our region. We are confident that our athletes will be formed into virtuous members of family, church, and workplace through a classical Christian approach to athletics.

Capstone's sports program exists as a vital complement to the classroom and the performing arts. Its role is to provide a laboratory for the lessons learned during the school day. Our athletics mission is to provide our Golden Gryphons with experiences in athletics that will sanctify (set apart and prepare) student athletes for sacred roles in family, church, community, and workplace for the glory of God. The wisdom, virtue, truth, and beauty pursued by the classical academy in the classroom is cultivated powerfully through spiritually formative experiences in sport when coaching is in submission to this mission.

This year we built upon the previous work of parent and community volunteers and Mr. Lange to expand our program to include:

5th-6th grade basketball, volleyball, and track

Grammar school and junior high soccer through Tri-City United

Upward Basketball through 6th grade

Junior High XC, basketball, track, and volleyball through NDHSAA

Varsity girls swimming through a services agreement with Shanley. This will be a formal coop in the fall.

Discussions are underway for cooperative agreements with Shanley in hockey, football, baseball, softball, and soccer, with plans to develop a robust soccer program of our own in the years ahead.

Sports being mapped out for the future as potential Golden Gryphon or cooperative programs are golf and tennis.

The performance of our programs, student enrollment, and athletics participation numbers will certainly necessitate some pivots in the plan, and each year we will continuously evaluate timing and delivery of our growing sports programs based upon those evaluations. While we will utilize cooperative agreements strategically to help as many families as desire a Capstone education to be able to do so while participating in sports they love and within which they have talents, our aim is to create a Golden Gryphon athletics experience that is so stellar that the vast majority of students would choose to join our teams rather than play in a coop.

Of course, the most obvious and tangible success of the last year is the building in which we are sitting. We have “finally” moved in to our beautiful campus that speaks by its form and the art it holds of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty and that reminds us to aim for, pray for, and live in admiration of the lofty ideals we discussed at the beginning of my address this evening. This new space will stand as a stone of remembrance, a memorial to God’s faithfulness—to his kind mercies upon a people who dreamed of something noble for their children and grandchildren.

From the larger, more humane classrooms, to the chapel to the science labs to the library (and its full shelves thanks to our generous donors), to the art studio, to the band and choir room, to the gymnasium and the actual playground we have inherited a “land” of our own.

In just the first two weeks, the blessing of one unified student body and faculty, easy observation and evaluation of all aspects of our program, more comfortable spaces and more humane schedules that allow for down time with one another, moments of deep conversation, recreation, and reflection, and even the sharing of meals and life together in hospitable spaces such as our north and south stair parlors and Founders Hall have fostered a greater sense of of purpose, connection, and blessing than we had imagined.

And the playground! Oh, the playground! We love to watch our younger Golden Gryphons frolic and play out there. They provide excellent entertainment for upper school students as they wait in line for their lunches each day.

We are living in quite a moment for Capstone and for each of your children.

2024 was a remarkable year of great leaps forward for Capstone, and 2025 is shaping up to be as well. We are grateful that all of you have chosen to start and to stay on this journey with us.

I’ll close by sharing with you what I shared with you last year at this dinner and at the inaugural state of the academy dinner before that.

From Deuteronomy 6:6-12, Moses, whose bust is featured prominently in our Founders Hall, just as he is about to deliver the law to God’s people, tells them,

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”

As we pull up to and drive away from our new campus each day and admire it rising out of the prairie into the ND sky and feel the pride of belonging to something good, may we remember that it is all by God’s grace and be careful to be reverent stewards of his school and to point our children to the holy, righteous, gracious God who to the praise of his marvelous grace has created us in Christ Jesus for good works, that we should walk in them.

In the limestone lintel of the front doors of our new campus are the Latin words, “Ego veni ut vitam habeant.” I have come that they may have life. The words of Christ, our good shepherd. As we close this evening, let’s give thanks to the one who guides, provides, and protects us by his gracious and mighty hand into the next year together on mission because of, for, and through him.

Let us pray.