

spire

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IN THIS ISSUE:

2024 EMERGING
LEADERS

JEFF SANDEFER

NICK SHELTON



Spire

Spire serves as a beacon of hope by sharing inspirational stories about Acton Institute supporters, scholars, and events to lift your spirit as together we build a free and virtuous society. To change hearts and minds—and the world—look forward and upward ... to the *Spire*.



4 President's Message



6 Cultivating Free and Virtuous Societies
JEFF SANDEFER



10 From Acton to Action
NICK SHELTRON



14 Faith, Family, and Formation
LAMO THE FOUNDATION



18 The Acton Institute and the University of St. Thomas

22 Ways to Support the Acton Institute & More





The Acton Institute defies the traditional definition of a “think tank.” We aren’t based in Washington, DC, or America’s financial capital, New York City, like so many other think tanks. And we aren’t focused on immediate public policy concerns (although we have had spectacular moments testifying before Congress).

Acton’s mission is to play the long game.

We believe that when we move the culture in the direction of freedom, politics will follow. I realize it takes some faith to maintain that position, especially when we are tested in moments of anti-economic ideas and bad anthropology that have captured the commanding heights of culture. We are in one of those moments when, as a Christian and a free marketeer, I feel that my back is up against the wall. I’m pretty sure you often feel that way, too.

But I’m writing to encourage you: Acton’s long-term work is making a difference.

The Acton Institute focuses on recruiting, training, and educating highly leveraged leaders in the foundation principles of human flourishing, which empowers them to defend free-market understanding in their circles of influence.

Through our publications, programming, and popular media, we continue to engage with our event alumni, who are utilizing their God-given talents and creativity to change society.

One area where our alumni are having a great impact is in education, not just in America but worldwide.

This issue of *Spire* is filled with stories of how Acton alumni are advancing Acton’s ideas in higher education and creating a new future for our children.

Over the past 34 years, we have “graduated” over 15,000 alumni through our in-depth, in-person educational programs (e.g., Acton University, Free & Virtuous Society seminars, Liberty & Markets seminars). As you’ll read, each of the alumni featured in this edition of *Spire* is a catalyst for change in institutions through teaching, mentoring, and creating their own programs. By way of their efforts, they are impacting hundreds (or thousands) of people with the vitalizing principles that lead to human flourishing.

Acton’s work to train these leaders is made possible only because of your generosity, faith, and support.

I am humbled and grateful for each of you. After reading this, I hope you are as proud as I am of what we have accomplished together.

Very Truly Yours,

KRIS ALAN MAUREN
PRESIDENT



Cultivating Free and Virtuous Societies

JEFF SANDEFER'S ACTON-INSPIRED ACADEMIES

You approach a healthcare provider to discuss your concern about the new tightness in your chest. After listening to a description of your symptoms, the provider recommends an EKG study to examine your heart rhythms. The test is a little expensive, but it will provide insight into the health of your heart, one of the biggest—and most important—culprits when it comes to chest discomfort.

It's not an unusual life scenario, and the next steps are invariably going to depend on your EKG results and whatever other testing is ordered. Maybe you need open-heart surgery. Maybe it's just acid reflux.

Here's the twist: This entire scenario is an educational exercise, and the person ordering tests and making decisions isn't a middle-aged M.D. —it's your 16-year-old child.



JEFF SANDEFER (CONTINUED)

This is just one of the numerous ways the K–12 Acton Academies differ from the standard educational model used in most public and private schools. Founded by Jeff Sandefer and his wife, Laura, the Acton Academy network of schools is committed to the Socratic method of education and applying knowledge to real-life scenarios.

But the Acton Academy and the Acton Institute share more than a namesake. Jeff Sandefer was among the first members of the board for the Institute.

Jeff will happily discuss at length the ways in which Acton Academies differ from more common educational institutions, and those ways are numerous. From Socratic discussions that put learners in a real-life situation to hands-on multidisciplinary projects, an Acton Academy class looks very different from those found in a standard public school. The divergences are also philosophical.

Regarding the philosophical underpinnings of Acton Academy, Jeff refers to Father Sirico, the co-founder of the Acton Institute, and his concept of the Entrepreneurial Vocation.

“The Entrepreneurial Vocation is really what the Acton Academy is all about,” Jeff states. “We think about that in two ways. One: We’re going to learn how to learn. Two: We’re going to learn how to do. We’re actually going to be able to do something in the world—that’s what the Entrepreneurial Vocation’s about—in order to learn to be who we’re meant to be.”

Jeff is himself a highly successful entrepreneur who founded several companies and created the Acton MBA in Entrepreneurship program. He knows a thing or two about business. But instead of doling out rigid “Do This, Not That” lists to would-be business owners, he looks to empower learners to make discoveries and come to conclusions largely on their own. Over the course of approximately 7,000 Socratic discussions during their Acton Academy careers, learners’ understanding of the world will be both questioned and defended by their classmates, but never compelled.

More than that, each Acton Academy is run, essentially, by the learners. This creates a strong incentive for robust self-government and self-regulation, and it leads to sturdy ethical compacts among the young people. Each Acton Academy studio is its own free and virtuous society in miniature.

According to Jeff, the learners are figuring out, “As Lord Acton would say, ‘To do what one ought.’ But then you have to decide what is ‘ought.’”

Jeff and Laura are two Acton Institute community members making an impact in the sphere of education, changing the world for the better one student at a time.

**NATIONAL
HERITAGE
ACADEMIES** 



From Acton to Action

HOW ONE INTERN SHAPED CHARTER SCHOOL EDUCATION

At National Heritage Academies (NHA), a network of 100 charter schools serving 65,000 students across nine states, Chief Learning Officer Nick Sheltroun guides the educational philosophy of an organization committed to both academic excellence and character development. But the seeds of Nick's transformative work were planted years ago, during a summer internship at the Acton Institute.

"The Acton Institute has had an outsized impact on my education and the way I think about the world," Nick reflects. "While I know that learning is a lifelong journey, I think if I look back at my life, there have been these key inflection points that have really shaped how I think about the world, and my internship at Acton was certainly one of those."



During his time at Acton, Nick was exposed to ideas that would forever change his perspective on education and society. He vividly recalls reading Leonard Read’s “I, Pencil,” a short story that illustrates the power of markets to create societal good. This introduction to free-market principles, coupled with discussions on educational freedom, set Nick on a path he never anticipated.

“I know I wouldn’t have taken my career into a school choice space had I not been an intern at Acton, had I not been exposed to the power of what markets can do in all these different areas,” Nick says.

After his internship, Nick embarked on a journey through the education system, first as a high school math teacher in both inner-city and suburban schools. The stark disparities he observed in resources and quality between these environments troubled him deeply, spurring him to seek innovative solutions.

This search led Nick to the charter school sector, where he found a way to apply the principles he learned at Acton to address educational inequities. Today, at NHA, Nick oversees an educational approach that emphasizes both academic achievement and character formation.

“We work with principals and other school leaders and teachers to impact kids each and every day, not only academically, but also their character,” Nick explains. “When J.C. [Huizenga] founded NHA, one of the pillars he was passionate about was what we call moral focus, where each month we take a virtue and make that a central part of the learning experiences for students.”

This focus on virtue aligns closely with Acton’s mission to promote a free and virtuous society. At NHA, values like integrity, respect, self-control, and compassion are woven into the fabric of daily learning.

“The values that we choose to emphasize are ones that resonate with our parents and probably anybody in society,” Nick says. “These kinds of things are, I think, the foundation of a civil society.”

Nick’s connection to Acton hasn’t faded over the years. He regularly brings NHA teachers to Acton University, recognizing the value of exposing educators to thought leaders who have deeply considered issues around education and society.

“What I love about Acton University is that you have an event where the purpose is really to promote a free and virtuous society,” Nick enthuses. “Our teachers come back not just entertained but changed in their thinking.”

As Nick reflects on his journey from Acton intern to educational leader, he has a message for Acton’s supporters: “In a world where there are fewer and fewer voices speaking for the values that Acton stands for, you’ve found a tremendous beacon in a rather noisy, crowded landscape.”

Nick’s story reflects the far-reaching impact of Acton’s work. From a summer internship to shaping the education of tens of thousands of students, Nick has employed the ideas cultivated at Acton to bear fruit, fostering a new generation of informed, virtuous citizens. Your support of the Acton Institute doesn’t just change lives—it shapes the future.

Learn more about National
Heritage Academies





Faith, Family, and Formation

THE LAMOTHE FOUNDATION'S ENDURING SUPPORT OF THE ACTON INSTITUTE

In the serene community of Ave Maria, Florida, Sydney McManus along with her brothers, Chris and Regan LaMothe, carry forward a legacy of faith, education, and philanthropy established by their parents, Pat and Bill LaMothe. As directors of the Patricia A. and William E. LaMothe Foundation Inc., Sydney and her brothers continue their parents' mission to revitalize authentic Catholic classical education across the United States and beyond—a mission that has been intertwined with the Acton Institute's work for decades.

The LaMothe family's relationship with the Acton Institute began in the early days of the organization. "Father Sirico and Kris Mauren came to visit my dad when he was at the Kellogg Company in Battle Creek," Sydney recalls. "They were just starting out, focusing on democracy, free markets, and religious liberty. My parents were all for it."

This initial connection blossomed into a long-standing partnership, with the LaMothe Foundation becoming one of the Acton Institute's most steadfast and generous supporters. The family's commitment to Acton's mission of promoting a free and virtuous society aligned perfectly with their own values and philanthropic goals.

“They saw what Father Sirico was doing was phenomenal,” Sydney explains. “He was rejuvenating and revitalizing Catholic education like my parents had grown up with in the ‘30s and ‘40s—really solid teaching of the faith and also how to think and reason.”

The LaMothes’ generous support extended beyond financial contributions. They became active participants in Acton’s programs and events, consistently championing the Institute’s work in promoting the principles of individual liberty, limited government, and free markets—all underpinned by a strong moral foundation.

As Pat’s health declined and Bill advanced in years, they sought to ensure that their legacy would continue to support Acton’s mission. In a pivotal conversation with Father Sirico, Bill LaMothe issued a challenge that would both shape the foundation’s future and strengthen its ties with Acton.

“I want you to take Sacred Heart Academy and do that around the country,” Sydney recounts her father saying. Sacred Heart Academy was a struggling Catholic classical academy until its refounding by Father Sirico. Since then, it has gained accolades from numerous academic institutions, including Hillsdale College and the Classical Learning Test.

This vision led to the creation of the St. John Henry Newman Institute, founded in part by Father Sirico to revitalize authentic Catholic classical education nationwide—a project that embodies the intersection of the LaMothe Foundation’s Catholic educational focus and Acton’s mission of fostering a free and virtuous society.

The LaMothe Foundation’s impact, guided by Acton’s principles, extends beyond U.S. borders. Sydney proudly shares the story of Father Joseph Lugalambi, who runs an orphanage and school in Uganda, Our Lady of the Rosary. After attending Acton University two years ago—a program the LaMothes have generously supported through Acton U scholarships—Father Lugalambi was inspired to implement the Catholic classical program in his school.

For the LaMothe Foundation, this work is not just about education—it’s about preserving culture and shaping future citizens in line with Acton’s vision. “What else matters if we’re going to lose our culture, too, if we don’t properly educate and form these kids who are going to be coming up to take over this great country and [institutions] around the world?” she asks.

As she reflects on her parents’ legacy and their unwavering support of the Acton Institute, Sydney’s voice fills with emotion. “They were such faithful, Catholic, down-to-earth, hardworking, and wise people,” she says. “They loved this country and what it had originally been set up to be—which is exactly what Acton works to preserve and promote.”

The Patricia A. and William E. LaMothe Foundation Inc. stands as a testament to the power of faith, family, and education in shaping a free and virtuous society—principles that are at the heart of the Acton Institute’s mission. Through its generous and continued support of Acton and initiatives like the St. John Henry Newman Institute, the Foundation is ensuring that future generations will have the grounding they need to think critically, reason soundly, and live virtuously.

In a world where traditional values are often challenged, the LaMothe Foundation’s work, in partnership with the Acton Institute, serves as a beacon of hope, illuminating the path toward a society grounded in faith, reason, and freedom. Its generosity and commitment to Acton’s mission continues to make a lasting impact, fostering a legacy that will shape generations to come.



The Acton Institute and the University of St. Thomas

SHAPING FUTURE BUSINESS LEADERS

In the heart of Houston, Texas, a groundbreaking partnership is taking shape between the Acton Institute and the University of St. Thomas (UST). This collaboration, centered on the UST McNair Center for Free Enterprise and Entrepreneurship along with the Cameron School of Business, is poised to transform business education and cultivate a new generation of ethically minded entrepreneurs.

“Our mission is to educate about the free and virtuous society,” explains Dr. John Pinheiro, Director of Research at the Acton Institute. “We want to show that entrepreneurship is a vocation, springing from our natural creative abilities, and that business can be and is a moral enterprise.”

This vision aligns perfectly with UST’s goals. Dr. Beena George, Interim Director of the UST McNair Center, emphasizes, “Collaborating with the Acton Institute has been an incredible opportunity for us to empower our students to deepen their understanding of free-market economics informed by the Catholic intellectual tradition.”

The partnership’s cornerstone is a new entrepreneurship minor, designed by Acton Institute experts for non-business majors. Dr. Pinheiro and Michael Matheson Miller from Acton have already co-taught a pilot course on business, political economy, and the human person. The full minor is currently moving through UST’s approval process.

But the collaboration extends beyond curriculum development. The Acton Institute is also providing faculty development, with a workshop for business faculty on integrating Catholic social teaching into courses. This holistic approach ensures that UST professors are equipped to carry forward Acton’s principles long after the initial collaboration ends.

The impact is already evident. Dr. Elham Mousavidin, chair of UST’s Management and Marketing department, shared this: “The Business Matters conference was an excellent event. The panel discussions were truly thought-provoking, filled with ideas that challenged my perspectives.”

Students, too, are feeling the effects. Anjali Sebastian, a Cameron School of Business student who attended Acton University, noted, “The experience was incredibly enriching, and I gained valuable insights and connections that will undoubtedly benefit my academic and professional growth.”

“Having attended multiple Acton University events in the past, I know that our students received an extraordinary gift, and one of my hopes is that this experience leads them to consider the call to create and grow faith-motivated entrepreneurial ventures.”

— ROBERT W. KEITH, DEAN OF THE CAMERON SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

This partnership represents a new frontier for the Acton Institute. As Dr. Pinheiro points out, “The way we promote our ideas through conferences is influential, but now universities are coming to us for help with curricular reform and training of faculty.”

Looking to the future, the potential for expansion is significant. While this collaboration with UST serves as a pilot, success here could open doors to partnerships with other universities, amplifying Acton’s influence in shaping business education nationwide.

This partnership offers a tangible example of how the Acton Institute is making a difference. By helping shape the future of business education and instilling values of free enterprise and moral leadership, Acton is inspiring the next generation of entrepreneurs.

As this innovative program with the University of St. Thomas continues to develop, ongoing support will be crucial. Together with its supporters, Acton can expand this model, reaching more universities and impacting more future business leaders with Acton’s vision of a free and virtuous society.

You are cordially invited to join the **Acton Institute** at

Acton’s 34th Annual Dinner

Keynote Speaker

DR. WILLIAM INBODEN

Director of the Alexander Hamilton Center at the University of Florida and author of *The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, and the World on the Brink*

Based on his interviews with senior Reagan officials and thousands of pages of newly declassified documents, Dr. Inboden will shed a fresh perspective on President Reagan’s unwavering faith and commitment to freedom during the Cold War.

Register now at acton.org/dinner

For more info, contact Rebecca Petrucelli
at events@acton.org or 616-369-6347

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 30

Amway Grand Plaza Hotel • Grand Rapids, MI • Black Tie Preferred



ACTON *Legacy*

After providing for loved ones, please consider adding the Acton Institute to your estate planning, helping to ensure the long-term success of the work you already support. We appreciate your support and want to make the gift as effective and beneficial for you as it is for us.

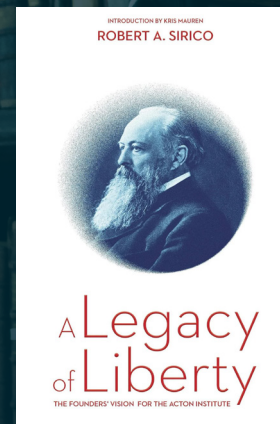
In addition to supporting our shared mission of defending a free and virtuous society, gifts may provide additional income for you and your loved ones, and potentially reduce income or estate taxes. You can make a planned gift with cash, appreciated assets (stocks, bonds, and real estate), personal property, and life insurance.

For more details and contact information, please visit acton.org/legacy or scan the QR code.

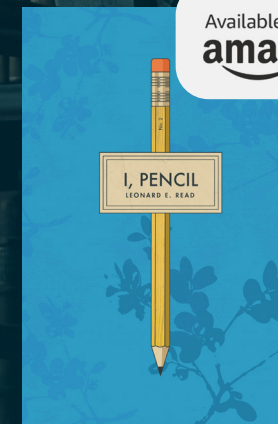


Book Recommendations

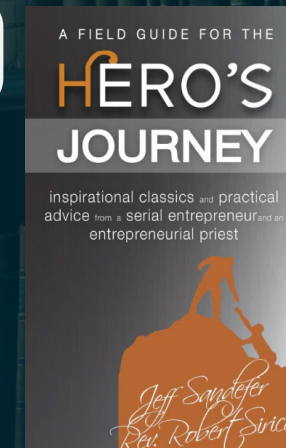
In the course of the conversations held with the outstanding individuals featured in this issue of *Spire*, it became apparent that books and reading have been an integral part of so many people's intellectual journeys. Below, you will find the titles and authors recommended by these outstanding alumni and Acton's president.



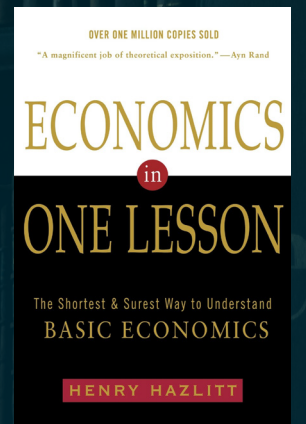
A LEGACY OF LIBERTY
BY FATHER SIRICO
Includes Toward a Free and Virtuous Society and The Entrepreneurial Vocation.



I, PENCIL
BY LEONARD E. READ



A FIELD GUIDE FOR THE HERO'S JOURNEY
BY JEFF SANDEFER & FATHER SIRICO



ECONOMICS IN ONE LESSON
BY HENRY HAZLITT

More books written by Acton scholars and affiliates, as well as foundational texts, are available at the Acton Bookshop.





EMERGING LEADERS

We welcomed an outstanding group of students to Grand Rapids for the 2024 Emerging Leaders Program. This year was our most selective ever—we chose the top 17 students from a pool of over 250! Participants reflected this selectivity as they eagerly made the most of the program, engaging with our scholars and diving into projects in their departments.

Our vision for this program is to find high-achieving students from across the U.S. and abroad and equip them with foundational principles to help them navigate their future careers. Grounding their leadership aspirations in solid character development will allow them to flourish long term. We want to see leaders in all spheres of the economy who understand human nature and the conditions that undergird a thriving society.

Students recognize the unique nature of this opportunity to gain hard skills and glean a holistic understanding of a free and virtuous society. This program is more than the sum of its parts; we have seen many students gain a vision for their vocation as they fit the pieces together.

Thank you for your support for and partnership in this important program.

Noah Gould, Alumni and Student Programs Manager



The **Emerging Leaders Program** is truly the best internship in the United States, I would argue the world. Acton is not the most famous think tank, not the largest, but these are not what make a great internship or a great organization. **It is instead the people and the values that are professed.** This is where Acton cannot be beaten. In many internships you are an intern, and you feel like that. Fr. Sirico told me that if anyone ever treated me like that, I needed to tell him personally. This sentiment sets the tone for the community at the Acton Institute.

— JOHN WELTE

I have learned a lot about free markets & effective compassion. The complexity of these issues cannot be understated, and although I have had no major shifts in my beliefs, the level of dirt that has been unpacked is more than noticeable. I have also really appreciated the ecumenical nature of the Acton Institute, and I have learned a lot about joining with my brothers and sisters in Christ to pursue what is good.

— JACOB YOUNG

The program has helped me broaden my horizons regarding poverty and how to solve it. It's been **eye-opening** and **encouraging** to truly discover that every person has the ability to get out of whatever horrible situation they've been thrust into and that we cannot simply give them free handouts. It has transformed my belief that aid is important while reinforcing my conviction that we must connect with people on an **individual level to promote true change.**

— TERRENCE BELL

Acton Institute Giving Circles and Societies

The Acton Institute is continually grateful for our supporters, who believe in our mission. By joining our Giving Circle, your gift supports recruiting, training, and equipping leaders from around the world to help promote a free and virtuous society.

FOUNDERS' CIRCLE

(\$10,000+ ANNUALLY, OR \$750/MONTH RECURRING GIFT)

- ✓ Personal call from Acton leadership
- ✓ Opportunity to name Acton University Fellowship
- ✓ Invitation to quarterly "town hall" calls with Acton leadership
- ✓ Complimentary subscriptions to all Acton publications for one year
- ✓ Invitations to private receptions at Acton events around the country, including the Annual Dinner and Acton University

LORD ACTON SOCIETY

(\$5,000+ ANNUALLY, OR \$350/MONTH RECURRING GIFT)

- ✓ Invitation to quarterly "town hall" calls with Acton leadership
- ✓ Complimentary subscription to all Acton publications for one year
- ✓ Invitations to private receptions at Acton events around the country, including the Annual Dinner and Acton University

PRESIDENT'S CIRCLE

(\$1,000+ ANNUALLY, OR \$75/MONTH RECURRING GIFT)

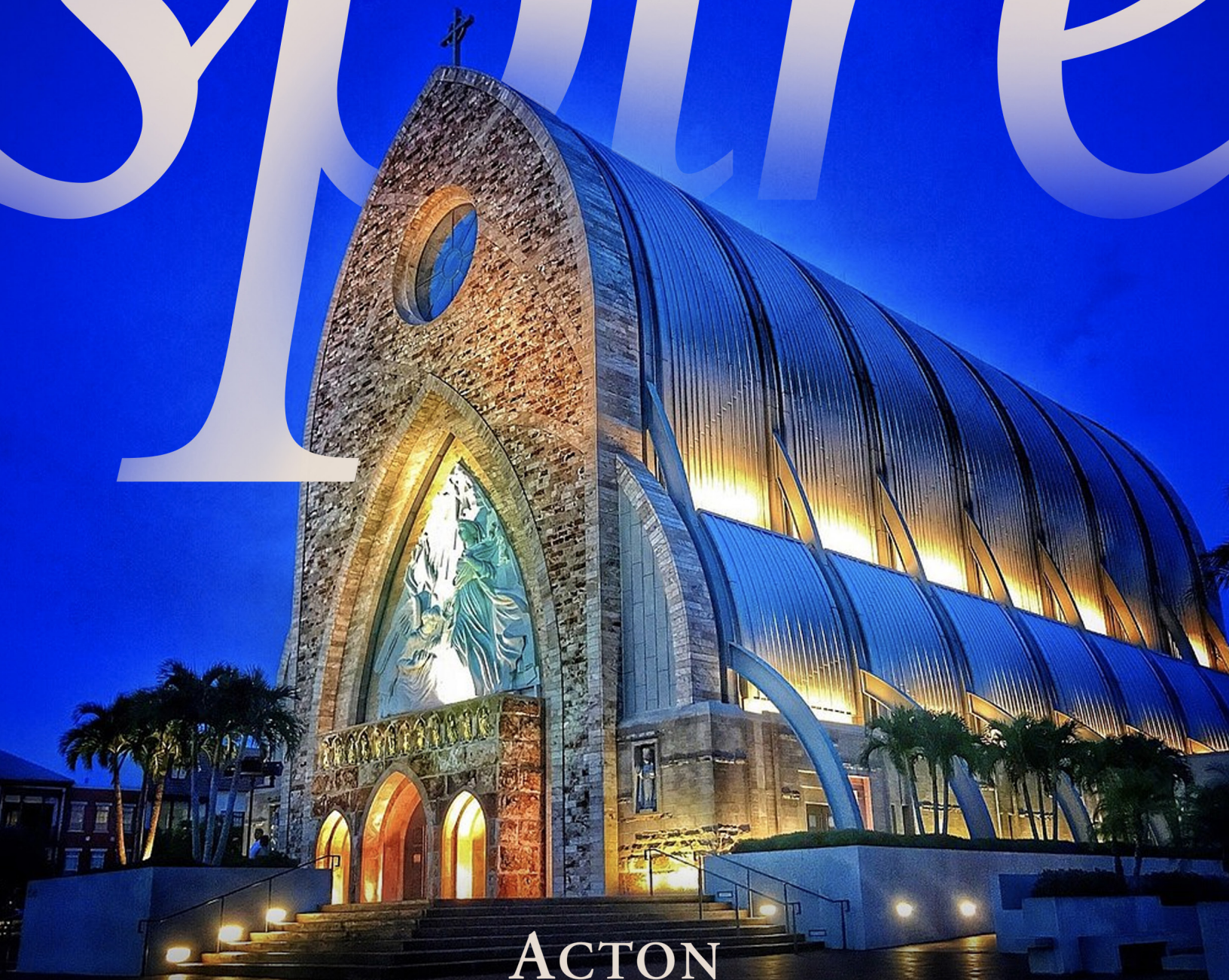
- ✓ Complimentary subscription to all Acton publications for one year
- ✓ Invitations to private receptions at Acton events around the country, including the Annual Dinner and Acton University

LEGACY SOCIETY

- ✓ Complimentary subscription to all Acton publications for life
- ✓ Invitations to private receptions at Acton events around the country, including the Annual Dinner and Acton University

To learn more about Acton's Giving Circles and Societies, please visit acton.org/giving or reach out to Kayla Kaseska, Donor Relations and Stewardship Manager, at kkaseska@acton.org.

Spire



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