

CORNELL | *On Campus*

Living in Christian Community

SOPHIA HOUSE WELCOMES FEMALE RESIDENTS AT CORNELL
By Francine Barchett, Cornell '20

The anticipation of a new academic year brings exciting news from Cornell's Chesterton House. The organization, which has become a widely-recognized resource for intellectually curious Christian undergraduates and graduate students, will open Sophia House, a residential facility for females, in the fall semester.

Sophia House will be located adjacent to Chesterton House's male

called to establish Chesterton House after sensing a perceivable barrier between campus culture and Christian culture.

"In the classroom by day and the dorm by evening, there seemed to be something in the drinking water of the campus that was deeply antagonistic toward faith," recalled Johnson (Cornell '89, Ph.D. '11). "There seemed to be little opportunity either

al and academic lives to merge. Since its launching event, Chesterton has not only brought numerous scholars to campus, but also enhanced the discussion of Christian intellectualism. The organization has also played a role in inspiring the creation of the Consortium of Christian Study Centers, which has 25 chapters on secular campuses nationwide.

While Chesterton House is distinguished for its philosophical rigor in line with C.S. Lewis and the eponymous G.K. Chesterton, it has additionally emphasized the need for life's necessities: sleep, food, and social interaction. As a quasi-fraternity and sorority, Chesterton's residential centers provide opportunities for students to cook, clean, laugh, weep, and mitigate conflict together, which Johnson believes will allow them to grow in their faith, both individually and communally.

"Intentional Christian community makes space for the faithful intersection not only of hearts and minds, but also of hands and habits," Johnson remarks. For those who cannot live in the centers, their doors still swing open over one thousand times annually for Bible studies, social events, and "old-fashioned hanging out." Johnson muses, "For a watching world wondering who these peculiar people may be, students living together in Christian community witness the life we have together in Christ."

Cornell's Chesterton and Sophia residential houses are the realization of Johnson's vision. In those facilities,



Image of what the new, two-acre Chesterton House ministry campus will look like.

living quarters, which opened in 2010.

As he reflects upon the Sophia House opening and Chesterton's progress leading up to it, including the introduction of Bible-based college courses five years ago, founder and director Karl Johnson admits that the developments have exceeded his "most optimistic dreams." Having attended Cornell both as an undergrad and grad student, Johnson felt

on or off campus to delve deeply into the big questions that students tend to have—questions of meaning, purpose, and value."

What began as a subtle observation sprouted into an idea, and by the year 2000, a compilation of local pastors, professors, and campus ministry workers stood with Johnson in solidarity. Their goal was to do just as Johnson had hoped: to allow students' spiritu-

students live in gender-specific buildings, but unite to eat, participate in special social events and readings, and attend retreats.

This year, the Chesterton and Sophia community includes 20 men and 15 women. Finding a nearby house for women was a challenge since Chesterton procured its male living quarters eight years ago; but thanks to a faculty couple moving out of their large home next door to the male facility, the ministry was able to secure the sponsorships to purchase and ex-

pand the building.

In the last 18 years, Chesterton House has transformed from an idea to a larger-than-life reality, capturing the hearts and minds of thousands of Cornellians and thousands more online. It has broadened from providing intellectual resources for Christians to offering students housing and community as they pursue their own academic and personal development. And the best news of all is that Chesterton's growth is not close to being over. Gazing further afield, Johnson

intends to improve the quality of Chesterton's residential centers and open a facility with a day-use library, classrooms, and offices, so that students can come at nearly any hour for "good books, good coffee, and great conversation."

But for now, Johnson and Chesterton House can rejoice in the opening of Sophia House, a building that will make the Cornell Christian community richer in love, unity, and, of course, Christian intellect. | [CU](#)