



HILLSDALE COLLEGE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 21, 2020

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Hillsdale College Moves Forward with New Center for Faith and Freedom

Plans to use recently donated facilities for religious and educational purposes receive zoning approval

HILLSDALE, Mich.— Hillsdale College has received final approval to use several properties in Somers, Connecticut, to establish the Blake Center for Faith and Freedom. The Somers Zoning Commission agreed with the College that the College is a religious institution and that its plans for the Somers properties constitute religious-institutional uses protected by state, federal, and constitutional law.

The main estate was donated to Hillsdale College by Prestley and Helen Blake in 2019. Prestley Blake is a co-founder of Friendly's restaurants, and the Blake family has generously used its wealth to advance the causes of religious philanthropy and cultural preservation.

“From its founding, Hillsdale College has a rich tradition of integrating faith and learning; the College’s Christian commitments are central to everything it does,” said Robert Norton, Vice President and General Counsel of Hillsdale College. “Thanks to the generosity of Pres and Helen Blake, we look forward to continuing to carry out our faith-based mission and getting to know our neighbors in the Somers community.”

Amid the grounds of the Blake’s Somers estate is an exact replica of Thomas Jefferson’s renowned Virginia home, Monticello. This will serve as the heart of the Blake Center, and part of the Center’s mission will be to preserve and celebrate this impressive structure.

The Center will host events similar to those Hillsdale College facilitates on its main campus and in other locations around the country. The enduring theme of these events will be Christianity, its relationship to Western and American thought, and the questions of faith and reason that have been at the heart of Christianity from the beginning.

A stone barn on the main property will be reconditioned into a chapel and will be used for religious ceremonies, liturgies, or services in connection with College events on site, as will a space in the Monticello house.

Among the types of events planned for the Blake Center are seminars, lectures, and teacher and board member trainings and consultations for K-12 public, charter, and private schools.

The Blake Center for Faith and Freedom is one of several Hillsdale College satellite venues. Last year the College opened the Steve and Amy Van Andel Graduate School of Government in Washington, D.C.

For more information about the Blake Center or Hillsdale College history, visit www.blakecenterforfaithandfreedom.org.

About Hillsdale College

Hillsdale College is an independent liberal arts college located in southern Michigan. Founded in 1844, the College has built a national reputation through its classical liberal arts core curriculum and its principled refusal to accept federal or state taxpayer subsidies, even indirectly in the form of student grants or loans. It also conducts an outreach effort promoting civil and religious liberty, including a free monthly speech digest, *Imprimis*, with a circulation of more than 5.5 million. For more information, visit hillsdale.edu.

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