



## **Bibles & belts: Academy teaches Korean martial art with Christian perspective**

*By Sherri Richards*

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As John Bedore is swept to the ground by one of his students, the metal cross around his neck swings back and forth.

A silver cross also hangs on the wall of the tae kwon do studio where students practice kicks and punches.

A painting shows the armor of God, as described in Ephesians – the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, the belt of truth.

Prayers open and close the martial art sessions. “Dear God, I hope you keep us flexible and strong,” a student prays aloud. “Help us get our moves and one day get our black belts.”

Bedore, a fifth-degree black belt, speaks of Jesus and the Holy Spirit to the students.

He’s building up Christian warriors, he says.

“I care about them, both their physical needs and their spiritual needs and they sense that,” Bedore says. “They come into a place of family.”

Bedore teaches tae kwon do, the Korean martial art of self defense, with a Christian perspective, he says.

While he is a tae kwon do master, “we understand that Jesus Christ is the one and only master of our lives,” he says.

“All these stripes on my belt mean nothing compared to the stripes Jesus took for us,” he says.

Bedore opened the USA Spirit Christian TaeKwonDo Academy in Fargo a year and a half ago.

A second location is slated to open in Moorhead this fall.

In order to move up in rank, Bedore’s students must memorize Bible verses as well as the tae kwon do patterns.

For example, they must learn Philippians 2:13, “For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

Bedore tells the students to hope and pray they never have to use tae kwon do. They should yell or run away from a situation before using the technique. He stresses the martial art should never be used to perpetrate violence, but to help others.

“That’s why God brought us into tae kwon do, to defend ourselves, to help,” he says.

The goal is to share the love of Jesus, he says.

Eugene Marquart, a tae kwon do grand master, says while the martial art doesn’t depict one faith or another, it is the development of the whole individual, disciplining the body, mind and spirit.

He runs Marquart’s Tae Kwon Do and Kumdo School in Moorhead.

“Really the goal of martial art training, the goal of tae kwon do training, is really to create a better human being,” Marquart says. “It’s through tae kwon do or martial training that you realize your self-realization.”

As a grand master, Marquart says he strives to live with integrity, respect for all creatures and humbly caring for others.

"It's not just something you practice in the gym, it's a life you live," he says.

He says tae kwon do can be taught with a Christian viewpoint, provided the focus of the art isn't lost.

Bedore says some parents are more comfortable with a Christian academy, knowing their children will not be exposed to an eastern religion like Buddhism.

He says in his 23 years of teaching tae kwon do, students knew he and his wife, Kim, were Christian, but they never called themselves Christian martial artists until he opened the studio here.

Kelli Carlisle's 9-year-old daughter and 6-year-old son started tae kwon do lessons this summer.

Her pastor's wife recommended the academy. She says the Christian atmosphere is the main reason she selected it.

"They learn how to take care of themselves, but the most important thing is they learn about Christ," Carlisle says.

Erica Malvin of Fargo says her 7-year-old son, Dustin, had wanted to try the martial art. She was especially supportive when she learned there was a Christian program. Dustin attends Park Christian School in Moorhead

She knew its values would match those of her family.

"It teaches them respect, which is a huge thing now," Malvin says. "The more you can instill that in a child, the better for everybody."

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