



The Toughest Question about Christian Ed

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The Toughest Question about Christian Ed

IN ALL THINGS EXPLORES THE CONCRETE IMPLICATIONS OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN ALL FACETS OF LIFE

This year I celebrated my 40th first day of school. I've experienced four as a public high school teacher, nine as a state university graduate student, six as a public university adjunct instructor, 13 as a student at K-12 Christian schools, one as a community college enrollee, four as a student at Christian colleges, five as a Christian college professor, and seven as a Christian college academic administrator.

If you added and got more than 40, you were right; some years I was both student and educator. I've done school many ways and in many places, but one constant has been a question I've encountered repeatedly. Sometimes it has been asked with a rough edge, other times with kindness or curiosity: "Why do you want to be involved in Christian schools?"

My answer has developed as I've taught with joy in public schools, been educated by outstanding state university professors, and led a national association on behalf of K-16 educators. My answer has matured as I've experienced school as a parent, and it has become more nuanced through two years as a host mom for international exchange students. My answer has gained depth and grounding, too, because my daily work as an administrator in Christ-centered higher education often gives me the chance to say aloud why Christian education is so important.

Here's how the conversation typically goes these days.

"Do staff and families in Christian schools think they are better than other people?"

No. Christ-centered schools exist because a community of people admits that we are a mess. We need the kind of help that only God can give, and we look to Jesus Christ



for saving grace. We want to learn about God, his Word, and his world so we can serve him better. We want to learn to love our neighbors. These lessons are difficult to take to heart; they call for daily formation and transformation. When Christ-centered schools are at their best, they challenge us and hold us accountable for serving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

"Do you think Christian schools are safer for your children or for you as an employee?"

No. Christ-centered schools equip students to be the kind of people who run toward trouble—to see the hurts of the world and try to heal, to see chaos and try to bring order, to see violence and try to bring peace. This kind of learning is vital, but I wouldn't call it "safe."

Why do you want to be involved in Christian schools?

"So what are Christian schools for, then?"

Christ-centered schools depend on a community of believers who deliberately educate students to learn and grow in the Lord so that they can serve the common good. Caring about the common good isn't just a trendy saying. In "The Case for Christian Higher Education," the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) estimates that its institutions contribute \$60 billion in economic output annually through institutional expenditures, wages, taxes, and alumni employment. Students at CCCU colleges and universities are more likely than those from other private institutions to be first-generation students and from lower-income families, and as graduates they are more likely to be employed in socially oriented fields such as human services, education, and business.

The desire to advance the common good is

a theme from the Bible. In Proverbs 11:10-11, we read about a city that benefits from upstanding citizens and leaders: "When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices; when the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy. Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed." No one wants a corrupt government! In Jeremiah 29, the prophet tells the followers of God to "seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

For Christ-centered schools, promoting the common good is more than making life better for everyone. It is also a way to share good news. In the Old Testament, we read about the Israelites setting up stones to tell of God's faithfulness "so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and so that you might always fear the Lord your God" (Joshua 4). It's a theme echoed many times in Scripture, including in Solomon's prayer as he dedicated the temple (1 Kings 8), in the Psalms (67, 145), and in the great commission that Jesus gave to his disciples and all who follow him (Matthew 28:16-20).

I hope that every Christ-centered school does a great job of educating students as Christ followers who live passionately, effectively, and visibly for the common good. I hope, too, that what I've shared rings true with what you see from our students, faculty, and communities. But I'm sure there are ways that we could do better. I hope you'll share what you notice so that we can try to increase the impact that we have. Most importantly, I hope you know that you are welcome to join us in the mission through your participation and prayers.

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