Volume #4, #4 October 2023

The ADC Disciple

Anabaptist Disciples of Christ is an affiliation of Conservative Anabaptist churches seeking likeminded fellowship, instruction, and accountability in church administration and congregational life in the Biblical pattern of the Apostolic church.

The Importance of Christian Education

by Thaddeus Eichorn

Something that impacted my life greatly was the Christian education I received as a child and teenager. Looking back over my life as a person who has received a college degree from a secular university and embarked on a career based on that education, I realize that, were in not for the quality of my early education, I would not be where I am today, both professionally and spiritually. I want to support the ongoing work to educate our young people so they can realize their full potential both for the sake of our community and for the kingdom of Jesus.

Reinforcing Christian Values and Beliefs

The most obvious benefits of having a private Christian education stem from the environment in which students learn and grow. This environment includes prayer, Scripture study and memorization, and a focus on God as part of the experience and process of education. Students also benefit from interacting with peers who were raised with similar values to their own. These benefits stand in contrast to public education where God and His Word are not welcomed and where a Christian student may have difficulty navigating the influence that non-Christian peers might bring. To those who are accustomed to having Christian education, these benefits may easily be taken for granted, but in reality, they are a great blessing. How fortunate we are that we can have our own schools and are able to teach what we believe to be true! Many people in the world and throughout history have not had this opportunity.

Christian education is the foundation for a solid Christian worldview. Worldview is essentially an individual's philosophy of how the world works. One's worldview shapes how the individual processes the world around him; sees himself in relation to the rest of the world; and, of special note here, how he sees his faith against the backdrop of the rest of the world. If I were to accuse you of simply believing and practicing Christianity because your parents did, what would you have to say against that accusation? Do you have a basis for believing what you do beyond simply following those before you? If not, how can you honestly challenge another person's inherited beliefs, as might be the case with a person who grew up a Muslim, Hindu, or atheist?

To get to the heart of those questions, we must step into the realm of objective but nonreligious truth. For instance, we can say that the Bible is the Word of God, and that it is objectively true, for all time. It is true for everyone, not just for those who believe in it. The problem? The Muslim will say the same thing about

the Quran. The atheist will throw both out and insert a system of humanist reasoning. For a conversation to go further, the parties will need to talk in terms of things they can all relate to, such as historical and scientific evidence and philosophical reasoning. In order to engage in these kinds of conversations with intellectual integrity (applying the same standards to your own ideas that you apply to others' ideas), a Christian needs to know his own beliefs well and have a firm and balanced worldview that is not highly susceptible to doubts cast upon it by competing worldviews. Christian education can help teach students the basis for our Christian faith while also having the freedom to evenhandedly compare it to other ways of thinking.

I believe Christianity rises to the top in the marketplace of ideas, but in order to make use of this reality, we need to be educated and trained to show it to the rest of the world. This starts with teaching and reinforcing Christian truths and values, but it extends into learning to contextualize those Christian beliefs in the broader world. Christian education is precious because it allows us as a faith community to maintain control of the educational content to allow our students time to learn and grow before taking on more hostile material. If our education were provided in public schools, we would not have nearly the same level of control, and our students would be influenced by whatever that public school chose to implement. This is not to say that a Christian school should never teach topics that might challenge a student's faith. On the contrary, the context of a private Christian school is a good place to do this. It gives opportunity to fairly present all views while maintaining a balanced, biblical perspective. Keep in mind, however, that evil does not play fair. If given the opportunity, it will delight in warping any idea it touches and crushing the most innocent victim. We have the power of truth behind us. Let us do our part to share it thoughtfully and effectively to the world around us that so desperately needs it.

For a young child, if the answer to such a basic question as, "Am I a boy or a girl?" is in question, what else is open for debate?

Impressionability of Young Children

Consider with me two things that, I believe, illustrate well the importance of providing quality Christian education to our children. The first concerns our involvement in various children's ministries. Why do we invest time, effort, and money into these ministries? We see the need to minister to disadvantaged children on one hand because they do not often have the wherewithal to stand up for themselves and on the other because they are often more open to the gospel message than many adults who have already made up their minds. We see the obvious truth that, in order to affect a culture, you must start with the young. Is the concept any different with our own children? The second concerns a recent trend in secular society of promoting an LGBTQ+ agenda through holding drag queen (usually a homosexual male dressed up as a female) story hours with young children. Parents who support and promote this lifestyle bring their children to these events to expose them to new ideas. It occurs naturally to most people that what a young child generally experiences will become normal to them. For a young child, if the answer to such a basic question as, "Am I a boy or a girl?" is in question, what else is open for debate? This is a recipe for a lot of confusion later in life, and it also promotes an ideology that says reality can be whatever you want it to be. We recognize the impressionability of young children in these cases. We must provide for the same impressionability in our own children.

Personal Experience

I benefited greatly from having a good Christian education because of the strong worldview it imparted to me. I entered college as a seventeen-year-old, and I was determined to hold my Christian faith up to the test of a secular educational institution. My education in our private Christian school prepared me exceptionally well for the academic rigors of college; but, more importantly, I had a Christian worldview that could stand up to the pressures of secular influence. I could effectively evaluate and filter the content of the courses I was taking to see how they compared with God and His Word. Had I been without a good Christian worldview, I would quite possibly have walked away from Biblical truth altogether because I would not have been able to square my Christian faith against the secular teaching I received in college. I faced plenty of doubt as it was, but I came away from my college experience with a faith in God much stronger for having stood the test.

My excellent Christian education is also a point of cultural pride for me. If my secular college experience had proved my Christian education to be of poor quality or shallow and ideologically one-sided, I would have been much more likely to turn my back on my Beachy

Amish background. I still disagree with and dislike certain things in my background; but the big things, and especially the truth imparted through my early Christian education, are what keep me where I am. My Christian education was a point of pride that served to connect me to my conservative heritage.

Education's Effect on Cultural Continuity

In our modern context, I believe education is extremely important in maintaining cultural continuity. As noted previously, education can broaden a person's worldview and helps to give context to a person's beliefs and cultural background. History and context are drivers for the transmission of a particular set of cultural practices and values, and a culture or group is made particular by the things it does or believes that are different from the majority culture. Thus, having a robust educational system is important for maintaining cultural continuity through generations.

My Christian education was a point of pride that served to connect me to my conservative heritage.

Take as an example the Amish culture, from which much of our own culture has emerged over the generations. What makes their culture distinctive is largely external and readily observable. They, more or less, operate as they have for many generations in that they dress, work, and worship as their forefathers for many years past did; and it is easy to see who is Amish and who is not simply by looking at them. As conservative Mennonites, our distinctive cultural or religious features are much less physical than the Amish. This difference requires our attention to non-physical things that make our culture distinctive, for instance, beliefs and practices around non-violence, believer's baptism, divorce and remarriage, two kingdom theology, and so on.

If maintaining your culture is important to you, you must buttress the distinctives of your culture. By this, I do not mean that conservative Mennonite culture should be strictly maintained as it is. I simply point it out to say that, if it is your desire to see the conservative Mennonite culture flourish in the future, you will need to be willing to support the things that lead to your desired end.

I would also submit that ensuring our children are well educated ranks in importance alongside our other mission and evangelistic efforts. After all, a large factor in the character and usefulness of the young people who often serve in these missions comes from their Christian education. Christian education not only equips young people to be good members of our community but also equips them to be bearers of the Gospel to the nations.

The Private Christian School as a Community Institution

Another positive effect of private Christian education is that it creates a separate social institution in a community with multiple like-minded churches. Parents and students from different churches all have a stake in the local school, and by extension, each church represented does as well. This provides common ground for the larger community, and it brings people into contact that might not otherwise have known each other, even though they share similar faith backgrounds. In the event of external pressure on a community due to religious persecution, this shared institution can serve as a rallying point for the churches involved. Whenever religious persecution crops up, the evangelistic efforts of churches and the teaching of religious schools come under fire. By maintaining a Christian school, a community builds an institution that can help it stand through difficult times.

Conclusion

The importance of Christian education should be apparent to all members of our community. Patrons of private Christian schools always have this concern before their eyes, but the whole spectrum of ages from grandparents to high school students should be able to grasp this reality. I hope to, some day, have children of my own, and I want them to receive as good an education as I did. So, I will work to support my local Christian school and make the sacrifices necessary to do so, and I encourage the members of my own community, and all those of similar religious persuasion, to do the same.

Used with permission.

Thad and Cherie Eichorn have two daughters - Gennavieve (2) and Hollyn (9 months) - and are recent members of Haven Fellowship, Plain City, Ohio. Thad is the owner of Eichorn Tax and Financial LLC.

PASTOR SPOTLIGHT

Steve Stoltzfus is a retired pastor attending Harmony Christian Fellowship, Millington, Maryland. He and his wife Sara Etta have seven children: Sheryl Marie, married to Lucio Almada; Joy Luann, married to Nathan Beachy; Larion Jon, married to Cheryl Spicher; Faith A'lea, married to Bruce Beachy; Stephen Lamar, married to Marcia Yutzy; Kris Andrea Faye, married to Keith Beachy; Lyndon Wayne, married to Shania Byler. Steve and Sara Etta also have twenty-six grandchildren.

Steve was ordained in 1981 as a Deacon and in 2002 as Lead Pastor. As of May 2020, Steve serves as Pastor Emeritus in a semi-regular preaching role. Steve is a farmer.

Steve serves on the Blue Ridge International for Christ Pastoral Board as well as the board for Street Light Christian Ministries, Sacramento, California. He recommends the following books: *Inside Out* by Dr. Larry Crabb; *Disciplines of a Godly Man* by R. Kent Hughes; and *A Good Minister* by Howard Bean.

Steve reflects on his pastoral journey: "The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage (Psalm 16:6). From the time I was a young child, I was taught faith in the Lord Jesus Christ by my parents. I grew up in a loving Christian family. Church and church attendance were always a priority in our family.

The call of God as a Pastor has been a very rewarding experience. I learned to know many good, Godly men who challenged me to a closer relationship with God and more time spent in studying and sermon preparation. Preaching at home and at other churches has been a very challenging but fulfilling experience. Sharing relationships and experiences with my fellow home pastors has been one of love and appreciation, with some misunderstandings and frustrations over the years. I learned many things from my associates and fellow church members. Church leadership is much more than teaching, leading, and preaching. It is also servanthood, humility, and grace."

ADC Church Profile —

Gracepointe Church, located in Dover, Ohio, has a membership of seventy-five and was established in August 2021. The current pastoral team consists of Shawn Miller, Randy Garcete, and Paul A. Miller.

The church is located between Winfield and Dover in Tuscarawas County although the perceived location is Holmes County.

Gracepointe is a sister church to Crosspointe Mennonite Church. The combined vision of these two churches is to start new churches rather than build bigger.

Gracepointe is involved in the Dover Kids Club and supports several different ministries financially without direct involvement. The church is also directly involved in the ministry of Legacy Christian School.

Gracepointe is a singing church and enjoys good a capella music. Members feel free to share openly with each other. Gracepointe embraces some flexibility in its Sunday service structure.

PLANNING COMMITTEE
Lonnie Beachy – *Chairman*
Mark Miller – *Vice-Chairman*
Dave Nisly – *Secretary-Treasurer*

Nate Yoder – *Editor*
614-736-1727
janate3@frontier.com

P.O. Box 55, Walnut Creek, OH 44687 | anabaptistdisciplesofchrist.org