

## The Christian School Leader's Primary Focus is the Child's Transformation

In another article, CSM showed how “innovation” in the Christian school is about transformation in the life of the child (*Christian Innovation Leadership*). Innovation has many other meanings from Makerlabs to Expeditionary Learning. None of these things are bad but they are ‘merely’ about pedagogy. For the Principal / Head of School, they are means to an end and not the end in itself. The end is the school’s mission which, at root, is about transformation. If it is not, then what makes the school Christian? In Matthew 4 “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.” The English word *news* is the plural of the word *new* as in the 14<sup>th</sup> century word *newes* (in German *neues*, in Slovak *noviny*, in Polish *nowiny*, in Bulgarian *novini*, in Russian *novosti*, in Welsh *newyddion*, in Cornish *nowodhow*). Jesus spoke something new into the world.

The implications of that, from Jesus’ point of view were staggering. In Matthew 9, he pointed out that if we stayed the same and had new wine poured into us, we would break – a story so important that all three synoptic Gospels record it. We had to actually become different in order to hear and understand and live this good news. It is a deliberate detail added when the gospeler reported that Jesus was put in a new tomb. As Mark reports (right in ch. 1), the people were amazed at the ‘new’ teaching, a teaching that had ‘authority’. This news, Gabriel tells us in Luke 2, is not miserable and about lots of rules. No, it is news that will result in “great joy for all the people”. Jesus tells us why there is joy: it is because he comes “to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor”, that is, the Jubilee. While there is joy in this news, it comes as the pearl of great price because it comes as the “new covenant in my blood that is poured out for you” (Luke 22: 20), not just metaphorically but literally. And that new covenant comes with a new command that we “love each other” (John 13: 34) reflecting Jesus’ love for us.

The Christian school loses its way when the Christian school leader forgets that the primary reason for a Christian education is to become “new”. The child moves from the faith of the parent to the insecure personal faith of the adolescent to the mature faith of the adult. It is the school’s primary task to nurture and support that journey. And acknowledge that this “good news of God’s grace” (Acts 20: 24) is so that we may “live a new life” (Romans 6:4) as a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5: 17 – and think of the resonance in the word ‘creation’) that will have a “new name” (Revelation 2: 17) with which we sing a “new song” in the “new Jerusalem” (Revelation 3 and 5).

This becoming ‘new’ is no easy process because the Christian school, Jesus says, is in a hostile world: “If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to

the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you” (John 15: 19). Nonetheless, being ‘new’ myself does not allow me to condemn those who are not new but only allows me to hold accountable those in the household of faith: “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?” (2 Corinthians 5: 12) For Jesus said that he was not sent “into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3: 17).

The Christian school leader acting in the Christian school therefore:

1. Wants the child to become ‘new’
2. Wants the child to be ‘joyful’ in that newness
3. Wants to train the child to handle ‘hate’
4. Wants the child to learn not to judge but to ‘love’

Grand Rapids Christian School is one of thousands of Christian schools that has a challenging and wonderful mission: “Preparing students to be effective servants of Christ in contemporary society”. The question for all of us as Christian school leaders is whether we are taking our missions seriously. When CSM examines school budgets, there are tens of thousands of dollars rightly spent on school programming that prepares students to go to college and to enter the world of work having been effectively taught and given the credentials that will qualify them to apply for and enter the next level. Our schools are rightly proud of their students who excel academically, receive awards, gain scholarships, go to great universities, are eminent in their profession. All this is truly wonderful and our schools are called to whatever is “excellent or praiseworthy” (Philippians 4: 8).

And in what ways does this make us different from the good schools around us, both public and secular private? Jesus said: “If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?” (Matthew 5: 46-47). The word EVEN is a shattering word. If we do what even the pagans do, in what way are we different? Why should a parent pay for what even the pagans do? What does it benefit a child when they come to a Christian school and receive what even the pagans receive?

We urge the Christian school leader to look at what is happening at the school through new eyes. Even though your school may be doing really well, we urge that you consider whether the ‘well’ is doing what even the schools around you are doing. This line of thinking has been spawned by many conversations since CSM’s founding that went along this line:

- It is hard to be successful in a secular setting.
- How can we attract students when we are in the most secular area of America?
- We are losing our way and don’t see hope as America becomes more anti-Christian

CSM’s response is always the same. Thus has it always been. The Christian school does not stand in condemnation of the society around it. The Christian school is the light, the beacon on a hill (Matthew 5:14) – the Christian family finds it to be their natural home; the pagan is drawn to it because of the promise of new life, of joyful living, of love that is not earned.

So take these steps:

1. In the budget process, ask where the line items are for the mission transformation of the child’s life
2. In the program process, ask where in the curriculum is there space for a new song as the mission makes each classroom a new wineskin

3. In student life, ask whether the evidence of joy in daily living, of light overcoming the darkness, shows that the mission is being evidenced
4. In public relations, ask whether the school is truly a light in its neighborhood
5. In family partnering, ask whether the parent is being drawn to their children's success in Jesus ways
6. In your meetings, ask whether you love each other – and whether your conversations demonstrate that love for those who hate you
7. In your social emotional learning, ask whether resilience and grit is being developed so that children can sustain joy through suffering

The Christian school stands as a counter cultural beacon in our society. As Christian school leaders, we are aligned with Jesus, not with the pagan political parties of this world; we are aligned with Jesus, not with the Sadducees and Pharisees of today; we are aligned with Jesus, not with worldly success. This uncompromising decision to love our enemies, to commit to freedom for the captive, to bring the excellent and praiseworthy into the life of the child, to strive for the new Jerusalem, this decision is something, as Jesus found in his own ministry, that draws the children to us. In these ways, as counter cultural Christian school leaders, we will then be able to put our hands on them and bless them (Mark 10:16).

CSM Mission: For Jesus; Through Mission; With Students

Website: [christianschoolmanagement.org](http://christianschoolmanagement.org)

Email: [christianschoolmanagement@gmail.com](mailto:christianschoolmanagement@gmail.com)

Membership: \$7.97 month

CSM is a 501(c)(3) dedicated to healthy, hopeful Christian schools. It works with Christian schools that have an average tuition K-12 under \$13,207. 10% of its revenues is tithed into the CSM Foundation in order to assist Christian leaders and schools with advice/counsel and to fund Christian school research. We charge for consulting based on the tuition level of the individual school to make it affordable for all.

Copyright ©2020 CSM. All rights reserved.

---