

# Christian Education Declaration

[Draft prepared by Dr Richard Edlin, Edserv International, © 19 December 2019]

## PREAMBLE

Education is never neutral. It is always philosophically committed. By this we mean that every school has a vision of, or belief about, what it wants to achieve in the programme it offers. It has beliefs about the nature of the learner. It has a perspective on what promotes good learning, and on the conditions and exposures that enable students to develop and flourish both within and beyond the school.

This initial belief commitment shapes every aspect of school life, including understanding child development, the place of parents, enrolment and hiring patterns, curriculum priorities and practices, evaluation and assessment, and cultural engagement.

The fact of no neutrality means that every educational school and/or system operates from a commitment to some faith perspective or set of beliefs. This commitment or bias may embody a theistic belief foundation, such as Christianity or Islam, or it may embody a non-theistic belief foundation, such as secularism or socialism.

In pluralistic nations such as The USA or Canada, it is inappropriate for governments to give precedence in education to any one philosophical or faith system, as this often will offend families committed to different sets of beliefs. For example, we believe that in government funding and control issues, Christian education should not have priority over secular education, and vice versa. Furthermore, we concur with our nations' adoption of Article 26 (3) of the of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which states that, "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children."

This document is not a legal contract. The purpose of the Christian Education Declaration is to articulate a particular understanding of the nature and task of education as conducted in school communities that specifically describe themselves as being Christian schools.

For the purpose of this document and the school communities that adhere to it, we declare an orthodox understanding of the meaning of the term "Christian". This traditional Christian set of beliefs is well articulated in the following contemporary adaptation and extension of the ancient Apostles' Creed, first developed in AD390 (see figure 1 below). We require belief in, and adherence to, the contents of this Christian Education Statement of Theological Belief and Practice on the part of all new employees, new teaching staff, and members of controlling bodies, in our schools. And we believe that Christians in North America have the unencumbered right to select nurturing contexts for their children that reflect these beliefs.

Figure 1: Christian Education Statement of Theological Belief and Practice

Christian Education Statement of Theological Belief and Practice

We believe in the unity of the Godhead: God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, and Holy Spirit, the indwelling, intercessory presence of God in every believer.

We believe that Jesus came to earth as the only messiah. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.

We believe that Jesus rose again from the dead, and after appearing to many people, he ascended into heaven, where he sits on the right hand of God the Father almighty.

We believe that through Jesus alone, humankind can have peace with God and a hope-filled present and eternity.

We believe that one day Jesus will return to earth, to judge the living and the dead and to take his own children to be with him for ever.

We believe in the communion of the Christian church worldwide, the forgiveness of sins through Christ alone, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.

We believe in the Bible as God's written Word to humankind. It is wholly God-given and authoritative, is without error or fault in all its teaching and affirmations, and is our basic interpretive framework for all of life, including education.

We believe that God created male and female, and instituted the heterosexual family as the basic social unit. A right relationship with God is the true example and foundation of all human relationships.

We believe that Christians are called to engage and flourish in the culture as good citizens.

We believe that Christians are called to operate in every chosen vocation as creative, hope-filled servants of God, acting as good stewards over God's creation, and as living testimonies to the full life now and for eternity that can be found in Jesus Christ.

We believe that the task of the Christian school is to assist parents in equipping children for this type of living.

## EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Christians declare that all truth, wherever it may be found, is God's truth. Therefore, by exploring life, creation, and scholarship through a biblically-shaped lens, and under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, we are able to shape and review educational patterns and practices that are consistent with a Christian witness and that provide the best opportunity

for young people to discover, engage in critical thinking, and flourish in a servant-hearted manner, in the globally-interconnected world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Christian schools are not primarily businesses or “fee-for-service” institutions – though they do need to operate and be accountable to proper fiduciary oversight. Christian schools primarily are learning communities structured around a shared commitment to the declared foundations and values of the school.

This Declaration affirms the statements made below as being dynamic reflections of a Christian Understanding of Education, in the following areas:

1. Declaration Concerning Parents and Christian Education
2. Declaration Concerning the State and Christian Education
3. Declaration Concerning the Teacher and Christian Education
4. Declaration Concerning the Student and Christian Education
5. Declaration Concerning Curriculum Distinctives and Christian Education
6. Declaration Concerning Enrolment and Operational Features and Christian Education
7. Declaration Concerning Teacher (re)Training and Christian Education

### **1. Declaration Concerning Parents and Christian Education**

(1.1). Parents are the primary teachers of their children. This is a God-given a priori position. At certain times, they choose (or are required by law) to make use of the skills of others to assist them in the upbringing of their children. In real settings or online, they may employ the services of others such as a sports coach, a baby-sitter, a music teacher, a dentist, medical personnel, a driving instructor, or a teacher. In all these settings, the parent delegates specific nurturing tasks, but retains responsibility. Therefore, the Christian school does not say, “Give us your children and we will educate them for you.” The Christian school says, “Please explore what we stand for and if you so choose, share some of the task of nurturing your child with our school community.”

(1.2). Parents in Christian schools commit themselves to undertaking parent envisioning activities across their school communities to ensure the maintenance and celebration of commonly understood educational goals and to critique and discern contemporary cultural trends and their potential impact on their children and on their children’s education.

### **2. Declaration Concerning the State and Christian Education**

(2.1) Governments are ordained by God to exercise wise and just government. The role of the state from a Christian perspective is limited primarily to ensuring the safety and just circumstances of its citizens. Whilst many governments in recent history have decided also to control education through government schools, we believe that in the best interests of a safe and just pluralist society, provision must be made for the parents and not just the state, to choose the type of education that children will receive (see the UN Charter referred to earlier).

(2.2) In that Christian parents pay taxes to governments that then use these taxes to finance education, we believe that Christian parents and their schools have a right to have similar access to these funds for education as do parents who send their children to government schools.

(2.3) The provision of tax funds to support Christian schooling carries with it the responsibility of governments to ensure that these funds are used wisely. This implies a limited right of governments to evaluate and validate the general tenor of education, student agency, relevant policies, teacher appropriateness, physical plant, health, and safety issues, management expertise, and core competencies within Christian schools.

### **3. Declaration Concerning the Teacher and Christian Education**

(3.1) Teachers are trained professionals with special ability to nurture children. They recognise different stages of human development, differing learning styles and capacities, dynamics of individual and group learning, the special characteristics of cooperative instruction, and the nuances of group management. They possess specialised content and delivery knowledge and skills relating to particular instructional areas, and they appreciate the benefits of teacher collaboration.

(3.2). The distinctive blend of insights and abilities possessed by teachers allows for the recognition of the office of teaching. This office deserves respect and freedom of operation within the guidelines of any school community within which teachers seek employment. Thus, though they work in partnership with parents, teachers are not mere mouthpieces for individual parental wishes and desires. Parents submit their children to the community of a particular school and, through such submission, yield a degree of control and management to that community under the policy guidelines of the school board and the managerial and leadership practices of the school principal and team of teachers.

(3.3). Teachers in Christian schools will always strive to involve parents in the teaching and learning process in ways that are appropriate for a learning community that is guided by the aims, mission, and policy determinations of the school.

(3.4). Jesus said that the student, when he is fully trained, will be like his teacher (Luke 6:13-14). Therefore, it is imperative that as reflective practitioners, teachers exemplify a Christian belief and lifestyle before the students that demonstrates the understanding and approach to life that is embedded in the school's vision and mission and is practised in all aspects of school life.

### **4. Declaration Concerning the Student and Christian Education**

(4.1). All children, irrespective of race or creed, are created in God's image and are precious in his sight. Like the office of teacher, the student has the rights and responsibilities of the office of student.

(4.2). In contradistinction to the limited capacities of all other animals, humankind have creative and cognitive abilities, sophisticated relational needs and capacities, and also the

moral capacity to imagine, understand, and choose alternative ways of thinking and living. One task of Christian schooling is to help children understand their capacities and develop them to the best of their ability, to the glory of God, and for the divinely-shaped welfare of the culture in which they live.

(4.3). All children, like their parents, are flawed because of all humanity's inherited sinful nature. A Christian school will organise itself in ways that takes both relational imaginativity and fallenness, into account, and will seek to nurture in children a realistic, discerning, resilient, and hope-filled understanding of the world and their place and task in it, in a manner that challenges children, teachers and parents with a celebration of the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all of creation and all of life's activities.

(4.4) Though the Christian school will explore the world through a Christian lens, it cannot and will not demand a personal adherence by its students to that worldview. The school community will cherish the development in its students of a Christian commitment, but it also will maintain the God-given moral right of defection from that perspective by students who choose to do so. In so doing, it will encourage all students to understand the implications of the worldview commitment around which they choose to organise their lives.

## **5. Declaration Concerning Curriculum Distinctives and Christian Education**

(5.1). Curriculum is the planned programme of instruction in a school – though insightful educators are always aware of the unplanned teachable moments that can occur at any time and which often make for the most meaningful learning experiences.

(5.2). Examination of the curriculum in a school, plus an awareness of the nature of a school's hidden curriculum and null curriculum, are good indicators of the *raison d'être* or worldview bias present in all learning. For a secular school in North America, the curriculum will be human-centred and perhaps further shaped by economic rationalism and self-determination imperatives.

(5.3). Despite the current Age of Bewilderment, the curriculum process in the Christian school is designed to be a delightful unwrapping of God's mystery parcel. It will be God-centred and child-focused, allowing students to responsively and resiliently explore and discover reality, including the respectful examination and critique of other faith viewpoints, from the perspective of God's truth and his calling and purposes for people in his world.

(5.4). Christian schools will shape curricula in a range of different ways. Some will use an outcomes-based approach, following the backward design model currently favoured by many educators. Others will use a more traditional Tyler-style approach. Some will structure curriculum around a differentiated key learning areas approach; others will favour a less compartmentalised, more integral, style. Still others will favour a classical trivium-based education model. In all of these patterns, there will be a rigorous striving for excellence and discernment. There also will be a common thread of helping children to understand God's world God's way, and a realisation of the hope-filled and servant-hearted implications that this has for young people individually and collectively as they grow up into that world.

(5.5). Evaluation of student progress in meeting curriculum goals will be formative and summative in nature, and will be shaped by both quantitative and qualitative analyses. These evaluations will not focus primarily on comparisons between students, but upon the degree to which each child has made good use of the talents, abilities, and personalities that God has given to him/her.

(5.6). Teachers will be expected to model these curriculum directions in their own lives with and before their students and the other stakeholders in the school community.

## **6. Declaration Concerning Enrolment and Operational Features and Christian Education**

(6.1). Most Christian schools fall into one of two categories (or a blend that includes aspects of both of them): there is the covenantal Christian school, and there is the missional Christian school.

(6.2). Covenantal Christian schools are organised around a mission and vision that charges the school to provide an educational environment that actively supports homes in which a Christian commitment is paramount. As well as a Christian perspective being evident in all instructional, organisational, and relational areas, these school may well include Christian Studies classes and/or chapel sessions in their programmes. Student enrolment will be selective on this basis, usually with at least 75% of children coming from Christian commitment homes.

(6.3). Missional schools welcome children from homes that have a variety of faith commitments. However, it is made clear in the enrolment process that parents selecting a missional Christian school do so with an awareness of the school's Christian worldview, and with an agreement not to actively oppose the school's faith perspective. As with covenantal schools, a Christian perspective will be evident in all instructional, organisational, and relational areas, and these schools also may well include Christian Studies classes and/or chapel sessions in their programmes

(6.4). It is necessary to charge some level of fees for tuition offered in most Christian schools. Nevertheless, Christian schools typically have a very active tuition subsidy program, with the goal of making enrolment possible to families that demonstrably affirm the school's Christian aims and mission statement, from across the socio-economic spectrum.

(6.5). Christian schools establish a form of governance that requires appointed or elected officials to declare a personal Christian commitment and to seek to set policies that reflect this worldview and meets national standards.

## **7. Declaration Concerning Teacher (re)Training and Christian Education**

(7.1). Many teachers in Christian schools have been trained in secular universities and secular teacher training institutions. There is much of value that they learn from this training and its associated practicum components. Nevertheless, the overall direction of this training is secular and dualistic in nature, based upon the assumption that transcendental issues

relating to a Christian worldview are largely irrelevant to school matters such as curriculum subjects, classroom design, student guidance, parental involvement etc. This false assumption is antithetical to a Christian understanding of education, where the desire is to bring every thought and action into subjection to Jesus Christ.

(7.2). Christian schools recognise the indispensability of sustained, longitudinal, collaborative professional learning for all school faculty and staff in order to (re-)calibrate thinking about education and discerningly, to examine and critique (and where appropriate adapt or adopt) current trends in education. Significant budgetary allocations, time release, individual teacher professional development profiles, and professional learning accountability structures surround decision-making in the teacher (re)training space in Christian schools.

(7.3). Christian schools are aware of the need to continue to provide dynamic, Christian-authentic training programmes for Christian teachers. These may be pre-training, post-appointment training, or a combination of both that has some of the characteristics of the apprenticeship pattern evident in trades training. As the primary beneficiary of Christian teacher training institutions, and in recognition of the reality that higher education institutions generally need external financial underwriting, wise cohorts of Christian schools provide direct support for like-minded teacher training facilities.

The End.