



Do I Belong in the Christian School?

By Karen Winter

Karen Winter, MEd, serves as the superintendent at Western Christian Schools in Claremont, California. She has worked in Christian education administration for 33 years. She has taught in all levels, from early education through college. An ACSI board member, she has served as the early childhood representative for ACSI in northern California for 28 years.

*A teacher affects eternity;
he can never tell where his influence stops.*

Henry B. Adams

After serving in Christian education for over 33 years, I am convinced that a Christian school teacher's godly influence is more far-reaching than ever in history. According to Ron Luce, the author of *Battle Cry for a Generation: The Fight to Save America's Youth*, "Our nation is truly at a crossroad. What we do in the next 5 years could affect the next 50 to 100 years of American history." Luce notes that according to research, once a child turns 20 years old, "the odds of reaching that individual for Christ are nearly 10 to 1." The Barna

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Research Group has used the data it has collected to draw an even more alarming conclusion: what children believe by the age of 13 is what they will die believing (Luce 2005, 33).

The statistics about the dynamic effect our godly leadership has on this generation are staggering, and yet Christian educators across the nation struggle as they ask themselves, "Do I really belong in the Christian school?" Others wonder, "Is the call to Christian education worth the effort or the financial sacrifice as compared with other educational opportunities?" Josh McDowell, an international youth speaker and the author of 77 books, has emphasized the phenomenal influence our Christian schools can have in developing

young people: "If the Christian schools can really get their act together, and I think they can ... our future leaders will come out of the Christian school and home school movements" (Keenan 2004–2005, 21).

"To teach is to touch a life forever" is a favorite motto for educators worldwide; however, its significance is even greater for Christian school educators because our spiritual influence in classrooms and hallways, on sports fields, in chapel, and through outreach programs literally affects all of eternity. "The fact is inescapable: the world view of the teacher, in so far as he is effective, gradually conditions the world view of the pupil" (Gaebelein 1968, 37).

If we recognize how valuable we are as Christian educators, why do we sometimes struggle with our continued commitment to this ministry? Is it so hard to believe that the omnipresent God of the universe knew exactly what He was doing when He placed you and me in Christian school education? Did our loving Father underestimate the array of challenges involving our personal commitment to this ministry? Did God really intend for the Christian school to be a mere stepping-stone to loftier plans for your future?

Through the years, I've heard a host of rationales for potentially leaving Christian education—offers of more money and opportunities for advancement. We make spiritual innuendos, referring to "God's will" and "God's timing," when, in reality, so often we are merely validating our own desire to make a move to something we consider better. However, if we truly want to experience the joy of completing God's perfect plan for our life, we will acknowledge that God's will is not

determined by circumstances, including better job offers. Rather, doing God's will is a matter of simple obedience and walking in that conviction each day—especially those days that bring challenges and momentary discouragement.

We fulfill God's will when we walk in complete, dedicated confidence that God called us into Christian education. We fulfill God's will when we remain fully committed, even when our own son or daughter complains, "I'd rather be in school with easier rules and a more relaxed dress code." Unfortunately, the decisions that many people make to leave Christian education come from relying on their own selfish ambitions rather than on God, who replenishes the strength they need to fulfill their ministry with perseverance, vision, and renewed excellence!

The truth is, great Christian schools are created through the tireless dedication of teachers and administrators who are so passionate about the cause of Christian education and about God's vision for their school that they wouldn't consider going anywhere else, regardless of the attractive offers and tempting perks available elsewhere. Great Christian schools are enhanced by faculty who are 100 percent sold-out to their ministry. The passion to make a difference in the lives of students burns inside them, and it won't be quenched with substitutes that provide greater salary packages but entirely miss the mark.

To mold a student's life in the character of Christ, committed faculty pray daily, guarding their heart so that they have pure motives. These teachers serve where God has called them, despite the obstacles and difficult challenges that arise.

Far too many Christian school teachers and leaders allow circumstances to lead them to doubt the conviction and passion they felt when they were first called to Christian school education. However, those who dedicate themselves to "press[ing] on toward the goal" (Philippians 3:14, NIV) reach the coveted prize that no amount of money or fringe benefits can ever replace. Committed Christian educators who give years of service to a Christian school reap abundant rewards that others who choose to go from one school to the next never even imagine.

My greatest joy in serving at Vacaville Christian Schools the past 17 years has been to see the miraculous transformation of our preschoolers as they move to our grade school, then our middle school, and then our high school. When the long-awaited graduation day finally arrives, the faculty and I are like proud parents watching our academically and spiritually prepared seniors walk across the stage to receive their diploma. The exhilaration we feel, knowing we have contributed to their lifelong success, continues as some of them accept national college honors. Mere words cannot begin to express the lasting satisfaction we receive when our alumni become our greatest testimony for the effectiveness of Christian education as they return with their own children to become second- and third-generation Christian school families.

My personal commitment to remain in my Christian school through the years has afforded me the wonderful privilege of watching students aspire to become teachers, pastors, missionaries, government officials, and business entrepreneurs. The faculty and I receive one of our greatest honors when our alumni return to be master teachers and thereby give us a tangible example of the reward that Luke 6:40 promises: "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." When I think about job satisfaction in Christian schools, I realize that it just doesn't get any better!

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There is no greater privilege or honor than serving in Christian education. It's not for the fainthearted but for the steadfast, visionary Christian educator who will help determine our nation's future. This exceptional career is for the faithful educators who hear God's call and then respond by walking in persistent obedience as they anticipate the most exciting real-life transformations imaginable. Christian education is for those who are determined to make the greatest impact in the lives of students. I can't imagine anything greater than serving in a Christian school and making it my personal commitment for an entire lifetime.

References

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