

Schools for the latter days



"If a tree falls to the south or the north, in the place where the tree falls, there shall it lay."

This verse, from Ecclesiastes 11, is astounding. It, like all scripture, reveals something about the Lord's hand in our lives that we may forget at certain times. That is, as much as we like to control situations, plan and protect ourselves, we also need to deal with 'what is' in our classrooms, schools, and our lives – no matter how the tree falls.

Many times we do not like where the trees in field of education fall. We are living in times where unprecedented decisions are being made which seem to stand opposed to the truth revealed by the word of God. Some things, like the 2015 Ontario Health and Physical Education curriculum, may not affect a school's daily operation (though League secondary schools must be more compliant). Others, such as Ontario's Bill 28, "All Families are Equal Act", and the inclusion of gender fluidity as a protected right are more difficult to glean for value. These changes more than subtly work to break down the Christian view of what it means to be a family. Which is something taught and promoted in our schools, as is tolerance and compassion for those with whom we disagree.

Across our wonderful country there is substantial pressure being put on Christian day schools. Indeed, in provinces to the west there are even more overt attacks against Christian world views: the court cases surrounding Trinity Western University law school, the pressure independent, partially-funded schools in Alberta have been experiencing surrounding the requirement to have gay-straight alliances, or the teacher who lost his job because he openly stated that he thought abortion was morally wrong.

With all this going on, people operating Christian schools can feel like trees are not only falling in a northerly direction, they are falling in a pick-up-sticks style helter-skelter tangle, with wood jutting off in in all directions.

It seems many decisions being made have been deliberately set as obstructions to the promotion of a Christian worldview. It gives one the sense that, if nothing changes, the trees will be stacked so high that we may soon lose the freedom to instruct the children entrusted to us in the truth of God's Word. Perhaps we will. We do, after all, live in the latter days.

So, do we just throw up our hands in despair because we can't control where the trees have fallen?

Thankfully not! There is more to Ecclesiastes 11 than being content to live with 'what is'. There are words of guidance, a call to action, and a message of hope. The guidance: *Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth.* Applied to our schools, this passage reminds us to do our work well- also giving our government its due. We need to work with an eye to the future building relationships with many, knowing that some may bear fruit and others may not.

Knowing this, we cannot despair over 'what is', after all it comes from the hand of our Lord. Nor can we be paralyzed by the fear of 'what ifs' in relation to living in the latter days. The Teacher points the way: *He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.* In other words, just because we are being pushed by forces which are outside our control, there is no reason not to move ahead. We are called to thoughtful, loving action that is braced with conviction, though fallen trees are stacked against us.

It may seem that our schools are facing greater and greater odds and more restrictions on our ability to educate in freedom. It seems that groups with agendas contrary to our faith are cutting entire forests and letting the trees fall where they may. Even so, we need to remember the answer to two questions: Who controls the trajectory of the trees? And, according to whose plan are the trees falling? There is need for work (and the League office may be part of that work), but there is no need for panic.

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Government Update



Community Engagement on Well-Being

There is an opportunity to raise a Christian voice in the public-school system right now.

The Ministry of Education is currently looking for feedback on what parents and community members feel affect a student's well-being at school. It is an open survey, where parents, teachers, and community members are able to express to the government what they feel well-being means.

It is an opportunity to cast our bread upon the waters, knowing that it may come back to us in ways that we would not expect- knowing that the Lord is in control of this as well.

It would be good to do some work with and for families who profess the Christian faith, but do not have the same opportunities for educating their children in a Christian school as we do.

The survey can be easily found on the Ministry of Education website by following this link: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/>.

When you take the opportunity to fill it out, you may notice two difficulties. The first stems from reading the questions without thinking about the current climate of permissiveness disguised as equity in the public-school system.

The second is the fact that it is very hard to disagree with any of the statements suggested, even when your agreement may be used to push agendas that you may not agree with. For instance, you will likely agree with these statements:

1. *A student's feeling of inclusion at school is a significant indicator of their well-being;*
2. *A student's positive mental health is a significant indicator of their well-being;*
3. *Well-being means having a positive sense of belonging;*
4. *Well-being requires that my cognitive, emotional, social and physical needs are met.*

As a parent whose child attends a Christian school, you will value these statements. What is more, you value these things not only for your own children, but for all children. In the place where participants can describe what these statements look like for them, it would be wonderful if there was a strong Christian voice. A voice that points out what type of action will support well-being, inclusion and positive mental-health. Action that speaks of God's grace, spoken with love in a broken world.

Educational Assistants Conference, 2016

Educational assistants (EA) are an important part of the fabric of many League schools. They are para-educators, whose task it is to support the work of classroom teachers with their own experience, knowledge and expertise. Their work is highly valued, and it is different from that of a classroom teacher. Because of this, the Assistance to the Special Child (ASC) Committee has, for the past number of years, organized a full-day conference where EA's from League schools, as well as EA's from other Reformed Christian schools, are able to gather together for the purpose of receiving specialized training and an opportunity to support each other's work through conversation and networking.

This year EAs congregated at Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College and had the opportunity to be involved in two of three offered workshops. The first was entitled, *Restorative Justice Practices*. It focused how students who have been harmed may obtain opportunities to be heard, have input into resolutions and have access to support.



The second workshop built up EA capacity for recognizing anxiety in children, and knowing how to help.

The third learning opportunity came in the form of learning to work with children who have low self-esteem. This workshop aimed to provide EAs with tools and suggestions for helping students who struggle with the effects of brokenness in this area.

The day finished with a 'Show and Share' - a session where EAs were encouraged to network and discuss best practices as they occur in their respective schools.

It is a real blessing that these education professionals are given this opportunity to work with and learn from each other. Lord willing what they have gained will bear fruit in their schools.

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(ASC)

Compensation
Committee

Curriculum
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Government
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