

## **A MODEL FOR THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCH AND ITS CHRISTIAN SCHOOL MINISTRY**

Relatively few Southern Baptist churches have Christian school ministries. It is estimated that there are about 600 such schools among the 40,000 Southern Baptist churches. However, this number is increasing at a significant rate and it is expected that the trend will continue. Many large, influential Southern Baptist churches already have established Christian school ministries and LifeWay Christian Resources has increased its support for Christian school ministries. For these and many other reasons, more churches are likely to consider starting Christian school ministries in the years to come.

As these churches start Christian schools, they will face a variety of decisions about the nature of the relationship between the overall ministry of the church and the specific ministry of the school. Generally, Southern Baptist churches that have started Christian school ministries have maintained close ties with their school ministries. A survey conducted by Kenneth Coley, Assistant Professor for Christian Education at Southeastern Baptist Seminary, found that ninety-two percent of the schools related to Southern Baptist churches were founded by a single church. Seventy-seven percent are not incorporated separately but are included in the church's corporation and eighty-five percent of the school's governing boards are made up of church members only (1998:11). This data suggests that sponsoring churches maintain a strong connection with their school ministries.

These strong relational ties along with the unique size and demands of a Christian school ministry combine to force church leaders to make a variety of decisions about how the overall church will relate to the school ministry. But the best time to make those decisions is before an issue rises to the level of conflict. Church leaders will save themselves from many crises if they will carefully think through the issues that churches and school ministries commonly face. Wise church leaders will address common points of contention before or during the founding of the school ministry. However, it is never too late for even a well-established school to look over its shoulder to address any unresolved issues or to look ahead for potential points of disagreement. Not doing so increases the risk of the church encountering conflict that has the potential of distracting the entire church from its mission.

The purpose of this chapter is to address issues common to Southern Baptist churches and their Christian school ministries and to recommend possible solutions or points of actions for church and school leaders to consider. It should comfort all ministry leaders

to know that these issues are common to Christian schools. There is no reason to give up or become frustrated every time a crisis erupts. Maintaining unity in the church comes with a price, and that price includes planning and foresight.

### **Philosophical and Foundational Issues**

Perhaps the most important task for the church that sponsors a Christian school ministry is the development of a clear philosophy of ministry and clear mission related to the school ministry. It is at this point that the church must first decide what the scripture teaches about the purpose of the New Testament church and the role of parents in teaching their children. Then, church leaders must discern and implement a theology of education that will drive the decision-making process related to a Christian school ministry. With this in mind, we will begin with a quick overview of what the scripture teaches on the matter of educating our children.

### **Partnering with Parents to Educate Their Children**

The body of believers known as the church has a variety of purposes such as worship, fellowship and evangelism. Also among the purposes of the church is the requirement to instruct believers and their children in the commandments of God. One may call this purpose discipleship or education. The origin of this requirement can be found in the Old Testament. For example, the Israelites were given the Ten Commandments and Moses was instructed to teach them (Ex 18:20). The Levites instructed the people in the words of the Law (Neh 8:9). And, most importantly, parents were instructed to “train up a child in the way he should go” (Prov 22:6) and to “impress [God’s words] on [their] children” (Deut 6:7). To this end, the Jewish community eventually established synagogue schools as far back as the Babylonian exile and developed more formal systems as early as 75 B.C. (Kienel 1995:27-29). Education of believers in the commands of God was a clear requirement of Old Testament believers.

Likewise, in the New Testament, the Great Commission given by our Lord states, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20). Believers are commanded to “present everyone perfect in Christ” (Col 1:28) and to take what they have learned and “entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Tim 2:2). Fathers are commanded to “bring [their children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). To this end, the early church instructed children in the home and continued formal schooling. Like their Jewish predecessors, they established schools for moral and religious training, though in their case they also applied concepts from the Greco-Roman idea of education (Kienel 1995:6).

In summary, these passages affirm that the Bible assigns two very important responsibilities: 1) parents are responsible for the religious education of their children and 2) the church is responsible for the religious education of its members. These two instructions provide the basis for the church’s philosophy of education. They place the

responsibility of education on the shoulders of the parents and the church family. Each has an important role to play in the spiritual and mental development of the child.

These scriptural commands also provide support for the case of establishing a system for Christian school education to accomplish the goal of Christian education. While parents are ultimately responsible for a child's education, the church should assist its parents in this task. Therefore, the purpose of a Christian school ministry is in large part to help Christian parents fulfill their God-given responsibility to educate their children. The school's presence cannot relieve parents of their responsibility, but it can assist them.

So, can the church establish a Christian school ministry? The answer is yes. But the tougher issue is whether a church must establish a Christian school ministry and whether a parent must send their children to a Christian school. On these two issues the Bible is less direct, but the debate in the church family will likely center around them. Among evangelical Christians, there are those who insist that the public school is still an adequate venue for their child's education while others insist that Christian parents must educate their children in an exclusively Christian setting. People with both of these opinions will end up attending the church's school and joining the church. They will all make assumptions about the church's position on the subject. In order to avoid conflict, church leaders need to address the issue and clearly communicate their perspective so participants are not misled and church unity is not disrupted.

One possible position would be to state that it is ultimately the parents' responsibility to choose how they will educate their children. Under this philosophy, pastors provide scriptural guidance to parents about the nature of the parents' responsibility and possible implications of their decision, but ultimately parents must make the decision about where and how to educate their children. However, parents need to know that whether they choose a public school, Christian school, secular private school or home school, they must be fully alert to the instruction given to their children. They cannot sub-contract their responsibility. Likewise, they are responsible for what their children learn and experience, and the lessons they learn in public schools are not always in agreement with God's teaching. For this reason, some families will choose to partner with the church's Christian school ministry.

Regardless of what position the church takes on this issue, it is imperative that church leaders struggle with the issue, arrive at a biblical position and clearly communicate that position to church leaders and the congregation. For example, consider what would happen if church leaders decided that they prefer that parents choose a Christian school educational setting but respect and support a parent's decision to choose the public school option. Then, the school committee hires a school administrator that believes the public school option is totally unacceptable and that a parent is sinful to send a child to a public school. In this circumstance, conflict, confrontation, and a disruption in the unity of the church becomes inevitable. Such an example affirms the idea of developing and

communicating a clear philosophy of education before divisive issues have the chance to erupt in the church.

### **Pastoral Support for the School Ministry**

More than any other person, the senior pastor must understand the philosophy and purpose of the Christian school ministry. Likewise, he must be in agreement with the establishment of the school. New pastors called to serve in a church with a Christian school must inquire about the school's overall philosophy and purpose and be in agreement about the direction that the school ministry has set. Pastors must be diligent to explore the pros and cons of sponsoring a Christian school ministry, and they must be convinced that the school is not only a valid ministry effort for a church, but that it is a valid ministry effort for this church at this time.

The pastor's support is critical because of the nature of the Christian school ministry. School administrators and school committees can make every effort to handle school business without demanding the pastor's time and energy, but it is impossible to shield the pastor completely from problems and issues that will arise and need his attention. Church or school leaders that think the school can operate without demanding some of the pastor's attention are fooling themselves. Personnel issues, unhappy parents, conflict over space, financial matters, and other issues addressed in this chapter will make it to the pastor's desk, leaving him at least with the responsibility of restating the philosophy of the church and school so that the issue can be resolved in harmony with that position.

Ultimately, how the pastor communicates the philosophy of education and how he handles conflict emanating from the school ministry will illustrate the pastor's overall support of the school. Coley states, "The key figure of the school is the pastor. He must be completely supportive of the school or it will limp along" (2004). Former Christian school administrator Paul Young similarly states, "The pastor must believe that the ministry of the Christian school is birthed in the heart of God and is an extension of the ministry of the church." (1997-98:6). Young continues, "The church's marriage to the Christian school must be exemplified, cultivated and guarded by the pastor" (1997-98:7). Support from the senior pastor is a must for any ministry, but it is critical for a Christian school ministry.

Likewise, other church leaders such as deacons and church council members must also understand the philosophy of the school ministry and be prepared to address key issues. Leadership groups like these are often tasked with making decisions about church policy, use of space, church budgets, and other similar issues. These groups must be in agreement with the church's purpose and its philosophy of education that results in the presence of a Christian school ministry. The school will compete for resources of the church like any other ministry. These leaders can view the school as a competitor to the other ministries of the church or as a partner carrying out the church's purpose like every other ministry.

## **Formalizing the Church-School Relationship**

Once the church has decided that the Christian school ministry is a valid ministry of the church, leaders must decide how they want the school to relate to the overall church. Over time, every church will begin to view its school ministry as integral to the church or an enemy of the church. Without intentional discussion and established practices, the church-school relationship will drift toward independence and separation.

There are several ways that the church can relate to its school ministry. Christian school consultant Phil Graybeal explains that schools can be viewed as a ministry “of” the church, “with” the church, “at” the church, or “in spite of” the church. Schools that are ministries “of” the church are completely integrated into the life of the church. The church is seen as owning the school ministry. The relationship is like a marriage—the joining together of various parts into a unified whole. On the other end of the spectrum is the school that exists “in spite of” the church. The church and school are two entities at odds with each other. The relationship is like a tug of war or a pending divorce. Between the two extremes are churches and schools with various levels of connection (Graybeal, 2003). Graybeal’s matrix assists a church in identifying the attitudes that currently describe the relationship between the church and school. Using such a tool will help a church identify its current relationship, determine the desired relationship and set goals for moving toward unity behind a clear vision for a desired relationship.

Coley describes the relationship between a church and school ministry as a family relationship. In his metaphor, the school is a child whose place in the life cycle determines his relationship to the parent church. Coley’s metaphor for the relationship between the church and school states:

The church should have the attitude that it births a ministry, that is, it raises the ministry from infancy. It nurtures, loves, disciplines and provides. In early manhood the ministry begins to prepare for itself. In doing so, the church provides guidance, but the growing ministry learns to meet some of its own needs. Once it reaches adulthood, the relationship changes. The metaphor becomes marriage. The church is the head and the school ministry is submissive to the head, conducts its affairs with maturity and is loved and cared for as a husband loves his wife. In the end, the church and school become inextricably intertwined. The idea becomes: what’s yours is mine and what’s mine is yours (2004).

Coley’s metaphor is helpful in that it recognizes that the relationship between the church changes through the years. Problems arise when the expectation of the parent and child are not clear and are not met. For example, the church might demand too much of the school too early, or the school may not “grow up” and take on responsibilities at the appropriate time.

The primary point of models like this is to demonstrate that the relationship between the church and school is not stagnant or simple. The relationship must be tended. It does not naturally find harmony and, in fact, it will likely move away from harmony if unattended. The goal of church leaders must be to clearly define the relationship and communicate it to the appropriate parties so that the church is working in concert with the school and unity is maintained.

### **Determining the School's Constituency**

Another foundational decision that can lead to conflict is determining the kind of student to whom the school will minister. Christian schools typically have enrollment requirements that prospective students and their families must meet. There are a variety of requirements that can be established, but the impact on the church-school relationship should be considered related to two particular requirements. First, the school may limit its participation based on the spiritual condition of the student and his parents and, second, it may limit its participation based on the student's aptitude.

#### **Open or Closed Enrollment**

First, church and school leaders must decide if they will have an open or closed enrollment policy. Again, schools with open enrollment accept children from Christian and non-Christian families alike. Schools with closed enrollment choose only to enroll children from Christian homes where at least one parent is a believer. Over half of the Christian schools in Southern Baptist Christian school ministries have an open enrollment policy (Coley 1998:11).

At issue is whether a Christian school can minister to a non-believing child and whether a Christian school can or should partner with non-believing parents for their child's education. First, limiting participation to Christian students is not possible if the school seeks to educate early elementary students. Horton says, "Without a regenerated, willing student, Christian education cannot carry out its purpose" (1992:5). However, many kindergarten, first and second grade students have not accepted Christ. So, if a school limits its admissions to believers only, it is likely to have practical problems filling classes in the lower grades. If the school makes exceptions for young students, then at what age or grade will the school require a faith decision before excluding the student from participation? In response to this dilemma, many Christian schools require that one or both parents be professing Christians. Thus, in a limited way, these schools adopt the purpose of evangelism as well as discipleship. These schools would still be considered to have a closed admissions policy.

But this position raises another question: Can or should a church partner with non-Christian parents for the education of their children? Some Christian school parents, administrators and other leaders shudder at the idea of having non-Christian families enrolled in the school. For example, consider the motives of some parents for placing their children in a Christian school. Some choose a Christian school to shelter their

children from secular influences that a child of a non-Christian family could bring to the classroom. Still, others argue that the school cannot or should not partner with non-believers for any Christian endeavor. However, churches regularly mix the task of evangelism and discipleship in other ministries such as Sunday school and worship. Granted, some teaching and preaching will not be understood by the unregenerate, but these churches trust the Word of God to be effective in their lives.

To be sure, this is a major issue among Christian school advocates. Many evangelical-minded Christian schools do not allow non-Christian families admission to the school. They cite that the influence of unsaved children and families will damage the spiritual atmosphere at the school (Deuink 1996:287). Others argue that the unregenerate mind cannot understand spiritual matters and that the church should have no partnership with unsaved parents.

The answer to this dilemma may be found in a proper balance of an open and closed environment. There are definite advantages to closed enrollment. The likelihood of better behavior of the students and support from parents increases under such a policy. But school ministries should not feel excluded from allowing some students of non-Christian families to enroll. The purpose of the school ministry need not be limited to educating only believers. Evangelism is a valid purpose as well. To that end, the school could enroll unregenerate children on a limited basis—a few in each grade—when the family has demonstrated openness to the gospel and the church. Perhaps they have already attended worship services or they participate in other ministries and have demonstrated that they are in concert with the purposes of the church, even if they do not completely understand them. In such cases, administrators would need to carefully explain to parents what will be taught in the school and the standards by which their child's conduct will be measured. The standards of the school should never be lowered for the sake of the unbelieving family, but a limited open enrollment policy would allow for believing children and faculty to be salt and light for the unbelieving classmate.

### **Student Aptitude**

A second issue related to the school's constituency pertains to the level of student aptitude required for admission to the school. While public schools must accept all students, Christian schools and other private schools may reject a student based on academic skills or an aptitude test. Most Christian school ministries cannot afford to offer special education classes for seriously handicapped children, nor can they accommodate a large number of learning disabled children. Larger private schools or public schools are more likely to offer special tracks for such children. Therefore, Christian schools often set standards for admissions so that they do not accept students they cannot adequately serve. Church and school leaders need to be honest about their ability to serve special needs or remedial students and set policy based on their resources.

Leaders must also consider if they will accept all average or better than average students or if they will give preference to the more intelligent students. At issue is the school's unique vision. Will it be a school for all average or above average students or does it choose to serve a special niche of students? If the school chooses to be more restrictive, the school may find that it is rejecting admissions to average students who are members of the church. If the church budget is supporting the school ministry directly or indirectly, such a policy could prove divisive. Since the school is a ministry of the church family, it is best for the school to stay as broad in its admission standard as possible. This allows the school to serve most of the families in the church.

### **Governance Issues**

Because the Christian school ministry is larger and more complex than most ministries of a local church, many churches choose to establish a committee or board to oversee the school ministry. Churches also hire specially-trained school administrators to handle the everyday operation of the school. But how these groups and individuals relate to one another varies from church to church. In Southern Baptist churches, sixty-three percent of the school ministries are governed by a board or committee (Coley 2004). Others are governed by the church's pastor, the school administrator and staff, or an advisory group. But all schools have an established authority structure, whether spoken or unspoken. In order to minimize conflict, church leaders must establish clear lines of authority for the school ministry.

### **The Church and Its Ministries**

There are a variety of ways that lines of authority can be established for a school ministry, but several biblical principles should be kept in mind if the school is being established as a ministry of the church. First, the church must decide if the school ministry is going to be under the corporate authority of the church. Some churches choose to legally separate the school ministry from the church by establishing it as a separate corporation with its own non-profit status under section 501(c)3 of the IRS code. In these cases the school likely operates with a separate bank account, budget, and set of bylaws. Others churches, however, leave the school ministry as a ministry of the church, operating under its corporate authority. While many authors recommend maintaining the school as a ministry of the church while at the same time establishing the school as a separate corporation, doing so may separate the school from the church in the minds of the church members and leave them with a sense that the school operates as a separate entity that uses the church facility. Granted, such a legal separation does not necessitate that the church have a hands-off approach with the school ministry, but it may give that impression to the church body.

Second, the authority structure for the school ministry must include the church's overseers. The biblical model for church government establishes the elders as the overseers of the church. In Southern Baptist churches, the primary elder is the pastor. Though the pastor need not be involved in the everyday affairs of the school, he must be

aware of the mission and activity of the school in order to provide spiritual oversight for the ministry. Therefore, the lines of authority should include the pastor. Some Southern Baptist churches have other groups that exercise authority in the church, namely, a church council or deacons. These groups also must be included in the school's lines of authority in accordance with church policy for any ministry of the church. Leaving the school ministry with a totally different authority structure than other ministries will cause confusion unless that line of authority is clearly and regularly communicated to church leaders and the congregation.

Lastly, the New Testament states that ministry in the church is a function of believers exercising their spiritual gifts for the good of the body. As such, the people serving in school leadership should be professing believers. Since the universal church is larger than any one church body, not all leaders need to be a member of the sponsoring church, but they all need to be yielded to God to do his work through the talents and spiritual gifts with which he has blessed them. This means that school leaders, including school administrators, teachers, committee members and the like, are more than employees or leaders. They are God's people doing a specific task for his body. With that position comes privilege and responsibility. They should be respected as brothers and sisters in Christ and should be treated as such in regard to pay, benefits and everyday courtesies. On the other hand, they should be expected to maintain the standards of Christian character and conduct. If they fall below the biblical standard set for them, they should not be allowed to continue their work, even if they exhibit high levels of competence in the area of education. Conflict in schools and churches will occur if one puts spiritually incompetent people into positions of authority or does not quickly address issues of morality or integrity.

With these three biblical foundations in mind, churches may choose one of several ways to organize the governance structure of the school ministry. Included in the structure, there will likely be the senior pastor or another pastor with oversight for the school, the school committee or board, other governing organizations of the church such as deacons or the church council, and the congregation. Exactly how the structure is drawn is less important than how it is communicated to the church and how it fits in with the church system of governance already in place. Again, it is critical that the governance model fit in with the overall philosophy of education and with the existing church governance system.

### **The School Committee**

Sixty-three percent of Southern Baptist Christian schools are governed by a board or committee. The next most popular source of governance is the primary leadership of the church's senior pastor, with eighteen percent of the schools under this structure (Coley 2004). There are a multitude of organizational charts used by churches and school ministries, but more important than the particular structure is the division of responsibility given to each party. Whichever structure is chosen, there must be a clear understanding

of authority and responsibility for the administrator and the group or individual that governs the school ministry.

The first task is to determine who will be given governing authority for the school ministry. The three primary options are a school board, a school committee or a pastor. A school board is typically necessary when a school is incorporated separately and requires a governing group. Though boards have corporate responsibility and are in many ways separate from the church, they may be kept closely linked to the church by, for example, requiring all or many board members to be church members or by making board member selection the responsibility of the church (through a governing group such as deacons). A school committee is the preferred name of the authority if the school is not separately incorporated and if the ministry functions like other church ministries that may be led by committees. Using the name “committee” communicates that the ministry is one of many at the church and that the group does not have the same level of autonomy and authority that a “board” might have. Finally, a church may choose to let the pastor alone oversee the school administrator. This puts the pastor in the center not only of many school policy decisions, but also in the center of most school controversies. Pastors with extensive knowledge of school ministries and pastors with a long tenure at the church might be able to manage this responsibility, but it is not a preferred arrangement.

Once one determines what entity will govern the school, the next task is to determine what responsibilities the church will give to the school’s governing entity. Part of this decision will depend on how the school is established as a ministry of the church. If a separate corporation is established, a school board may have the right, for example, to own property, enter into contracts and manage financial resources. If there is no separate corporation and the school is closely aligned as a ministry of the church, the governing board or committee may have more limited authority but may still be tasked with managing and submitting a budget, hiring personnel, performing staff evaluations, determining salaries, setting student admission requirements, and determining tuition and fees. The committee job description should be approved by the appropriate governing bodies and thus give the committee authority to carry out the designated tasks without interference.

Once the responsibilities have been granted to the governing authority, the next task is to clarify the way that the governing authority and the school administrator will interact. As noted, the governing entity may be a school committee or board or simply the senior pastor of the church. Since “committee” is our preferred designation, we will use that term. Many school consultants recommend that the school’s committee should be responsible for carrying out the mission of the school ministry by establishing policies for the ministry and working through the school administrator. Dr. Paul Kienel, of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), states the relationship this way:

The board’s principal function is to fulfill the wishes of the corporate body it represents. The board does this by establishing board policies in behalf

of the corporation within the confines of the school's bylaws given to the board by the corporate body. The board then entrusts the implementation for the established policies and the day-to-day administrative decisions to its chief executive officer as the administrative officer (n.d.).

This structure gives a clear charge to the committee and administrator. It keeps the committee from micromanaging the school and it holds the administrator accountable to the decisions of the committee.

John Carver has developed a popular model for establishing responsibilities and creating boundaries for boards and administrators. He notes that the proper relationship between the board and the administrator, which he calls the CEO, is critical to the health of the organization. Regarding the CEO-board relationship he states that the board's job is to hold the CEO accountable for the end result while not being concerned with specific job responsibilities or the means to accomplishing the end. They are to write overarching policies and allow the CEO to operate freely within those parameters. For many established boards or committees, the transition to this way of operating is difficult. As Carver states:

Some boards are reluctant to empower the CEO to this extent. Their reasons vary from being unwilling to let go of the strings on decision making to being unwilling to burden CEO and staff with such momentous decisions. But by delegating less authority, the board must constantly forsake strategic decisions to make tactical decisions. Leadership is being cheated in either case (1997:108)

Carver's design for board governance provides a good model for churches to consider for the director-committee relationship.

In summary, the governance structure for the school ministry relies first on the church determining a mission and granting specific authority to the governing authority of the school to carry out that mission. Then, the governing authority, such as a committee, makes policies related to the school's mission. Those policies are then carried out on a day-to-day basis by a competent school administrator.

Finally, the church must determine the composition of the school committee. Several options are available. First, some churches insist that the committee be comprised only of church members while others allow a minority of non-church members to serve as well. If non-church members are allowed to serve, the church must make sure that they are strong disciples and members in good standing of a local church. The church that considers its school ministry as a ministry of the church must also make sure that the committee participants are committed to the church's philosophy of Christian education and its implications on budget, tuition, shared facilities, doctrinal teaching, etc. While having non-church members on the committee might add a valuable perspective to committee discussions, it may water down the connection of the school with the church.

Another consideration regarding the committee's constituency is whether the church should insist that potential members fully support Christian school education over public school education. For example, would a church allow a person to serve on the committee that sent their children to public school or that is currently a teacher or administrator in the public school system? This question is answered when the church answers the question about its position on Christian education. If the church says that Christian education and public education are both acceptable paths for parents to choose, then the church would be hard-pressed to make a case for limiting the committee to those who insist Christian education is the only option. In fact, having a committee stacked with people who are not in harmony with the church's position could prove dangerous. On the other hand, staffing a committee with members that do not appreciate Christian education and do not see the need for the school ministry is hazardous as well. The best option is to carefully select committee members that are in harmony with the church's position on Christian education.

### **The School Administrator**

The school administrator has the primary responsibility for overseeing the day-to-day operation of the school ministry. As previously noted, the school committee will set policies for the administrator to follow. But outside of those limitations, the administrator has the freedom to operate the school in the best way possible. In the end, the key ingredient in the relationship between the school committee and administrator is trust. Kienel argues:

A principal responsibility of the school board is to employ an administrator in whom it has complete confidence to carry out the school's mission and the basic board policy it has established.... The board's predominant attitude toward the administrator should be one of respect and confidence. If this attitude is lost, there is little hope of continued progress (n.d.)

The administrator must have the freedom to act creatively and with authority to carry out the mission of the school. Such freedom must be granted by the committee to competent, trusted staff.

There are three major principles for assuring a good relationship between the school administrator and the rest of the church staff and leadership. First, the school administrator should have a clear understanding of who is in authority over him or her. Administrators sometimes face the unusual issue of reporting to two separate authorities, a pastor and a school committee. This is due to the fact that the administrator is a staff member of the church as well as a head of school. If such circumstances means the administrator indeed reports to two entities, the responsibilities of each group should be made clear. These entities will individually or corporately share the responsibilities of hiring and evaluating the administrator, determining a salary, settling grievances with school employees and parents, setting and enforcing church and

school policies, overseeing financial matters in the school, and establishing a master plan for the school's future, among other tasks. To keep the relationships simple, it may be best to think of the administrator as the Chief Executive Officer of the school, the committee as a policy-making organization and the pastor as a spiritual overseer.

Second, the school administrator should be part of the church staff. They should be approved by the same body or bodies that approve other staff members. They should attend church staff meetings and functions. They should abide by the personnel policies of the other staff members regarding vacation, sick days, standards of conduct and so forth. The goal is to maintain unity and team work between the administrator and other church staff and leaders. Unity and teamwork requires communication and clear expectations.

However, with that said, there also must be recognition that the school administrator's job is very different than that of a typical minister. When school is in session, their daily schedule can be very full and extend far beyond official office hours. And while the schedule during the school year may be very hectic and allow little or no time for vacation days, the summer schedule may lighten and allow for shorter office hours to make up for the long school days. Therefore, personnel policies that work well for a minister might not work so well for the school administrator. For example, ministers might receive a day off during the week to compensate for a typically busy Sunday. School administrators cannot practically take a weekday off, nor are they "on the job" on Sundays. Likewise, the typical school day of a school administrator starts an hour or more earlier than that of a minister and it may run late into the evening as they attend sporting events, fine arts performances and the like. To be sure, ministers' schedules can be overloaded as well, but there are differences between the schedules. If personnel policies only consider the typical staff member's situation, the school administrator may be left with unreasonable demands.

The principle to remember is that when policies and procedures for all church staff can be the same, make them the same for the sake of unity, uniformity and communication. But when a staff member, like a school administrator, has job demands that are different, make necessary adjustments. Christian school ministries are very different than other church ministries. This cannot be overlooked or denied.

Third, the school administrator must be a team player. This has to do more with attitude than policies and procedures. Team players are on board with the overall mission of the church and value the role of other ministries as a part of that mission. When a school administrator is a happy and cooperating part of the church leadership team, they will be willing to compromise and cooperate in the overall mission rather than simply running a great school. In the church-school model, the school ministry does not stand alone. On the other hand, the school needs resources to accomplish its mission with integrity and excellence. When other members of the church staff and leadership view the school as part of the mission and the administrator as part of the team, compromise and

cooperation will flow in both directions. There is no room in the church-based school for a lone ranger as a part of the staff.

### **Managing Conflict and Communication**

Determining a workable governance structure for the school and communicating it to the church family is an important step in reducing conflict related to the school ministry. However, no type of structure has the capability to eliminate all conflict. Grievances and disagreements will occur at every level. Parents will express concern about school policies and procedures and how their children are taught. Faculty may complain about their work environment or an evaluation they received. Church members will become frustrated about the logistics of shared space and overall support of the school by the church. These are only a few of the potential sources of conflict.

### **Biblical Conflict Resolution**

Since eliminating conflict is not possible, determining a strategy for managing conflict is a must. The scripture passage most commonly referred to for developing such a strategy is Matthew 18:15-17. This passage gives instruction to believers about how to settle a disagreement with another believer. Though the passage is specifically about matters of church discipline, it sets a pattern for believers to follow. That pattern starts with the offended person going directly to the person who has offended them. This eliminates the opportunity for gossip, that is, saying something slanderous about someone in the presence of others. Simply put, if you have a problem with someone, go directly to him or her. This principle applies to all believers, but is an especially important standard of behavior for those who participate in the church and its ministries.

In the Christian school ministry, leaders and participants at various levels need to apply this principle. Kienel explains how the principle applies to parents when he says:

The Matthew 18 principle requires that parents talk to teachers about student problems before they talk to administrators. If unresolved at the two people level, the matter is prayerfully and orderly moved upward in the school organizational structure. This is the Lord's way of solving person-to-person problems (n.d.).

The problem occurs when a parent attempts to bypass someone in the line of authority. For example, the parent may take his grievance about a teacher directly to a board member. Kienel advises, "If a parent complains to a board member about a teacher, the board member should urge the parent to follow the Matthew 18 pattern of resolving problems at the lowest level possible—involving the least number of people" (n.d.).

This principle applies at every level in the school governance structure. For example, it is not uncommon for a parent to go directly to the pastor about an unresolved issue with the administrator. At this point, the pastor must know the chain of command and

exercise wisdom by asking the parent if he or she has talked to the administrator first. It is especially difficult for a pastor to cut off a member in such a way, but in doing so, he is teaching the parent to settle conflict biblically. On the other hand, if the pastor promises to handle the problem, he only rewards dysfunctional, unbiblical behavior and sets a precedent for every parent to go directly to him with their school-related problems. Every person in the authority structure of the school ministry must know his place in the organization and must insist that grievances be settled in an orderly manner.

### **Communication**

Another way to eliminate conflict is by good communication. Lines of communication must be open and clear between the school and the church staff, church leadership and the congregation. Consider first of all the communication between the school and the church staff. There is no doubt that of primary importance is communication with the senior pastor. At a minimum, the policy should be, "No surprises." That is, the director should give the pastor warning and seek advice about school issues and points of conflict that might make it to his desk. Ideally, as discussed, the pastor will attempt to help resolve matters of conflict by referring complaining people to the school board or other appropriate authority. But many school issues are emotionally charged and if a pastor can be alerted in advance and assured the situation is being addressed, then he can speak confidently to the person and let them know that the situation is being handled appropriately. It is also important that the director and school staff foster strong relationships with other staff members. Everyone's ministry from the custodian to the Sunday school director will be touched by the school ministry, so communication about overall vision and values, upcoming events, calendaring, and so forth, is critical.

The best way to keep communication open is through weekly staff meetings. While it is true that many staff meeting issues may not relate directly to the school ministry, school staff should be proactive in such meetings to inform participants about school matters and the impact of decisions on the overall ministry.

The church leadership and congregation also need adequate communication about school ministry matters. Since the school is largely a weekday ministry, many church leaders and members will rarely see the school in action. They may not know about the school's impact on young lives. Without sounding self-promoting, the school must use bulletin announcements to keep the ministry in the minds of church members. The director needs to be present at church events and build relationships with key leaders. School leaders need to think of creative ways to let the students interact with the church such as by serving Wednesday night supper or having a fine arts group perform in a worship service. If left alone, the tendency is for the school ministry to be forgotten by the average church leader and member. Positive communication needs to outweigh the negative communication that will occasionally come as the school experiences internal conflicts with students and parents.

## **Financial Issues**

Perhaps nothing gets people's attention faster than money. When you handle people's money, you will undoubtedly get their input about the job you did. In the church, money gets people's attention and budgeting issues can be a source of serious discussion. The Christian school ministry adds a variety of variables to the church's finances that other ministries typically do not. Issues that affect the church-school relationship are most evident related to budgeting, school income and school expenses.

### **Budgeting**

Christian school ministries are typically held accountable by the church through an annual budget. Schools can be tempted to operate as if they are independent of the church, but this should never be allowed. The Christian school is a ministry of the church. It exists because the church created it. Therefore, the church, or a designated body, should approve the budget annually and review the budget regularly for accountability. As Deuink reminds us:

The school must be given the authority and liberty to raise necessary funds to operate, but those who make the school's financial decisions are accountable to the church leaders who have established overall financial policies. This accountability is only fair, for the church is held legally and morally responsible for any school debts or contractual agreements (1996:124).

Deuink goes on to note that the church should not make the school take its budget before the entire church body since it is too intricate to explain line by line, but the church should designate a group or groups to hold the school accountable.

Accountability is not the only issue. Church and school leaders should also consider whether the school's budget will be kept separate from the church budget, whether the school budget will operate on a different calendar from the church and how school budget surplus and deficits will be handled. First, church and school budgets can be kept as a part of one unified budget. One might make this case as part of an effort to keep the school as a ministry of the church in every way. In other words, keeping the church and school budget together communicates that the school is clearly a ministry of the church like every other ministry represented in the church budget. When possible, this is a good option.

However, school budgets are best organized according to a fiscal year that matches the school year. Southern Baptist churches tend to have fiscal calendars that match the Sunday school year (September to August) or the calendar year (January to December). School calendars are best kept from July to June or somewhere near to that since the main sources of income and expense (tuition and salaries, respectively) are determined annually and start and finish at that time. This difference in operations between the

church and school makes a strong case for separate budgets. As stated previously, since the school is a ministry of the church, it is best to treat it like every other ministry. But at times treating the school the same as any other ministry creates too much of a hardship, and exceptions need to be made. Such may be the case regarding budgets. It is very difficult for a school to plan and successfully manage a budget if the fiscal year of its budget does not match the school year. A separate budget may be necessary as long as the church has a consistent role in approval and oversight of that budget.

Finally, the church must also decide in advance how it will handle school surpluses and deficits. Schools typically operate on a zero-based budget where income meets expenses, but school budgets can be very large, and even a small percentage annual surplus or deficit can greatly affect the church. Some churches choose to handle the school ministry the same as any other. If there is a deficit, the church will cover it with other church receipts, and if there is a school budget surplus, the excess is absorbed into the church budget. Others keep an account of surpluses and deficits and rely on the school to establish a cash reserve to cover any cash flow problems. Once again, for our purposes, the point is to make sure the policies the church adopts accurately reflect that the school is a ministry of the church. Separate budgets and separate cash reserves can communicate a separation of the church and school if leaders do not recognize that the compromises made are for convenience and fiscal accountability rather than as a result of a philosophy that intends to make the school more distant in its relationship with the church.

### **Sources of Income**

School ministries are typically required to maintain a balanced budget. That is, they must receive an annual income in direct proportion to their annual expenses. The primary source of income for a Christian school is tuition and fees paid by the parents of the children that attend the school. But there are other possible sources of income as well, such as fundraisers or grants. In addition, sponsoring churches may choose to contribute to the school ministry particularly during the school's startup years. Each one of these income sources raise policy questions that the church leadership will need to address.

First of all, leaders must decide who will determine the biggest source of income for the school—tuition. Church members who enroll their children in the school can become disgruntled as tuition rises year to year. They will want to know that systems of accountability are in place to make sure the school ministry is spending their money wisely. Such concerns make a case for the presence of a school committee consisting, at least in part, of school parents. The school committee should propose the annual budget including tuition levels. The presence of such a committee may keep the church's pastor or other church leaders from being pressured to set the tuition at a particular level.

Another important income issue to address is fundraisers. Many churches have fundraising policies for its ministries. It is important to make sure that the unique needs of a Christian school ministry are addressed in that policy. Most schools across America, public or private, have opportunities to raise extra money for capital items such as computers, sports equipment, band instruments and the like. In most communities there is a degree of acceptance related to various fundraising programs carried out by schools. People are not surprised to pay admission to a school sports event or to have a student ask them to buy Christmas wrapping paper to help the school upgrade its computer lab. But such activity may be restricted for church ministries according to established church policies. Churches that start Christian school ministries will need to examine its policies and decide up front if the school's plans conflict with current policies and if policies need to be adapted for the school ministry.

Another possible source of income relates to school startup costs. When a church establishes a Christian school ministry, it must accept the fact that the school will need some time in order to become financially self-sustaining. Typically, school administrators are hired prior to the presence of an income stream. It is also not realistic to expect that every class will be filled to capacity or to a breakeven enrollment level during the first few years. Churches need to consider how these possible deficits will be funded. Church and school leaders need to be very realistic about the possible costs and the number of years deficits will be allowed. Without careful planning, leaders could face the decision of closing the school after several years of ministry and thus disappointing faithful church members.

### **Sources of Expense**

Some sources of expense for the school ministry directly affect the church-school relationship as well. School ministries increase the overhead expenses of the church in many ways. Schools are five-day operations that increase utility bills, cleaning costs, building maintenance costs and staffing needs, just to name a few. Church and school leaders need to decide how such costs will be expensed to the school ministry.

Some churches prefer to recognize the school as a ministry of the church like any other. Therefore, since they do not charge the youth ministry for using space for a lock-in or since they do not charge the women's ministry for space for their weekday Bible study, they will not charge the school, either. On the other hand, a church might try to develop a formula to determine the cost of such items as utilities, cleaning, and maintenance, which the church incurs because of the school's presence. Based on their calculations, they could then choose not to charge the school for any of those costs or they could choose to charge for a predetermined portion of the costs. Some consultants even recommend that the church charge the school for all costs, then gift back to the school that amount from the church budget to cover the costs (Gamble 2003). In this way the church and school are forced to recognize the additional costs created by the presence of the school ministry, but no actual penalty is incurred. There are a variety of scenarios for accounting for these indirect costs, but it is important that a policy be agreed to so

that the school can predict its annual costs with reasonable accuracy. If the amount charged to the school each year is a moving target, there is no way for the school to adjust its income stream, primarily derived from tuition payments, to meet the need.

### **Space Issues**

We have already considered the costs of using church facilities and how those costs may be expensed to the school, but the issue of shared space deserves further attention since it can be a flash point for conflict between the church and school ministry. Many school consultants rank space issues high on their list of potential sources of conflict with Christian school ministries. Kenneth Coley notes the hard feelings one might experience when the room they use becomes shared space with the school:

Unfortunately, the joy of expanding ministries can sometimes be dampened by conflicts between those who are asked to share the same classroom space at different times during the week. In such cases administrators have seen otherwise calm, loving saints act more like temperamental toddlers who don't want to share their toys. An unwashed table top or a row of desks and chairs out of place may result in tears, resignations, or running gun battles (1999:19).

The goal of church and school leaders should be to minimize such problems by clear communication about the overall philosophy of shared space, the process for church and school calendaring, and how room resources can be used.

### **Philosophical Foundations**

When space is used almost every day of the week and shared between several ministries, problems are inevitable. One should not think that problems might happen; they should know that problems will happen. A teacher's desk will be disturbed; classroom equipment will be broken; supplies will be misplaced. In order to help teachers and laypeople accept these circumstances, they must first appreciate all ministry that is taking place in their space and the good stewardship of resources that occurs because of the practice of sharing space.

Churches that start Christian school ministries often find that facilities they once used for a few hours on Sunday and Wednesday are now being used all day, five days a week. As a result, there is more mess, but there is also more ministry. Former school administrator Paul Young notes, "Churches must be willing to sacrifice clean, sterile buildings for traffic-worn facilities that are used daily in training and educating children" (1997-98:8). Young then quotes Proverbs 14:4: "Where no oxen are, the trough is clean; but much increase comes by the strength of an ox" (KJV). He explains that having an ox to help with the farming yields a greater harvest, but that it also makes for a messy stall. Such is the case in the church as well. The more ministry that takes place, the more

mess will be produced. But such a mess is a good mess, because it means that ministry has taken place (Young 1997-98:8).

Christian school faculty and church laypeople need to have a kingdom focus regarding facilities, and it is up to the school and church leaders to remind ministry participants about the big picture of all that is being accomplished through the maximized use of church resources. Coley suggests, "One way to build *esprit de corp* is to sponsor celebrations where the various ministries who must struggle to use the same classrooms come together to cheer for each other as they share what God is doing in the lives of the families to whom they minister" (1999:19). Such a meeting is one creative way to communicate the value of shared space and the need to work successfully through difficulties.

### **Calendar Planning**

Another way to avoid conflict over shared space is to effectively use a church calendar. Christian schools add many events to the church's annual schedule. In addition to normal daytime classes during the week, schools potentially need weeknight and weekend space for athletic events, clubs, graduation ceremonies, parent meetings and more. All the rules that apply to other church ministries apply here. The school ministry as well as other church ministries need to plan ahead and reserve space in plenty of time, and cleaning and maintenance staff need to be notified in advance to plan for cleaning up and preparing facilities for the next day.

However, what happens when the church literally runs out of space? Consider the church that wants to start a weekday women's Bible study and needs several classrooms for the various classes and small group meetings. However, as the church's school has expanded one grade a year, space available for these ministries becomes limited or nonexistent. Now the school, as explained earlier, is in the unfortunate position of squeezing out other ministries. There is no simple solution to these issues, but church and school leaders must commit themselves to constant communication so that decisions can be consciously made about future space allocation.

### **Room Use Policies**

Finally, decisions will need to be made by church and school leaders about how rooms will be used by the school and other church ministries. Though school teachers would like to use the walls and marker boards exclusively, a strategy will need to be developed to keep a room from having too many distractions or to make the marker board available for weekend use. Of course, specific policies will depend on who uses the space during the week and who shares the space on weeknights and weekends.

Some churches have effectively tackled the issue of shared space as they planned new buildings. Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas installed marker boards that slide back and forth to reveal one of two different bulletin boards used by two different

ministries. Calvary Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, built their rooms with partitions that close off about one fifth of a room to hide student desks and other items that are moved behind the partition when the school is not using the room. Closet, cabinets, and shelving can also be utilized to facilitate use by multiple ministries. Once again, advanced planning, communication and reasonable compromise is the key to successful sharing of space.

## **Chapter Summary**

Creating and managing a successful Christian school ministry involves much more than deciding how to handle the issues mentioned above. But any church that wishes to establish a successful Christian school ministry must make some important decisions about the relationship between the church and the school ministry. Ignoring or avoiding these issues will inevitably lead to conflict and will distract the church family from its mission.

Briefly stated, the strategy I recommend above is: “Think ahead, and correct as you go.” First of all, church and school leaders need to think ahead about the issues that will arise as the school ministry is birthed and matures. The issues raised in this chapter are designed to help church leaders begin that process of thinking ahead. My hope is that churches will avoid many struggles because of the decisions they made in advance.

Secondly, no decision has to be final. As children mature, they are granted more freedom and they are allowed to take more risks. Likewise, as a Christian school ministry matures, some of the policy decisions that constrained it in the early years can be adapted to allow more freedom and ingenuity. In this chapter, I have offered suggested solutions, but I have typically refrained from declaring exactly how every issue should be resolved. Biblical principles always need to be applied to an issue, but beyond that there is freedom. Just as football teams develop a game plan before the game, so should church and school leaders develop a plan for the school ministry. But good teams are also watchful as the game is played so that they can make halftime adjustments. The church-school relationship is dynamic. It changes over the years and it requires leaders who are keen observers and visionaries who can predict the points of potential conflict and make the necessary changes that keep the church and all its ministries from becoming distracted from its overall mission.