

## **PROBLEMS FACED BY CHURCHES AND THEIR CHRISTIAN SCHOOL MINISTRIES**

The relationship between sponsoring churches and their Christian school ministries is often strained. In some ways, the relationship is not unlike that of any other church ministry. But on the other hand, the church-school relationship is more complex due to the size and mission of the Christian school ministry. The school ministry requires more resources than other church ministries in regard to time, people, space and money.

Most church ministries involve a few hours of the congregation's time in a given week. The typical Sunday school ministry, for example, uses the church facility three or four hours a week at the most for preparation, training, and actual classroom teaching time. But the Christian school ministry meets on the campus for about seven hours of classes per day or thirty-five hours per week. In addition, there are extra-curricular events for students such as sports, fine arts and clubs. With the addition of a Christian school ministry, church programming changes from a mostly weeknight and weekend schedule to an all day, every day schedule.

Christian school ministries also involve a variety of new people in the church's ministry activity. In many churches, school faculty and staff outnumber the other church staff. Though potential for ministry increases with more ministry staff positions, the potential for conflict increases as well. School ministries also increase the number of families involved in the church's ministry. Most Christian schools will minister not only to families already in the church, but families that attend other churches and unchurched families as well. All of these families are making a large financial investment in their child's education, and they desire to be involved in the school's ministry and to be heard related to school operational decisions. In short, with the church's increased potential to touch lives also comes an increase in potential people problems.

The school ministry also requires more space to carry out its ministry. Churches tend to share space between its ministries. That is, the youth may meet on Wednesday nights in the gym or a large room used on other occasions by the children's ministry or adult ministry, but space needs of the school ministry are different. Teacher's desks, student's desks, shelves, cabinets, teaching tools mounted on the walls and other items become permanent additions to classroom space when a school ministry is established. In effect, usable square footage is lost for other ministries and flexibility may be minimized for space allocation.

Finally, Christian school ministries involve a large amount of money. Other church ministry budgets are typically dwarfed by a school ministry budget. For example, the preschool director will expend a small portion of the funds collected through church offerings—perhaps one to three percent of the overall church budget. However, the Christian school ministry will expend all, and hopefully no more, of what it collects in tuition. Most of the school expenses will be to pay faculty and staff. These costs are not variable based on student enrollment, and therefore a slight flux in school enrollment can have a tremendous impact on the bottom line. Such is not typically the case with other ministries of the church.

These, and other factors, can strain the church-school relationship. With any increase in ministry comes an increase in risk and opportunities for conflict. The problem is that some churches will not even consider a Christian school ministry because of the stories they have heard about time-consuming and potentially church-splitting problems caused by the presence of a Christian school ministry. Paul Young states:

Most people would agree that the marriage of the church and the Christian day school is in trouble. There has developed an attitude of distrust, disloyalty, and in many cases open rebellion. And as in any marriage that is in trouble, the children are suffering the most. The conflicts are causing many pastors to question their commitment to Christian education. In fact, most pastors surveyed today would not consider having a Christian school as a part of their church's ministry (1997-98:5).

The problems Young refers to are common. The task at hand is to determine the sources of those conflicts so that we can prepare recommendations that will keep conflict to a minimum. The cost of not trying to find a solution is an opportunity lost to minister to children and families in a way that will further God's kingdom.

### **Issues Common to Christian School Ministries**

Trying to identify the problem areas in a Christian school ministry as it relates to the overall church is not too difficult a task. Experts in the field commonly refer to a few sources of conflict. Ed Gamble, president of the Southern Baptist Association of Christian Schools, names four problem areas: space, finances, calendar coordination and staffing (2003). Charlie Schneider, a consultant at LifeWay Christian Resources, points to the same problem areas, but emphasizes that poor communication about decisions related to these areas is another major source of conflict (2003). There are a multitude of issues that a Christian school ministry can face, but experts in the field and literature addressing the topic generally point to three categories of conflict: governance issues, space issues and financial issues. What follows is an examination of each of these issues as they affect the church-school relationship in a typical Southern Baptist church.

## **Governance Issues**

Every organization has an authority structure, whether written or unwritten. Through the established authorities, decisions are made about policies, procedures and everyday operations of the organization. Christian schools are no exception. In fact, one of the first questions a church should answer once it decides to start a Christian school ministry is, "Who is in charge?" Developing a clear answer to this question is critical for the health of the church and Christian school ministry. Determining how decisions are made and establishing accountability for the decision-makers is at the core of determining the organization's system of governance.

Christian schools, in general, are governed according to one of the following three models based on their sponsorship: independent, multi-church sponsored or church sponsored. Independent schools are not directly related to a church. Livesay calls these "Parent-Neighborhood Schools" and states that they are "generally founded by parents who want a better (and Christian) education for their children when no church or churches wish to be involved" (1983:17). Therefore, they are considered "independent" of any specific church affiliation. As such, they are typically governed by a self-perpetuating board comprised mostly of parents.

Multi-church sponsored schools are established by more than one church. Their governance structure is likely to be similar to that of the independent school except that their board members represent the participating churches. The board members might be selected by the sponsoring church, or the board may select its membership with a view toward involving parents from a variety of sponsoring churches. Regardless, the board stands independent of any direct church control. Though churches might provide some kind of financial support, most of the income comes from the parents enrolled in the school (1983:17).

The final model for a Christian school organization is the church-sponsored school. James Deuink, editor of the Bob Jones University manual for Christian school administration, states, "Most Christian schools established since the mid-1970s have been organized as a part of a local church" (1996:42). Tom McClure of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), a popular accrediting agency among SBC schools, estimates that about thirty percent of their member schools are independent while seventy percent are church-related. However, McClure also notes that the gap between independent and church-related schools is slowly narrowing because some presently church-related schools are becoming independent and most new schools starting are independent (2004).

The focus of this study is the church-sponsored Christian school, more specifically, schools started by Southern Baptist churches. These schools are governed by the sponsoring church, but how that governance is accomplished varies greatly. This is due, in part, to the variety of ways Southern Baptist churches are themselves governed. The

governance structure of a school is greatly affected by the governance structure and leadership culture of the local church.

Southern Baptist churches are autonomous bodies. Neither the national convention nor any other local group mandates a particular system of governance for a local church. However, Southern Baptist churches are, for the most part, congregational churches. That is, the ultimate decision-making authority for the church is the congregation. Some Southern Baptist churches take almost every decision to the floor of the church in a monthly business meeting. Other congregations, as a practical matter, authorize various committees and groups, like deacons, to make some decisions on behalf of the church. But, in the end, the congregation retains power by selecting the members of those groups.

Governance is ultimately about decision-making. So, the first key question for a church to ask is, "How are decisions made in our church?" That question will be followed by "How will decisions be made for the Christian school ministry?" But to answer the second question, one must clearly understand the answer to the first.

In a Southern Baptist church, decision-making power may rest with several individuals or groups: the pastor, the deacons or a similar board, committees and, as stated, the congregation. The names of these organizations and their specific authority may differ somewhat, but the names are not as important as determining what the key organizations are and what decisions they make on behalf of the congregation. Each of these entities has varying levels of power. As such, they will each relate to the school ministry in a different way.

Establishing a governance system for the Christian school ministry will be affected by the church's governance structure. Just like in the church, the Christian school ministry must ask the question, "Who makes the decisions?" And, since the school is under the authority of the church, another key question is, "To whom in the church are the school's decision-makers responsible?"

In the next chapter, some specific recommendations will be offered, but for now, consider two examples. Radnor Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee operates a Christian school ministry called Radnor Baptist Academy. At the top of the school's governance structure is the school administrator. There is no committee or school board to whom he reports or that helps him develop policy for the school. The administrator reports directly to the pastor of the church. In this system, the administrator has extensive authority to establish policies and carry them out. The pastor meets regularly with the administrator and they agree on policies and procedures, but the pastor essentially has veto power over the administrator's decisions. The pastor partners with the board of deacons for leadership and decision-making but is under the authority of the congregation only. The only decisions taken to the church concerning the school are the amount of utility and overhead expense the church will charge to the school and issues related to the existence of the school as a ministry of the church.

This system exists at Radnor for various reasons. First, the pastor has a long tenure and holds a significant position of authority in the church. Second, the deacons and congregation vote only on major issues, that is, they are not accustomed to voting on every issue of every ministry in the church. Therefore, one can observe that in Radnor's case, the school governance structure fits with and reflects the values of the church's governance structure.

On the other hand, consider the governance of Carmel Christian School, a ministry of Carmel Baptist Church in Matthews, North Carolina. Major decisions at Carmel are made by the congregation after passing through the church council and deacons. The church council is made up mainly of committee chairmen and ministerial staff. The school's administrator is hired by the church and considered a church staff member, and he reports dually to the Carmel Christian School Committee and the Minister of Education. The school committee functions like any other committee in the church and has one vote in the church council. The Minister of Education and school administrator are *ex officio* members of the school committee and members of the church council. The school committee is free to unilaterally establish policy for the school except in the areas of budgeting, personnel and facility use where they must seek approval by other committees.

Basically, Carmel established its school ministry to operate like any other ministry of the church. In some ways the ministry has autonomy, but on issues affecting other ministries such as finances, space allocation, and salaries, they must first process the matters through committees responsible for those decisions. On rare occasions the school committee runs a decision through the church council, deacons, or the congregation. Such is the case with the annual school budget and was also recently the case when they voted to create a partnership with a nearby Christian high school.

Which system is right? Perhaps neither, or both. It is important, however, to realize that the choice of governance structure has implications on the speed and quality of decision-making. School board decisions that must be approved by other entities will have a slower implementation time. Likewise, decisions that require the approval of other entities will be forced to keep in mind the efficient operation of the church as well as the school, a situation not always to the school's greatest benefit.

One other issue related to school ministry governance is whether the school will be incorporated as a separate entity or if it will sit under the corporate umbrella of the church. Schools that incorporate separately typically do so as a nonprofit corporation. However, it is possible for the school to remain under the authority of the church by means of its bylaws provisions. Deuink recommends that schools be separate corporations so that the government regulations that are applied to the school will not become additional burdens to the church (1996:43). Kenneth Coley, professor and Christian school specialist at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, recommends the same separation so that the school is "one giant step removed from the ministry of

the church” even though the school remains tied to the church in the form of its corporate head (2004).

Yet, how are Southern Baptist churches applying the governance issue in their Christian school ministries? Coley conducted a survey of pastors and school administrators at an annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Association of Christian Schools (SBACS). He found that ninety-two percent of the schools were founded by a single church. Seventy-seven percent of the schools are not incorporated separately but are included in the church’s corporation. Regarding the school committee or board, eighty-seven percent of the schools’ governing bodies are selected by the churches’ deacons. Ninety-two percent of the schools have the church’s pastor as an *ex officio* member of the board, or involved in some other significant way. Furthermore, eighty-five percent of the schools’ governing bodies are made up of church members only (1998:11). These survey results indicate a tight relationship between Southern Baptist churches and their Christian school ministries.

### **Space Issues**

Independent Christian schools typically build or rent their classroom meeting space. Such schools can place the highest priority on optimizing their classroom space, yet they must bear the entire cost of providing a facility. Church-based schools, on the other hand, typically share space with their sponsoring church. The cost of providing space is significantly less, but the space is shared. Sharing space means that teachers and administrators must walk a tightrope between creating the optimal classroom and keeping a room useable for other church activities. It is at this crossroad that many school faculty members and church volunteers find themselves in a battle. Careful planning and communication may head off conflicts over shared space, but one must predict the major issues that might arise and communicate clear expectations to those who share the space.

According to Coley’s previously mentioned survey, eighty-eight percent of the SBACS member schools meet in the buildings of the church that founded them (1998:11). This means that most Southern Baptist churches with school ministries know the conflict that may arise over practical issues like shared use of storage space, wall space, and marker boards. They also know the difficulties with physically converting space from a school classroom to meeting space, and coordinating the church calendar for Sunday school or other activities.

Church-based schools like any other schools need adequate space to display visual learning tools, to post classroom rules and to write down homework assignments. These items posted on walls, bulletin boards and marker boards are not always easy or convenient to remove each time the room will be shared with another group. Teachers must consider the impact their classroom decorating has on the other church ministries. For example, a teacher cannot hang mobiles from the ceiling over each child’s desk if the room setup changes on the weekend for an adult Sunday school class. When the

student's desks are moved and adult chairs are added, the hanging mobiles become an obstacle course for the adult students to navigate as they find their seat.

Churches and schools also need to consider what kind of furniture they will use and their strategy for physically moving furniture on a weekly basis. Student desks are harder to move and store than foldable tables, but the desks typically provide better storage space for the students' school supplies and books. Likewise, students' desks that are not able to be shared by the other class must be moved aside or stored. Whether the desks are moved to the side of the room or placed in an empty room, usable square footage is lost. Chairs that are the right size for the school students may not be the right size for an adult Sunday School class that shares the space on the weekend.

All of these issues have an impact on time and money. Custodial staff or teachers will inevitably spend time preparing rooms for shared use. Time that teachers use for the task is time not spent on the educational tasks they are specially trained to do. Time spent by custodial staff means more hours of work and more labor costs. In a large school and busy church setting, this can amount to a significant expense.

Finally, churches and school ministries struggle simply over the amount of time allocated for the use of particular space. Whereas the concern mentioned above relates to what the space would look like, this point considers the implications of the school's need for so many hours of classroom space in a given week. In one church's ministry, the annual expansion of the school, grade by grade, meant that the Tuesday morning women's ministry classes would eventually not have enough rooms in which to meet. Other women's ministry classes were offered on Tuesday evening, but the ladies involved in the morning preferred to meet during the day. In addition, the school expansion required space that was used for childcare for the women's ministry and an outreach-based aerobics ministry. So, should the one-day-a-week ministries win out over the five-day-a-week school ministry? In other words, should a ministry's need for three hours of classes on one day prevent the school's expansion of teaching children for thirty-five hours a week? And, related to the previous section on governance, who makes this decision?

Though these issues seem trite, they can be a source of extra expense, aggravation from unmet expectations, and conflict over the value of individual church ministries. At the center of space controversies are communication and attitude. However, sometimes the issues are deeper and force a church to examine its mission and values.

### **Financial Issues**

The third common source of conflict in the church-school relationship is the issue of finances. Christian school ministries receive a significant amount of money. School budgets can dwarf the rest of the church budget in small churches, and church leaders that find the church struggling for necessary cash cannot help but notice the significant income of the school. Likewise, a church-related school that meets at a church can lose sight of its tremendous savings in overhead expenses because it does not have a

mortgage or utility bills to pay. Money gets everybody's undivided attention. Therefore, an epicenter of potential conflict is found in the school budget.

There are a variety of options that arise from the school budgeting process. Starting with the income side, the first issue school ministries and authorities in their sponsoring churches can divide over is how much of the school's income will come from school ministry efforts such as tuition and how much will come from the church's efforts such as tithes and offerings. This is an especially important question for the first years of the school since startup costs typically require extra funding. Second, increases in the school's tuition can frustrate school parents and lead them to try to take their case to the church leadership or to a business meeting in order to override any existing school authorities, such as a school board. Lastly, many schools, both private and public, participate in fundraising. Yet, if a church does not allow fundraising for its own ministries, what will it allow for the school? These are a few of the income-related issues that will need to be addressed.

The expense side of the school budget raises issues as well. The church and school ministry must consider how much of the overhead expenses will be paid by the school budget. Some costs are easy to identify, like the cost of furniture, office equipment and supplies. But determining overhead costs of one particular ministry can be very subjective. If every cost were to be allocated, one would have to determine fair rental value of the building and prorate expenses like utilities, lawn service, custodial service, wear and tear on buildings, and much more. Not only is this task tedious, but it is an inexact science. A tremendous number of assumptions must be made. For example, how does one determine the exact cost of an electric bill when that involves air conditioning, computers, lights, hot water, and cooking, all of which take place when school ministry and other ministries are occurring at the same time? A truly precise calculation related to air conditioning alone would require one to know the body heat and number of students and how many times they opened the doors. True precision in this effort is impossible.

Other budget issues relate to the budget cycle itself. The school year runs from August to June. Therefore, it is best for the school budget to run from July to June. However, if the school's budget is not separate from the church budget, its fiscal year is more likely to begin in January or September. This can make budget planning very difficult for the school. School ministries also face the issue of how to handle a school ministry surplus or deficit at the end of a fiscal year. For example, if the fiscal year ends in December, the school's budget may not balance because there are perhaps more expenses in the beginning of the school year than in the second half. If the school ministry budget is a part of the overall church budget, the church will need to decide in advance if budget surpluses or deficits will be carried over into the next year or if they will be absorbed into the church budget like other ministries. One can quickly see that wise decisions about budget policies and practices can make a big difference in keeping financial accounting simple and efficient.

In summary, the three issues related to Christian school ministries that have a potential for conflict are governance issues, space issues and financial issues. Problems arising from these three issues are common in the everyday operation of a Christian school ministry in a Southern Baptist church.

### **The Issue of Varying Purposes of the Christian School Ministry**

Every good organization has a mission and vision. Christian school ministries share basically the same mission—providing children with a Christ-centered education designed to develop them into mature Christian disciples and leaders. But each school's vision is likely to differ. That is, each school has at least a slightly different idea of how to accomplish its mission. The school's vision helps define its unique personality and purpose.

Two particular issues related to a school ministry's mission and vision have significant implications on the operation of the school. The first is whether a school is focused on outreach or inreach, and the second is whether a school is focused on educating the brightest children or children of all aptitudes.

#### **Outreach or Inreach**

A prevailing philosophy among Christian educators is that Christian education is reserved only for children who are believers or who are the children of believing parents. As Horton states, "without a regenerated, willing student, Christian education cannot carry out its purpose" (1992:5). Deuink affirms that, "Christian education is not to evangelize the lost, but rather to educate saved young people to be Christlike..." (1996:287). Such a philosophy typically leads to a closed or close enrollment policy.

A closed enrollment policy would mean that a school exists only for Christian families of the church or denomination of the sponsoring church. The child himself may not have accepted Christ as his savior, but the parents must be born again believers. A close enrollment policy would require the family to be Christian but would not require them to be members of the sponsoring church or its denomination (Livesay 1983:17).

However, some Christian schools have an open enrollment policy. This means that they accept students whether or not they or their parents profess salvation or have any church affiliation. An open enrollment policy is not unusual among Southern Baptist Christian schools. Coley's survey of SBACS member schools revealed that fifty-five percent of these schools enroll children of unchurched families provided they agree to support the rules of the school (1998:11).

The issue of open, close, or closed enrollment is hotly debated. The school's policy must be clearly communicated to the church and the school's constituency. Some parents seek Christian education in part to shelter their children from evil influences. Allowing non-Christian students into the school can be a threat to that kind of environment. But

many churches, especially Southern Baptist churches, have a strong bent toward evangelism and their pastors and congregations prefer to sponsor ministries that make disciples as well as teach and grow them. Considering the implications of this policy and clearly communicating this purpose is critical.

### **College Preparation or a School for All Students**

The second important issue related to the school's purpose concerns admissions. While public schools must accept and educate all children, private schools, Christian or otherwise, have the unique opportunity to reject a student based on his academic skills. Christian schools typically screen prospective students using standardized achievement tests and mental aptitude tests, but the standard for admission differs from school to school.

The first issue is special education. While some Christian schools make provision for students with physical, mental and learning disabilities, most Christian schools are not large enough to handle exceptionalities. Deuink notes, "At the present, the cost of providing education for exceptional children and the lack of personnel trained to meet their unique needs have made it difficult for schools to address this problem" (1996:282). Most Christian school ministries do not have highly developed special education programs like the public schools.

The second issue then becomes determining the level of aptitude a child must demonstrate in order to be admitted. Again, the mission and vision of the school should help determine this policy. Some schools accept the only the highest quality candidates while others accept any child at or above grade level. This becomes a source of conflict when the children of church members are rejected for admissions at their own church's school because of this policy. The issue is whether the school decides to be for all Christian students or only for those with a high aptitude or who are preparing for college. Again, considering the implications of a particular policy and clearly communicating this purpose is critical.

### **The Issue of Competing Philosophies of Education**

Another issue that creates conflict in churches with Christian school ministries is more foundational and philosophical. This conflict concerns the various philosophies of education to which church members adhere. Granted, few people can articulate their personal philosophy of education, but they make decisions each day based on their philosophy. They choose where to educate their children. They choose who will teach them. They choose whether the Bible or spiritual issues will be a part of their education. These and other decisions give evidence of a parent's philosophy of education. The conflict in the church arises when the presence of a Christian school ministry causes parents to consider whether the Christian school is a more appropriate place for a child's education. To understand the conflict, one must first understand the basics of the debate between the secular school, or public school, and Christian school education.

## Secular versus Christian Education

Christian school advocates across several denominational and theological lines make the case that education in Christian schools is radically different and inherently superior to any education that can be offered in the modern American public school system. Their primary argument is that the philosophical bases of secular education stands in complete contradiction to biblical revelation. For example, regarding the secular view of mankind, Ronald A. Horton, editor of a book published by Bob Jones University Press, states:

Secular education begins with the assumption that man is born good and remains good if his environment is favorable to his natural development. The function of education, therefore, is to remove the obstacles to the free and full expression of his natural impulses and thereby to make possible the self-determination of his personality (1992:ix).

According to Horton, there are at least two flaws with this way of thinking. First, such a view presumes that one can provide a value-free educational environment. However, he states, both teacher and environment are agents of social conditioning. Second, this way of thinking stands in opposition to the Christian view of the inherently sinful child that needs to be brought to an understanding of his sin and who needs to be trained to understand his relationship to God and his world (1992:ix-x).

Similarly, Reformed theologian Cornelius Van Til notes the critical difference between a God-centered education and a secular education. He states that Christians and non-Christians have foundationally different educational aims. In Van Til's words,

Non-Christians...are not concerned with bringing the child face to face with God. They want to bring the child face to face with the universe. Non-Christian education is *Godless* education. What is of most importance to us in education, that which is absolutely indispensable to us, is left out entirely (as quoted in Berkhof 1990:3).

Van Til dispenses with any question about his insistence on Christian education as he further defines so-called "Godless" education, saying:

Godless education ignores or denies that man was created responsible to God. This implies that sin is not a transgression of God's law. Hence Christ did not need to die in our stead. Godless or nontheistic education is also non- or anti-Christian education....If then we want a God-centered and truly Christian education, we will have to break away completely from the educational philosophy that surrounds us (as quoted in Berkhof 1990:3).

Van Til sees no place for the Christian child in a secular educational environment that does not take God into account.

Glen Schultz, an advocate for Christian education among Southern Baptists, also critiques the value of public education in his book, *Kingdom Education*. In doing so, he notes the failure of the public school system to accomplish one goal stated by its founder. Schultz quotes Horace Mann, father of the American public schools, when he predicted,

[I]f American taxpayers could provide education for every child in America, within a short period of time the effect of the public school system would empty all the jails and prisons in the country... Let the home and church teach faith and values, and the school teach facts (as quoted in Schultz 1998:33).

Schultz notes the obvious failure of the public schools to accomplish such lofty goals and proceeds to explain why. According to Schultz, in the course of life each person develops a worldview or philosophy of life. That worldview is the belief system that determines our attitudes and behaviors. Education, by its very nature, leads the student to the formation of a worldview. His contention is that the public school system's philosophy of education holds to and teaches a man-centered worldview. Such a worldview, according to Schultz, is basically flawed and leads to moral bankruptcy. Christian education, on the other hand, more properly teaches a God-centered worldview, a view that ultimately leads to better moral outcomes (1998:34-35).

### **Potential Discord in the Church**

Much more discussion could be added to the above views that argue for Christian education over secular education like that found in the modern American public education, but it is not our intent to make the case for Christian education. Rather, our point is to indicate the presence of strong opinions about the ineffectiveness and, more pointedly, the harmfulness of secular education for the affected student. These strong opinions not only exist among theologians and Christian education leaders, but among some laity in churches with a more established tradition of providing Christian school education.

With the above factors in mind, step into the average Southern Baptist church in America and you will find that most children attend the public schools and many church members are teachers and administrators in the public schools. In our previous examination of the history of Christian school education, it was noted that American Baptists have generally accepted the public school system as an acceptable place to educate their children. For the most part, Baptists in general, and Southern Baptists specifically, did not begin to abandon the public school system until the 1960s following various court rulings that banned religious classes in school facilities and that eliminated prayer in school.

Southern Baptist church leaders who seek to start a Christian school ministry must be aware of the philosophical dichotomy that exists between Christian school and public school advocates. The presence of a Christian school ministry will not only attract Christians who prefer a Christian environment for the education of their children, but Christians who are dogmatically opposed to any form of education for their children that is not completely Christian-based. The debate between the various factions can and will rage in a church that establishes or operates a Christian school ministry.

An example of such a struggle can be seen in recent activity at the 2004 Southern Baptist Convention. *Baptist Press* reported that two pastors proposed a resolution at the convention “urging Southern Baptists to ‘remove their children from ... government schools’” (Strode 2004). When the Resolutions Committee did not bring that particular resolution to the convention floor for a vote, the pastors, one of whom is a former second vice-president of the SBC, sought to amend a similar resolution that made it to the convention floor for a vote. This second resolution stopped short of encouraging constituents to remove their children from public school but did call for “Southern Baptists to give their children a ‘thoroughly Christian education’” (2004). Messengers to the convention overwhelmingly voted down the amendment that called for the abandoning of public schools. Commenting on the incident in a later interview, then Southern Baptist Convention President, Jack Graham, whose church has a Christian school ministry said, “Southern Baptists are concerned about the direction of some public schools, but on the other hand many of our best people—administrators, teachers, coaches—are Southern Baptists working within the public school system all around America” (2004).

The tension found in these proceedings of the Convention likewise exists in the local Southern Baptist church, where there is a Christian school ministry, and pastors are often caught in the middle. Pastors recognize the importance of a Christian school alternative for their members and they want to support their school ministry, but they also know that many families in their churches are content to rely on the public schools and that others in their churches make their living there. The position that Christian school education is the only acceptable venue for a child’s education is not a position held in most Southern Baptist churches.

### **The Issue of Communication**

The final problem we will examine related to Christian school ministries is the problem of communication. In any organization, communication is important, but in the Christian school ministry there are a variety of constituents that are involved in the ministry, and maintaining adequate communication between each of them requires constant effort. Constituents include school faculty and staff, board members, church staff, committees, lay-leaders, and volunteers. Each of these requires certain information about the Christian school ministry in order to maintain order and effectiveness in their own areas of responsibility. When communication is lacking, problems occur. Charlie Schneider, Christian school consultant with LifeWay Christian Resources, states, “Most conflicts

flow out of lack of communication or poor communication. Room usage, bus usage, finances, overall philosophy of ministry and discipline issues are only a few of the areas that require good communication. Without it, church schools will always experience flash points of conflict” (2003).

### **Communication Between Church Leaders and School Leaders**

The first line of communication must occur between the Christian school ministry’s leaders and the church’s leaders, and the most important line of communication in that category is between the school administrator and the pastor. As the undershepherd of the church, the pastor shapes the vision for the church. The school administrator must keep the school’s mission and vision in harmony with the pastor’s mission and vision. Likewise, the pastor’s philosophy of education must be understood and supported by the school administrator.

Communication between the pastor and school administrator can be hindered for a variety of reasons. Consider the church that calls a new pastor who does not understand the underlying philosophy or basic operation of a Christian school ministry. That pastor may only see the school as an organization that causes problems and distracts the church from its mission. Likewise, a school administrator might be hired by a school board, with little consideration for the administrator’s support of the overall church ministry and the direction in which the pastor is leading the church. Communication can also be hindered if the pastor or school administrator is not accessible for meetings. School administrators may consider attendance at church staff meetings a waste of time if school issues are not regularly addressed. Pastors may not convey a sense of availability for the school administrator to drop by his office and seek counsel or share ideas. There are many ways that healthy communication can be stopped, but many experts consider good, open communication as essential to a successful partnership between the Christian school ministry and the church.

Another major issue for a pastor and school administrator relates to conflict management. What happens when a family in the school has a disagreement with a teacher or school administrator? Sometimes a parent will bypass meeting with those they have the problem with and they will go directly to the pastor. Following the principle Jesus established in Matthew 18:15, churches often insist that people meet first with the person with whom they have the disagreement. Then they move up the line of authority from that person until the issue is resolved. However, pastors are often asked to give a person a hearing before that procedure is followed. Pastors and school administrators need to agree how these situations will be handled. When leaders do not follow the chosen path for reconciling conflict, even more conflict can result.

In addition to the pastor, other church leaders also need to communicate well with the school staff. Frustration comes easily when there are scheduling conflicts and infringements on meeting space. Church leaders must develop clear procedures for keeping an accurate church calendar for all the ministries of the church. Similarly, trust

can break down if the school staff responsible for ministry's finances does not have a good relationship with church staff and committee members who are responsible for the overall financial integrity of the church. A system of checks and balances must be in place and a reporting system for the school's finances must be established so that regular communication occurs. If the school is experiencing financial trouble, church leaders need to be alerted and a plan for handling cash shortfalls or surpluses must be established and communicated. These are only a couple of examples of places where communication breaks down between school staff and church leaders. The starting point for unity is to make sure that policies, procedures and overall philosophy of ministry is communicated so that frustration over petty issues is eliminated as much as possible. No church and school ministry will be able to predict and plan for every problem or event, but when communication lines are clear and good communication is rehearsed, the opportunity for greater unity and smooth operations increases greatly.

### **Communicating with the Congregation**

The second line of communication must occur between the Christian school ministry and the church congregation. There are several reasons why the typical church member might know very little about the ministry of the school. First, in many Christian school ministries, over half of the students come from families that do not attend the sponsoring church. Furthermore, those students whose families do attend the sponsoring church may only make up a small percentage of the total church population. In other words, there are many families in the church that do not have family members enrolled in the Christian school ministry and, therefore, they are not familiar with the school's contribution to the church's ministry.

A second reason certain church members may not know much about the Christian school ministry in terms of its time of operation is the fact that the Christian school operates when many church members are not a church. Most church programs take place on weeknights, likely Wednesday night, and Sundays. Perhaps with the exception of extracurricular activities such as sporting events, most church members will not see the school ministry in action. This is unusual for a church ministry. For example, even if a senior adult does not have a child, they will see children going to Sunday school, sitting in worship or performing in the children's choir on occasion. But church members not directly involved in the school will not likely see children attending class, playing on a school sports team or performing in a school play. The result can be a communication gap between many church members and the school ministry that can erode support for the ministry as a whole.

Communication between the school ministry and the congregation becomes important as the church family is asked to support the Christian school ministry. Many sponsoring churches provide financial assistance to their school ministries. Typically, all church members vote to approve the budget and a degree of understanding of the school ministry's efforts and value in the church's mission is important for such support. Church members also experience the consequences of shared space. If their only experience

with the school is the extra desks that take up space in their crowded classroom, support for the school ministry can be difficult to create. School ministries must be intentional about communicating their mission, values, goals and accomplishments with church family. For the school ministry to be successful, the church family must be proud of the school ministry and recognize its value and participation in accomplishing the church's overall mission.

## **Chapter Summary**

Anyone who says that Christian school ministries are simple and trouble-free is not telling the truth. When a church adds over thirty-five hours of ministry time to its weekly schedule and increases its staff by dozens of school employees, there will be issues that even the most experienced school administrator cannot avoid. But for all the risk that is involved in starting a Christian school ministry, there is an equal or greater amount of reward. As long as there is sin in our world, ministry will be messy, but the good news is that it is worth it.

In this chapter, I have sought to introduce you to the kinds of issues that can arise as a church births and grows a Christian school ministry. None of the problems are unsolvable. In fact, in the process of solving problems, church and school leaders grow in their ability to manage and resolve conflict. Leaders also learn more about themselves, the Bible, and God's unique vision for their church. Values are clarified and the church's mission is solidified as leaders grapple with new methods for discipling young saints. None of the effort is wasted when the finished product is kept in mind—a mature, disciplined, intelligent, dedicated child of God.

There are ways to minimize the difficulties of starting a new ministry. We can learn from the experience of others and we can anticipate the issues mentioned in this chapter and make policy decisions in advance in order to address problems before they occur. Not every conflict can be predicted or intercepted, but in the next chapter I will further address many of the issues raised above and provide biblical and historical insights that will help leaders come to their own conclusions about how to build a healthy Christian school ministry.