

How Does Your School Cultivate Spiritual Growth?

Christian schools are an ideal place for young people to grow spiritually—and spiritual maturity is high on the list of characteristics we want our graduates to have. How does your school intentionally ensure that spiritual formation takes place among students? If your school doesn't have a plan in place, I encourage you to consider discussing the following approach with your school leadership. Enjoy these thoughts from Dr. Bob Stouffer, principal of Oskaloosa Christian School in Iowa.

Are you ever concerned about how well your children are maturing spiritually at your Christian school? Just because a student is enrolled at a Christ-centered school doesn't mean she or he is conforming steadily into the likeness of Christ. Some Christian schools have unfortunately drifted away from strong spiritual moorings. While you as the parent are primarily responsible for the spiritual formation of your children, you still need a strong spiritual partner in your Christian school.

I would like to share one specific way that you can get involved with the in-school spiritual development of your children. The following approach to spiritual formation is one of the best I've seen among the dozens of schools I have visited or administered in the past 15 years. What is this transformative school practice?

At our Christian school, one or two students from each grade level (kindergarten through eighth grade) are grouped to participate in a beautiful disciple-making model that we call chapel groups. There are 12 groups of 10 to 12 students. A teacher is a part of each group but doesn't control it, so the greatest joy of this approach is that junior high students truly lead the younger kids.

A teacher committee chooses a theme and theme song for each school year; for instance, our theme this year centered on the Beatitudes. The committee also schedules activities for the entire year. Each chapel group is assigned a different color, and each member of the group wears a T-shirt that color. The theme logo is imprinted on all T-shirts, so the school is unified.

Each grade level is responsible for leading a monthly chapel; for example, the kindergarten class and teacher presented our schoolwide chapel in September. During the first week of each month, the eighth graders meet with the month's lead teacher to learn about the chapel, chapel songs, and chapel activities, so that all of the students are thoroughly prepped for their roles and responsibilities.

During the chapel period of the first week of the month, the eighth graders lead their respective chapel groups in becoming familiar with that month's songs and arm motions. The second week is the chapel led by the scheduled chapel group. That month's lead teacher and classroom lead the student body by singing, reading Scripture, and performing narratives and skits. Then students break up into their chapel groups and complete an application activity. The pace is fast. The activities

are engaging and energizing. The mix of different-colored T-shirts is a literal and veritable rainbow of the Kingdom breaking through on earth! School parents and grandparents are invited to gather in the bleachers to celebrate the Lord and the leadership of the students.

This intergenerational interspersing of students and staff is wonderful to behold—not just during chapel activities, but any day, when students are high-fiving fellow chapel-group members from other grade levels. Not only that, but the younger students look to the junior highers to observe the Christlike behavior they would like to emulate when they reach that particular grade level.

A parent volunteer from another school recently visited our school to observe how chapel groups work. She is known as the "theme integrationist" for her Christian school. She is (and all Christian schools should be) seeking ways to naturally infuse spiritual formation in venues for growth: Bible class, chapel, and academics in every classroom. We too often compartmentalize our spiritual formation activities, but Christian schools must be intentional about integrating a biblical worldview into all aspects of the programming. The staff members are the "living curriculum," and they partner with parents to disciple children in the classrooms, performance halls, and athletic arenas. The entire school campus is holy ground. Every student should be involved in a total school worship experience.

My call to action is for you to inquire about how your school intentionally ensures that spiritual formation is taking place. Perhaps your school would consider using chapel groups, since they could be a juggernaut that could radically transform the spiritual culture of your school. I would be pleased to assist you in forming this model. Do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail (principal@oskaloosachristian.net) or telephone (641-672-2174).

We must be concerned about the spiritual wellness of our Christian schools. As a parent, you have a responsibility to hold the board and administration accountable for positively influencing a school that truly gives sincere evidence of Christ as first love. Chapel groups are an important way of creating community, and this will assist you in your responsibility of discipling your children.



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