

CLAS S I S

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Sine doctrina vita est quasi mortis imago

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Operational Funding

*Compiled by Ty Fischer
from contributions by Peter Baur,
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Recently, ACCS schools were polled concerning the biggest challenges that they faced. The greatest concern was simply meeting operating expenses.

ACCS asked the above named gentlemen to look at this challenge and suggest solutions. All of these men have extensive financial experience in business as well as in ACCS schools.

Here are ten principles recommended by these men that will help schools struggling with operational expenses to thrive:

1. **Don't charge too little.** People who can afford it should pay the real cost of educating their child. Every school should know how much tuition they would have to charge so fundraising is not necessary at their school. Many schools get half of the equation correct—they try to set their tuition so that the majority of their target families can afford it. However, in the end, they subsidize those who can actually afford to pay the entire tuition for their child. Many schools that are thriving financially have a sliding tuition scale. Affluent families pay exactly what it costs to educate their child, and the school raises funds for those families who can not afford full price. That way, subsidies benefit those who actually have need—not those who don't.

2. **Invest in what matters.** Books, facilities and teachers cost money; budget for them. Many schools lose focus and struggle because of simple lack of planning or setting of priorities. Every school board should ask: What is important to our school? What is essential? A school must have a facility, and classical Christian schools should strive to eventually have facilities that reflect the excellence of the education we are providing. Teachers also cost money. Good teachers are worthy of double honor. Do not embitter your teachers by failing to pay them a living wage. Aim at paying them as much or more than their secular counterparts. As you do this, however, be certain you hold them accountable to the standards of excellence we have as classical Christian schools.

3. **Ask for financial help.** Many are willing to help but need to be asked. There is skill in knowing who to ask for what and how to ask them. This is a two-edged sword. First, as schools that teach rhetoric, we must practice what we preach and learn the language of respectfully asking for money.

Continued on page 2

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Inside this issue:

Marketing.....4
Quid Novi.....6-7
Classifieds.....5, 8-11
New Members.....12



Operational Funding

continued from page 1

Second, we must eschew all pride and realize our ignorance. You must recognize if you do not have business expertise on your administration and board, and you need to look for help. Most who head a school are good at either the educational process (curriculum, training teachers, etc.) or the business side. Often, administrators know grammar, logic, Latin, and even Greek, but are ignorant of the practical knowledge needed to respectfully ask those with the money to donate to our cause. Be on the lookout for Christians in your area with knowledge and contacts—even if they are not a perfect theological match. Also, if you do not have contact with Christians having strong business sense, contact the ACCS office and our executive director will put you in touch with leaders across the country that have this knowledge and would love to help you succeed and thrive financially.

4. **Know what you need to know.** You need to know your target market and what people in that market can pay. Setting tuition rates that are far above this level means that most will be hindered from coming to your school. You will either have to raise a tremendous amount of money and subsidize everyone or you will have to pay your teachers peanuts—which will not work long term. Ask questions like this: Is there a Christian community (i.e., churches) in this area that will support this type of school?

5. **Give away anything you can—information, ideas, curriculum.** God blesses giv-

ers. Receivers tend to give. If salvation is by grace, how much more Christian education! If God graciously blesses you, look to be a blessing to schools or Christian homeschool students around you. Sometimes this will make little sense when you are just

scraping by yourself, but we, as believers, do not love one another because it makes financial sense. We do not do for others simply so that they can do something for us. We help others because Christ has bought us with His blood. That said, Christian community is a tremendous blessing, and the beginning of community happens best when everyone holds out God's gifts freely to others.

6. **Make decisions like you would in business.** Schools may be charities, but they operate best as a well-run business. Do you have a budget? Does it reflect what is important to you? Do you review your budget regularly and see if you are over or under budget? If you are not doing adequate financial planning for the short term (this year) and long term (permanent stability), take some time, have a board retreat, do some planning before you get to the retreat and nail down some of these business practices. Thinking ahead and planning is not a lack of faith; instead, failing to do this demonstrates a lack of faith. Faith and trust in a loving Heavenly Father should result in a conviction that as we are faithful He will bless

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our work and restrain the curse. He does this, of course, not because we are worthy, but because we are His in Christ—who has redeemed us with His blood. Trusting God means planning faithfully for the future.

7. **Think in 200 year increments.** The financial investments you make should remain valuable for many generations in order to relieve your posterity of the same strain you feel. Classical Christian education teaches children—and adults—to love truth, beauty and goodness. These permanent things which are linked to the character of God should be reflected in the buildings we inhabit and the books that we read. Right now, however, we might be stuck in dank church basements with books that are taped together. We must not, however, compromise our long term vision because of our present circumstances. Our buildings 200 years from now need to have the same sort of permanence as the buildings built by our Christian forefathers. They built for millennia. Our age builds half-billion dollar stadiums that have planned obsolescence in thirty years. Christians tend to aim at the lowest common denominator. We build functionally, but is function all we should consider? Do we teach Latin or logic or rhetoric simply for functional purposes? If we do, the name for us is “sophist.” The ancient sophists learned only so that they could have power and wealth. While we certainly hope that our graduates can earn a living, we want more. We are building a culture that is built on the love of learning and of enduring things.

8. **Set your tuition so that it will cover the vast majority of your operating expenses.** Doing otherwise puts you in permanent jeopardy, and you risk financial ruin. Find out how much

money you can realistically raise, and do not pretend that you are going to raise substantially more than this. Most experts say that if you are depending on fundraising to meet more than 20% of your operational funding

Continued on page 3

Operational Funding

continued from page 2

you are on dangerous ground. If you are consistently counting on more than this from unknown sources, you are putting yourself in great danger.

9. Education in the logic and rhetoric years costs more—budget for it. Just as we deny egalitarianism in the classroom, we must deny egalitarianism in the costs of education. Grammar school is learning the facts. The logic and rhetoric years demand more books, more work and a different approach. To be successful in these areas, classroom sizes might need to shrink so that students will have time to argue, to think and to discuss issues. Make sure that you know what you

want out of your students when they graduate, and do not hesitate to pour yourself and your financial resources into your students to achieve these ends.

10. Quality teachers cost money. Sometimes schools have donors that they do not recognize and often ignore—their teachers. Make plans to eliminate the unfortunate circumstance of having your teachers be the biggest donors to the school by virtue of

receiving salaries that are far less than a market wage. Most teachers at classical Christian schools know that they could make more at other schools. Too often, however, schools get comfortable with this sort of expectation. If we deny the sacred/secular distinction that was prevalent in the Middle Ages, should we ask teachers to live below the poverty line? Would we ask a Christian doctor or lawyer or businessman to do the same? Of course not!

We must be committed to paying our teachers in a manner that would be commensurate with the median income of the families whose children they educate. If we want teachers to help us raise princes, they must know from

personal experience distinctions like good, better and best.

These are some of the important principles that all schools need to come to grips with as they start up or as they begin to grow. Following these principles will bear great fruit for our schools. What is more, failing to follow these principles will grind our schools into the ground. We hope and pray that these principles will bless your schools as you faithfully apply them.

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*This article has been produced by the Ad
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