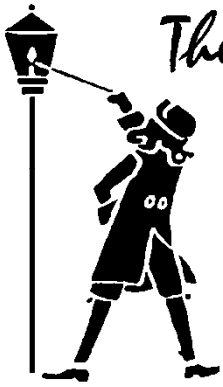


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IN CHRIST AND FOR CHRIST - TO KNOW CHRIST AND TO MAKE HIM KNOWN

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December 1, 2008

## WHO'S TEACHING YOUR CHILD?

When a child enters a school building, with whom does the ultimate authority for the education of that child lie? Local school boards invest hundreds of hours in managing the affairs of their schools, fixing budgets and establishing policies that they believe will achieve the best education of their children with the resources available to them. Superintendents and principals must exercise great wisdom in the oversight of their schools, particularly in hiring and firing the teaching staff. Most teachers entered their profession due to some sense of calling, a desire to influence and inspire future generations through quality classroom instruction.

Teachers do not receive nearly the appropriate compensation for their dedication and sheer work required to educate children. Obstacles to learning clutter every classroom, from poor teacher-pupil ratios to inadequate teaching tools, from burdensome policies to personal financial pressures caused by misplaced cultural priorities. Many teachers must fight hard just to fulfill their sense of calling adequately. It is little wonder when they become defensive of their role and assume undue authority for a child's education.

Highly educated and overly burdened with responsibility, school administrators must manage multiple forces that work like competing weather fronts vying to control the climate. Like generals behind the front lines, they feel the weight of their decisions as they affect their teaching staffs. Their strategic role can sometimes cloud their vision of the ultimate goal. Occasionally their efforts to win the battles cause them to forget the purpose of the war.

As public education has evolved in the U.S. over the last century, confusion and debates about authority have plagued education. An incident at the Joseph Estabrook Elementary School in Lexington, Massachusetts illustrates this. A "diversity book bag" was prepared at the beginning of the year, containing books on various subjects intended to expand a child's appreciation for diverse cultures. The bag was scheduled to be sent home with one child at a time throughout the year.

In January of 2005 the bag went home with David and Tonia Parker's five-year-old son. One book in the bag, *Who's In a Family?* by Robert Skutch, promotes diversity of a different sort. It portrays various family compositions, including families with same-sex parents. Parker believed that the book subtly promoted acceptance of a homosexual lifestyle. This concerned him, not only because it opposed his Christian moral beliefs, but also because he believed that he and his wife owned an important responsibility for instruction in such moral issues. It seemed inappropriate for the school to be exposing kindergarten students to the subject.

Parker engaged in a series of emails with the school and finally met with the school's principal and district director of instruction. Parker requested that he and his wife be notified in the future of any planned classroom discussions involving adult themes, giving them the option to exclude their son from those discussions. The school denied his request, saying that same-sex marriage was legal in Massachusetts, and therefore the topic did not require parental notification. The Lexington School Committee chairman, Thomas Griffiths, commented, "We don't view telling a child that there is a family out there with two mommies as teaching about homosexuality, heterosexuality, or any kind of sexuality. We are teaching about the realities of where different children come from."

Clearly, both sides have an important perspective. The debate, however, finally rested with educational authority. The Parkers contended that they possessed final authority for the instruction of their son. The school administrators believed differently, as expressed in the persistent denial of parental notification in this matter. David Parker refused to leave the building until they agreed to a parental notification policy in the future. The principal would not comply and called the police. Parker was handcuffed and put in jail on a charge of trespassing.

Schools must establish rules and procedures that ensure an orderly environment for learning, and protect against perpetual interruptions to the instructional schedule. The Estabrook administrators, however, lost sight of the purpose of the war. They refused to recognize the parents as the final authority in education, subjecting parents to "friendly fire."

The incident reminds Christian parents of the need to be salt and light in their communities. Involvement should not consist only of watchdog activity, with appearances at school only to challenge policies or practices that jeopardize their authority. Parents should take the opportunity to connect with teachers and administrators, attend parent-teacher conferences and school board meetings, interact with their children about their daily experiences at school, and supplement their child's education.

When parents place children in the public school system, they agree to share their authority with the system, requiring parents and schools to cooperate in the task of education. Parents, however, should not abdicate their ultimate responsibility for training their children. They must superintend the superintendents, principals, teachers, and curriculum to ensure that their children are being trained in wisdom and truth. Parents should never fear the truth, but only the subtle corruptions of that truth. Education affords them the opportunity to bear witness to the truth not only to their children, but to school teachers and administrators.

*Pastor Stan*

(For further information on this subject see the *Boston Globe* article at:  
[www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2005/04/29/arrested\\_father\\_had\\_point\\_to\\_make/](http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2005/04/29/arrested_father_had_point_to_make/)  
or watch YouTube at:  
<http://link.brightcove.com/services/link/bcpid1815820715/bctid1822459319>.)