

Tuition and Mission or, Do Policies Teach?

In a meeting with Christian school administrators about long range tuition planning, I heard the following tuition policy rationale that requires a response. *Since some parents paying their own children's tuition are reluctant to donate to cover another family's tuition (financial aid), it makes practical sense to cover financial aid within the budget and ask parents to donate to cover more acceptable or exciting needs such as teacher bonuses or pay increases.*

I won't argue the practicality of such a plan. Certainly we need to be wise in what we ask for. Often, special auction or other fundraising projects, including athletics, performing arts and technology, have been chosen (and have been successful) **specifically** because they were exciting, visible, and directly enrich "my" student. But tuition policy also has non-monetary implications. Policy cannot be guided solely by dollars or practicality, especially in a mission-driven educational institution which teaches that we must "do" the truth to know it. Not only policy on curriculum, activities, hiring and discipline, but also financial policy must be guided by the mission of the institution and lend support to that mission. In addition to having an **immediate effect** (e.g. initial setting of rates) policy also has a **ripple effect** over time and throughout a population because **policy reveals what we really value and serves to attract and retain people who agree with it**. So,

1. If we adopt policy to appeal to a particular constituency who are not motivated by the Biblical injunction to care for the poor, the result will be that we will attract additional likeminded people and will disaffect those who value the Biblical injunction. Will we be building a constituency of "fee for service" thinkers who will come and go according to how their personal needs are met?
2. Some of parents have remained committed to Christian schools for a quarter of a century or more out of a commitment to the idea of Christian education beyond their own children. A shift in the kind of parents we attract and retain can have an awfully long-term impact.
3. If we do not practice care for the poor in our institutions and teach it to our parents through explanation and promotion of our policy, how will our parents reinforce what we teach in the classroom to their children and to other parents, thus building a community of like-minded believers?
4. If we do not "**do** care for others and especially for the poor" as an institution, how will we be believed by students when we **teach** these values in the classroom?
5. We are told that teaching is modeling and that the ultimate goal of Christian education is discipleship. Students can be equipped to transform their world by seeing Truth lived out in action (in lives). Hearing the words alone won't do that.

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