

July 2011

Dear Upper School Parent,

Greetings to you! I hope that you and your family are enjoying summer to the fullest and have been engaged in activities and events that are refreshing and renewing. While I am not at all ready for summer to be over, I am thinking about next school year and hope that you will take some time to look through this summer packet in order to prepare.

When wondering why they have to learn what we are teaching, a common question we hear from our upper school students, one that you probably hear at home as well, is “What am I ever going to do with this?” They, like the rest of us, are quick to ask pragmatic questions. While this question is legitimate and not unimportant, it is not the right starting place concerning the purpose of education. In his classic work, *The Idea of a Christian College*, Arthur Holmes writes, “The question to ask about education is not ‘What can I do with it?’ That is the wrong question because it concentrates on instrumental values and reduces everything to a useful art. The right question is rather ‘What can it do to me?’”

Looking to the tradition of classical, Christian education, Holmes explains that the liberal arts are ones which concern intrinsic values and are ends in themselves. More important than offering training that is only immediately practical and, therefore, not of lasting value, classical, Christian education shapes the soul of the student, which is of everlasting value. Holmes explains, “Liberal education provides an opportunity to steward life more effectively by becoming more fully a human person in the image of God, by seeing life whole rather than fragmented, by transcending the provincialism of our place in history, our geographic location, or our job. Provincialism isolates us from our past, isolates us from segments of the human race; cultural provincialism isolates the American way of life from anything else; vocational provincialism limits the horizon to a certain kind of task. But liberal education is an opportunity to become whole and to see life whole rather than provincially fragmented in one way or another. It is an opportunity to find meaning for everything I am and do. Christian liberal arts education is concerned that we do this in the light of God’s self-revelation, so that we learn to think Christianly, to value as Christians should, and so to act responsibly.”

Interestingly, an education that only tries to answer the question “What am I going to do with this?” ends up being useful only for a short period of time. But an education that continues to ask, “What is this doing to the student?” has lasting value, with ongoing practical usefulness. It reminds me of Jesus’ exhortation to seek first the kingdom of God. By pursuing what is ultimate and eternal, we are better equipped to live in the mundane.

It is one thing to understand this and agree with it, but as a school in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is not easy to implement. Modern education has been traveling down the path of pragmatism for so long that it has changed our default view of the purpose of school. Therefore, in order to provide your children a classical,

Christian education, a real education, we must have teachers who understand these distinctions and have ongoing training and encouragement in what it looks like in the classroom.

While our teachers engage in various kinds of training throughout the school year, summertime is ideal for deeper immersion and sharper refinement. This summer, several of our upper school teachers have been able to participate in training opportunities. Curtis Correll attended a conference hosted by the Institute for Classical Schools which concentrated on mathematics and the physical sciences. It was limited to about twenty teachers and was facilitated by two premier teachers of math and science from classical schools in Richmond, VA and Austin, TX. Harvey Kay is continuing work toward a Master of Arts degree in History at the University of Memphis. This summer he is participating with a professor in a directed readings course in which he is studying the lives of the seminal figures of the Reformation. Greg Kinney is also getting further training in History and methods of teaching it by participating in a conference at Millsaps College. Adam Lockridge and I both attended a conference hosted by the Institute for Classical Schools in which representatives from the most established classical schools in the country met to discuss crucial issues concerning the model of classical education and best practices in its implementation. We benefitted greatly from the training, which included lectures and discussions led by John Lennox, a mathematician from Oxford who is a Christian intellectual and has recently debated well-known atheists such as Richard Dawkins and Peter Singer. Dr. Lennox is well-aware of what is happening at classical schools like WA and gave us much encouragement to continue what we are doing at the levels of elementary and secondary education.

Another teacher who is getting training this summer is actually new to Westminster. I am pleased to announce that Mary Read will be teaching 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade science courses. Along with undergraduate and graduate degrees in the sciences, Mary has been a researcher and teacher at the University of Memphis for the last several years. She will be attending a conference this month that is focused on training science teachers how to use Socratic discussion in order to teach students both the skills and details of scientific understanding. Additionally, I am equally pleased to announce Michael Stewart, who will be teaching Latin and Ancient Civilization. Michael comes to us after just completing law school at the University of Alabama. Prior to that, he taught Latin in classical schools in Alabama and Virginia. Both Mrs. Read and Mr. Stewart have had excellent training and experience. Coupled with a demonstrated love for students and for their respective disciplines, these two teachers are welcome additions to our faculty, and I know that you will enjoy getting to know them.

Please keep all of our upper school teachers in your prayers. They are the lifeblood of the upper school and much is demanded of them as they train our students to understand and live in light of the reality that they are made in God's image. Please know that you and your family are in my prayers this summer, and I look forward to seeing you soon. As you read through this packet, please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions. Blessings to you!

Yours in Christ,

Andrew L. Smith  
Head of Upper School