

# *EDUCATIONAL GRACE*

## **A History of Providence Academy's Formation**



In early March of 1994, five couples from various walks of life, with ten gradeschool-aged children among them and from three different local churches, were brought together with a sense of calling that our community needed another Christian school. Those five couples that formed the original steering committee were Billy and Penny Kilgore, Earle and Cara Chute, Wayne and Vicki Carroll, Keith and Nina Gilchrist, and Paul and Debbie Gorman-and after a few months, the five men instituted the original school board. Our children had been in schools ranging from home-based, to Christian, to public. Penny Kilgore had taught in another local Christian school and provided a wealth of many years of classroom experience that kept us focused on what a new school would need in place when the doors opened.

The initial inspiration was multi-faceted and far beyond a general call to reactively start up another alternative to government school in Johnson City. We all did recognize, though, that restoring the ruins of modern education and embracing a biblical world and life view with which to educate was not going to come from politicians and bureaucrats-much less with more of our tax dollars. The naming of the school took the better part of one early meeting-but it was only by divine providence that we were being used by God to implement His plan; and as a proposed school of excellence, the title of academy was propitious. Thus was born *Providence Academy*...at least on paper and on our 501(c) 3 application.

The educational “high ground” was inspired by the Spirit’s conviction that parents’ Christ-centered lives also include the God-given stewardship responsibility not just to teach school-age children, but also to provide for them an orderly, nurturing, and challenging environment in which they would learn to think and be life-long learners. For reasons known only to God, doing so in a Classical and Christian school was the motivation behind our labor. A choice does not need to be made between genuine learning and a love of Christ. The myth of moral/spiritual neutrality in all aspects of life, but especially in education, was also appreciated, and we desired a school that would be ostensibly Christian, knowing that education is a major battleground in the spiritual warfare that the Lord tells us that we and our children will encounter (Eph.6:4).

The call became more refined through prayer and in the evening and weekend meetings that took place at *Heritage Baptist Church* and our homes. The Protestant Classical method of instruction became the academic foundation upon which we would build the curriculum and staff. Douglas Wilson’s book, *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning*, the *Logos School* resources, Dorothy Sayers’ original 1947 essay on Classical Education, *A.C.S.I.* manuals, classical educational cassette tapes, notepads, briefcases, and empty bottles of *Tylenol* shared much table space with Scripture in our individual homes and meetings. It is fair to say that this effort became a second job for all of us, as much delegated work was also done individually amidst already busy schedules. The school became a charter member of the *Association of Classical and Christian Schools*, which at that time had less than a dozen member schools across the country and none in Tennessee or this several state area. In the last three years, however, dozens more have been started by the grace of God...the Classical/Christian education is still swimming upstream in the cultural river, but Christ’s momentum is proving more than able to continue. Readers are encouraged to learn in more detail elsewhere the particulars of Classical education and why, for centuries, it was so successful in producing truly educated young adults and why *Providence Academy* steadfastly embraces this educational method.

A Classical and Christian school is evangelical and discipling in its ministry; however, the founders of the school were burdened for a non-denominational school (therefore, not parochial) that would minister to the children of believing parents (discipleship model). This is in contradistinction to a Christian school whose students may come from families that do not have believing parents (evangelical model). The type of Christian school one forms, then, is defined largely by what types of parents will be accepted and/or by the specific parochial (denominational) doctrine the school will espouse. But, the discipleship school remains evangelical, *in effect*, because not all children of believers will enter the spectrum of offered grades with a saving knowledge of Christ. Thus, the importance was recognized early to recruit good biblical role models for teachers and administrative staff and to form a sound statement of faith that embraced the essential primary doctrinal tenets of the Christian faith. Secondary doctrinal issues, such as mode and age of baptism, would not be endorsed by the school; but where questions did arise on such secondary theological issues, the student would be referred to the authority of his parents and pastor.

We planned to start grades K-6 in August 1994 if a meeting place could be secured before July 1. This was a daunting task as most church educational wings are not in compliance with city school building codes, and some eligible churches were not seeking a para-church ministry of this magnitude at the time. Some open meetings were held at *Heritage Baptist Church* to inform Christian parents further of our mission. The publicity was by word-of-mouth and church bulletin announcements. Start up money was provided generously by the steering committee families and enabled plans to progress for five months without tuition. The idea of faith promise giving, on a larger scale, similarly supported by the school’s patrons, was thus born. As a conduit of His unlimited funds, this benevolent giving program helped to bridge the difference between tuition and the real cost of education and served to

strengthen parents' commitment to the school. We wanted Christian families of many different income strata to be more likely to afford private tuition, thus intentionally avoiding elitist prep school tuition rates. The first year's tuition was \$1500.00 largely due to the stewardship vision of our host, **Mountain View Baptist Church**, which was to impact the community for Christ by making its facility open for use by a para-church ministry during the week, the time that churches are most under-utilized. By not only offering their church, but doing so rent-free, the tuition even now remains well below that of most private schools.

After much prayer and many discouraging weeks of looking at churches and several visits to a vacant elementary school, we were almost resolved by late May to defer opening the school for another year. Then we were given the name of Mr. Jim Cambron, a bi-vocational pastor at **Mountain View Baptist**, and information that the church, built just two years earlier, might have the potential educational space we needed to get started and grow into. Mr. Cambron and Deacon Ray Long were instrumental in helping us convey our mission to their membership. The rest is unvarnished providential timing and provision as the congregation of the church voted in favor of hosting us at their June 29 meeting! God provided so abundantly...a church with a warm heart and hospitality, a building already built to city codes, second floor unfinished space in which to add a grade with each subsequent year, and a rent-free user's agreement by which we paid only for our share of the utilities and janitorial service. We have, though, in partnership with the church supplied many dads and moms that have helped financially and with "elbow grease" to build new classrooms, erect an outdoor play structure, and pave the parking lot. It has, by the grace of God, been a wonderful partnership with our co-laborers for Christ at **M.V.B.C.**

During the summer of 1994, prior to school opening in the fall, only the steering committee's children were enrolled "for sure." Once the facility was procured, the charter classes began to fill for grades K-6, with combined Third/Fourth and Fifth/Sixth grades. Teacher and Administrator interviews consumed much time in June, July, and early August. P.E., Art, and Music were taught by the K-6 grade classroom teachers and parental volunteers, and a part-time teacher's aide was hired. Interest in this nascent school was very encouraging, and through additionally donated funds and equipment, we were able to stay out of long-term debt (another objective of the founders) and hire an Administrator, Mrs. Margaret Hartzler. She served us well during that first year before returning with her husband to the mission field with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Indonesia. Faculty members were hired by August 1, and their orientation began on August 15. The school's dedication service was held on August 17, and 63 students began their charter year at **Providence Academy** on August 22, 1994. Within a few weeks, the student body had increased to 69, and growth in the subsequent two years allowed for additional teachers to be hired for the individual grades and for the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades to be created. An elementary principal, office secretary, and teacher's aide were soon added on a full-time basis, in addition to part-time Art, P.E., Music, and Logic teachers.

**Providence Academy** is a servant school to you, the parents, and is but one of many tools that God has given you to biblically raise up your children to trust eternally in Jesus Christ alone for the remission of sin, impact the world for Christ, cherish and defend Truth, lead others to the Lord, and appreciate that which is truly righteous and beautiful in the Creator's world. Eventually our children will themselves be child-raisers, wage earners, church and community leaders...how are we doing as a culture or even as the Body of Christ? We can all do better educating and nurturing our children in a spiritually hostile world, and I believe God expects it. But, this, nor any other school, will do all the preparatory work for parents. Parents alone, particularly fathers, must understand, implement, and oversee the rearing of their children, and delegate where and when conscience allows. *Semper fidelis.*

- *"Religion is the only solid basis of good morals; therefore, education should teach the precepts of religion, and the duties of man towards God."* - **Gouvenour Morris, an American colonial statesman**
- *"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."* - **Ephesians 6:4**

*Sola Deo Gloria*  
Paul Gorman, M.D.,  
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