

Public School Ministry at Grace

Inform, Train, Support, and Empower



By Norene Shephard

About 80-90 percent of children who come from Christian homes attend public schools. From kindergarten through high school, each child will spend approximately 16,000 hours in an environment that promote secular humanism. It is extremely transformative, and the church must help parents to understand this reality. Grace Church is taking bold steps in this direction.

A new “across the street” ministry is being launched at Grace this fall to address these needs. Under Pastor Josh Mulvihill’s direction, Mindy Heine, Shyla Allard, and I (Norene Shephard) have leadership roles in this ministry. Plans include events that encourage and uplift teachers, educate parents and students about their religious rights in the classroom, and promote biblical worldview teaching. “We want our classrooms to be fertile soil where truth and righteousness will flourish.”

Among the goals of the ministry are:

- To educate Christians within the public schools regarding their rights so they can live their faith confidently. (Joshua 1:9)
- To empower Christians within the public schools to share their faith with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:15)
- To equip parents to play an active role in their children’s education. (Proverbs 22:6)
- To engage students and parents in Christian worldview training so they have a thoroughly biblical worldview and can defend against what is taught in opposing secular curriculum.

Wasn’t prayer and Bible study in our schools overruled by the Supreme Court decades ago? Prayer is happening in schools all across the land, and Bible studies are allowed as well. While schools cannot require or sponsor these activities, students are allowed to pray and organize prayer and Bible study groups. In some elementary schools, Good News Clubs or similar children’s clubs meet after school hours. In many schools, teachers meet daily or weekly to pray. The reality is, they do have broad freedom to pray, lead Bible studies, and express their faith openly without repercussion.

Students Take Action

Central Middle School will have a new Bible study, led by two girls who were looking for ways to share God’s Word about the mission field: Sarah Welch and Alissa Merrick. Feeling God calling them to start a campus Bible study, they discussed the idea with their parents. They then prayerfully approached their principal, who affirmed their idea and said they first needed to find a teacher who would sponsor them.

They prayed with their parents before approaching a specific teacher. He seemed astonished at first then said, “I’ve been waiting and praying a long time for someone to ask me to do this.” Under the guidance of their parents and Pastor Travis Armstrong, the girls spent the summer preparing their school Bible study, which begins this fall.

The generation in our schools right now is a very special group. They are not only preparing for careers, ministry, and parenthood, they are the salt and light in their schools, a part of God’s plan for reaching the world for Christ wherever He places them.



Sarah Welch and Alissa Merrick

Ansel Regalado, a fourth grader who attends Grace Church, wrote a homework assignment about God’s work in his life as he dealt with a serious health challenge. His paper gave his testimony and explained his relationship with God. He turned the paper in as assigned, and the next day his teacher chose it to be read to the class. This gave Ansel the opportunity to talk about Christ to his entire class as one of the ways he practices “prayer-care-share.”

On another occasion, Ansel noticed that a classmate was experiencing earache pain. Right there in class, he gathered others around and led a prayer for the classmate, much to everyone’s astonishment.



Ansel Regalado

Know Your Rights

Students and teachers need to be well informed about their rights and boundaries regarding the expression of faith in the public schools. One of our ministry priorities is to instill a solid understanding of the religious rights that now exist in the classroom. The United States Department of Education outlined these rights in the publication, “Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools,” available at www.ed.gov. Some of these rights are:

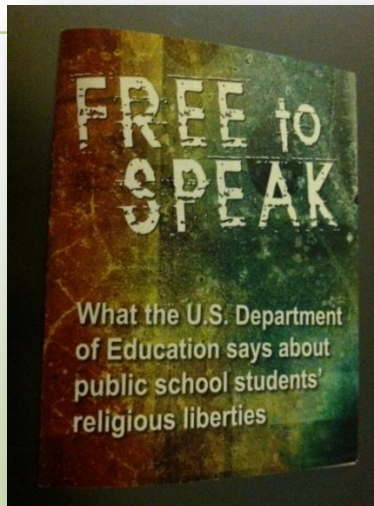
- Students may read their Bibles or other scriptures, say grace before meals, talk about their faith, and pray or study religious materials with fellow students during non-instructional time, as long as it does not disrupt instruction.
- Students may express their religious beliefs and discuss their faith in homework, artwork and other assignments, free from discrimination.
- Students may freely pray or address their faith in a speech, such as graduation, but school officials may not mandate or organize prayer during a school.
- In addition, teachers may use the Bible and other sacred material, such as religious songs, in the classroom as long as it is used for the sake of its literary or historical value and not used for worship or proselytizing in the classroom.

Christian educators are on the frontlines daily, facing detractors who would skew the delineation between truth and lies. They are quietly and effectively praying, caring, and sharing, living out the Gospel as they hold back the tide of unbiblical ideas that bombard our children. They need discernment to deal with false doctrine that creeps into school curriculum. As a retired teacher and Minnesota field director of Christian Educators Association International (www.ceai.org), I lead the part of the public school ministry at Grace that addresses their specific needs.

Parents need to be informed and equipped as well. It is not enough to presume the teaching our children receive in Sunday School will be sufficient to counteract what they are learning from the secular curriculum in our public schools. Parents must become active participants at the schools their children attend. Mindy Heine, a mom of three in the Eden Prairie public schools, works directly with parents. She has hosted several groups, sharing her vision and brainstorming ideas that can positively impact schools.

In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he states that he labors and struggles "to present everyone mature in Christ." (Colossians 1:28-29) Education must be on every parent's radar as it either helps present or prevent maturity in Christ. During a devotional presented at the "4 to 14 Window" conference in May, Pastor Dobbs said we all respond to the erosion of the culture in one of three ways: we can reject it and totally isolate ourselves from everything, we can receive it and accept everything about it, or we can redeem it. Please join as we seek to redeem our schools.

For more information about the public school ministry at Grace Church, contact Mindy Heine at dmheine@gmail.com or Norene Shephard at norene.shephard@gmail.com.



On Sun, Sept 8, Grace Church students and teachers will be commissioned during both worship services.

The leaflet, "Free to Speak," which outlines educational freedoms in simple language, will be available at a school ministry information table and in the Children's welcome area.