



Me! Teach in a Christian School?

By Mark Taylor, College/University Representative

I had a father who loved sports and a mother who loved learning and the English language. My mother also was a talented musician. In the realm of multiple intelligences, my father was high in bodily-kinesthetic and logical-mathematical, and my mother was high in verbal-linguistic and musical-rhythmic intelligences. Their strengths and gifts greatly influenced my life and future paths. Of even more importance, they modeled and taught me the importance of living for God and using my gifts and strengths to His glory.

High School Years

By the time I was in high school, I had developed a strong interest in music and sports. I played football, baseball, and basketball in high school. I was a percussionist. I played in the band and the youth symphony. I sang in a group in my church, too. I enjoyed learning and focused on a college preparatory track.

I had opportunities to develop leadership skills and learned the importance of service. I was invited to join the National Honor Society, an organization that honors students who have excelled in scholarship, leadership, service, and character.

During my senior year in high school, I really struggled with what I believed God wanted me to do with my life. My grandmother thought that I would be a missionary. I did not believe that I had a call to a foreign mission field; however, I knew whatever I did would involve making a difference in the lives of others.

I considered social work and teaching. If I were to teach, I was interested in teaching music initially. I had a heart for kids with special needs, too. They were like the underdog, and I always rooted for the underdog. By the end of my senior year in high school, I felt that God was leading me to focus on a degree in elementary education/special education.

College

Four years after high school graduation, I graduated from college with a Bachelor of Arts in elementary education and special education from West Liberty State University, located just four miles from my home. One activity I treasured from my college years was my involvement with the Navigators, a Christian discipling ministry. This ministry would influence my life for many years to come.

Teaching Opportunities

Upon graduating, God opened a door for me to begin my teaching career at the Special Education Learning Facility (known as SELF School) of Porter County in Valparaiso, Indiana. I taught a junior high class of Trainable Mentally Handicapped (as it was termed in those days) students. Some of you might enjoy knowing my first contract was for \$10,500.

It is interesting how God leads. I never thought I would be teaching and living in Indiana. However, my parents moved there, and that is where God led me. This allowed me to be near my family and my younger brother and sister. In addition, I was able to be a part of an awesome Nazarene church in Portage, Indiana. I worked with the youth at church, and I was hired to serve as an interim youth pastor for about six months. The church had an incredible music program, and I was able to be a part of that also. All these took place while I was a fulltime teacher.

During my time teaching at SELF School, I decided to study and earn my Master of Science in education with a specialization in learning disabilities from Indiana University. (At that time, your teaching license required that you earn a master's degree within five years of teaching.)

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I never expected the next part of my story in education. My church decided to start a Christian school, known then and today as Portage Christian School. The church hired a school administrator and decided to start with grades 3-12 for the first year. The administrator approached me about teaching and being the athletic director. At first, I said no because I really enjoyed what I was doing. Then he asked me to pray about it. After much prayer, I agreed to take the position. It thrills and blesses my heart to see the school and the athletic program still thriving today, some 40 years later.

After a few years, the administrator asked me to be an assistant principal. Within another year, I was hired to be the head administrator. I taught, coached, and ministered there for 10 years. While there, I earned my Master of Arts degree in Christian school administration.

Me! Teach in Missouri?

I was asked to consider a school superintendent position at North County Christian School in Ferguson, MO, a suburb of St. Louis, MO. After much prayer, my family and I stepped out in faith and moved to Missouri. My charge was to revive a school that was struggling greatly and restart a high school program. With God's help and blessing, we were able to get the school back on firm footing and establish a good high school program. All six of our children would eventually graduate from North County Christian High School. Eleven years into my ministry there, God surprised me by taking me in another direction.

Me! Teach at a College?

I had always thought that I would like to teach at the college level. I never considered it seriously until I received a phone call from a friend who taught at a nearby community college, St. Louis Community College. She told me the college was desperately looking for someone to teach a course in music for elementary teachers. She knew that my education and background would be a good fit. It seemed like God was opening the door for me to get a taste of college teaching and a little extra income. I could work at it along with my administrative responsibilities at North County Christian School, so I decided to teach that course.

It went quite well. And then another course was available to teach as a part-time faculty member. In about a year, one of the full-time faculty and department chair was going to leave because of her husband's out of state job transfer. She encouraged me to apply for the full-time position. Should I apply? I enjoyed my ministry with North County Christian School. Was God leading here? I did not have a lot of experience or doctoral studies then. As I prayed, I felt led to step out and apply. I believed I would not have been offered the position if it was not God's plan.

To make a long story short, I was offered the position as an assistant professor. I started full-time at St. Louis Community College in 2000. I even became an assistant basketball coach at the college.

The Journey Continues...

God has allowed me to serve Him using the gifts and abilities through what is now 20 years at St. Louis Community College. I was part of starting our Campus Crusade Ministry on campus. I have been able to coach college basketball. Currently, I am a full professor and a department chair at the community college.

I am still actively involved in the Christian school I served but now as a school board member. I play the drums with the worship band in our church. I like to think of myself as a missionary in St. Louis, fulfilling my grandmother's prophecy.

In 1974, when I graduated from high school, I never dreamed I would be teaching college in St. Louis, Missouri. At the end of this year, I will have been involved in education for 41 years.

It all started in West Virginia and ended up in Missouri with a stop off in Indiana. You never know where God will lead you in your education career and ministry.

"Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground" (Psalm 143:10, NIV).

Dr. Mark Taylor lives in Ferguson, Missouri. He has worked in the field of education for 41 years. He is a professor of education and serves as the department chair of the Social and Behavioral Sciences/Teacher Education at St. Louis Community College in St. Louis, Missouri. You may contact Mark at mltaylor@stlcc.edu.