

# PRIVATE, PUBLIC & HOME

## Making the right choice for your family

**W**hen *Today's Pentecostal Evangel* tackles the subject of education, we are sure to get passionate feedback from readers. Advocates of homeschooling, private Christian schools and public schools all feel strongly about their respective choices, and many would like to see this magazine endorse one specific type of education.

We believe there is room for diversity in the church when it comes to education; in fact, there is diversity in our office. *Evangel* staff members have made different decisions regarding the education of their children.

God created every child with unique talents and needs. For every child, there is a specific combination of parenting and education that will best contribute to his or her success.

Whether your children are already in school, or that important decision is still ahead of you, keep in mind that God knows and loves your children even more than you do. Seeking His will for your children regarding their education — and every element of their lives — is one of the most important things you can do.

Three *TPE* staff members candidly share how they made this important decision for their family, and each offers tips on how to make the most of your child's education.

### **Christian school**

*By Christina Quick*

If private schools were only for the wealthy, our family would surely be excluded. The truth is, funding our children's Christian



education has required sacrifices. From driving older model cars and shopping bargain racks to taking on extra work projects outside of our full-time jobs, my husband, Wade, and I have made deliberate efforts to ensure that our two children have the benefit of a Christ-centered learning environment.

We began our commitment five years ago when our son was about to enter kindergarten. Since neither of us could quit our jobs, we felt that homeschooling was not an option. We visited and toured the local public school as well as a Christian school.

As we sought God about our decision, we sensed Him leading us to the Christian school. There were financial concerns, but we trusted God to meet our needs as we fol-

lowed His direction.

At the end of that first school year, I proudly attended my son's kindergarten graduation, camcorder in hand. Tears welled in my eyes as a beaming group of 6-year-olds sang praises to God, quoted Scripture, said the Pledge of Allegiance and talked about the many things they'd learned. It reminded me this truly is the kind of education I want for my children.

My son is in fourth grade this year, and my daughter is a second-grader. They are good students and enthusiastic readers. Like most of the other kids in their school, they rank in the highest percentiles on national standardized tests. Most importantly, their faith is blossoming as the biblical principles we teach at home are reinforced in the classroom. With results like these, it's easy to view every

sacrifice as a worthwhile investment in their future.

#### Tips for those considering private school:

- **Don't assume you can't afford it.** Meet with the admissions director to discuss possible payment arrangements. For example, you might be able to make 12 monthly payments instead of 10. Some private schools even offer scholarships for lower-income families.

- **Consider and plan for all the costs involved.** Fees for enrollment, textbooks, extracurricular activities, lunches and extended care can add up.

- **Be realistic.** If your vision of private school is a place where every 8-year-old is a model citizen and every teacher is incapable of

mistakes, you'll be disappointed. Allow for human imperfection and do what you can (such as praying, volunteering and communicating with teachers) to make your child's school experience a positive one.

- **Don't neglect your spiritual duty.** Showing your child how to follow Christ is primarily your job, not the teacher's. A Christian school can be a valuable ally in raising godly kids, but it's never a substitute for a Christlike example at home.

CHRISTINA QUICK is staff writer for *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

#### Public school

By Ashli O'Connell

I am a product of public education. While my spiritual education was occurring at home and at our

Assemblies of God church, my academic training was taking place in a school in a city where evangelical Christians are a marked minority. I grew up believing I genuinely was a Christian soldier, fighting the battle on the front lines every day. I walked the hallways with a Bible tucked into my book bag, pulling it out when my peers put me on the spot about my faith.

My parents could have sent me to private school or kept me at home, away from the influences of other faiths and value systems. Instead, they encouraged me to investigate other worldviews, and then come home and discuss them. This approach made my faith stronger and taught me to think and to speak for myself about the difficult questions of life. My brothers and I success-

fully navigated the public school system, graduated with honors, attended college and serve today in our home churches.

Today's public schools are different places than they were 20 years ago. I would not send my children to public school in some districts in this nation. My husband and I, however, are blessed to live in an excellent school district. That certain holiday in December is still known as Christmas, many of the teachers are Christians and the academic standards are among the highest in our state.

We are sending our daughters to public school because we feel children can benefit from exposure to a variety of worldviews — as long as the atmosphere at home includes lots of discussion and analysis of the

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things they are learning at school. We do not want our girls to first learn the harsh realities of the world when they leave our home for college. We'd rather they be exposed to it in small doses as they grow so we can help shape their reactions and decision-making skills.

We also believe our girls will have an opportunity to influence the lives of their fellow students, and we are committed to helping them walk through the experience.

#### Tips for families in public school.

- *It is critical that you are involved. I signed up to be a volunteer in the library so I would be familiar with the books on the shelves and to build a rapport with the library staff in the event I had a concern about*

## You know your children best, and you know what the right decision is for your family.

*the reading material. I also volunteer in the classroom. You must have a positive working relationship with the person who spends seven hours a day pouring information and ideas into your child's head.*

- *Your child will have difficult days. It's not easy being on the outside of the crowd. Peer pressure is real. Other kids — even teachers — may mock your child's faith. But this is training for real life. Better they learn it while you still have the*

*influence to shape their reactions. Keep the lines of communication open. Discuss what happens at school each day. Pray and read the Bible regularly as a family and be intentional about spending time with your children. Do so, and you will always be the most important influence in their lives.*

- *Public school is not the best option for every family. Where academic standards are subpar and security issues are a problem, consider*

*alternatives. Also, some children are not wired to excel in a classroom environment. You know your children best, and you know what the right decision is for your family.*

ASHLI O'CONNELL spent seven and a half years as assistant editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*. She recently left the *Evangel* to pursue a teaching career in public education.

### Homeschooling

By John W. Kennedy

My wife, Patty, and I started homeschooling our three sons 15 years ago, long before the movement became acceptable in mainstream circles.

When I say we homeschooled, I really mean Patty did most of the instructing. While both parents must be solidly behind the decision, one — usually the mother — must be convinced by the Lord to carry it out.

Our reasons are still the top two cited by homeschooling parents: dissatisfaction with public school academics and to provide moral instruction. At the time we lived in the inner city, where our young sons actually spent much of their public school day tutoring pupils who didn't speak English as a first language.

We then enrolled the boys in Christian school for a year, a move that took Patty's entire full-time-job paycheck. The next year, as Patty drove to a store to pick out school supplies, she sensed an unmistakable prompting by the Holy Spirit that she should teach our children herself. Although she didn't have a teaching degree, Patty sensed a tremendous responsibility to educate our sons at home.

That heart desire is essential, because initial zeal goes only so far. As studies grew more complex when our children grew older, Patty found herself stretched teaching subjects such as Latin and Greek.

Despite being the primary breadwinner, I couldn't be detached from the process. I led family worship, Bible study and prayer before going off to work. In the evening I taught history — and handled any discipline problems that may have arisen.

As the years went by, Patty developed an eclectic curriculum and used public libraries often. Our boys benefited because our church sponsored a homeschool support group with more than 100 kids, involved in everything from science experiments to debates. When we moved to Chicago, the Windy City's various museums provided a memorable learning environment.

Our sons survived more than a decade of homeschooling without turning into socially maladjusted adults. They all are working their way through college. Josh, our oldest, is a year away from graduating from a private university — with plans to teach elementary public school.

#### Tips for homeschooling excellence:

- *Make sure both the mother and father are committed to the idea. In most cases, a father must be willing to be the sole breadwinner and a mother must be willing to spend all day, every day, working with the children.*

- *Don't feel overwhelmed by the idea. There are numerous homeschool curriculums available as well as many local homeschool support groups. Just because you don't have a college degree doesn't necessarily mean you aren't qualified.*

- *Be flexible. Learning isn't limited to the kitchen table. Take field trips to museums, libraries, parks and concerts to educate your child. Don't assume you need to shell out big bucks for new curriculum; library and used bookstore materials may suffice.*

- *Don't underestimate the workload. Teaching isn't for the faint of*

*heart. A parent must know a lot of information and be able to relate well to children.*

- *Research various learning styles. Not every child learns the same way, and you need to be sensitive to how to best educate your boy or girl.*

- *Dad, get Mom out of the house at least one night a week for a date, away from the kids.*

JOHN W. KENNEDY is news editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

### And the winner is ...

By Scott Harrup

Some of my best memories are of listening to stories in the two Virginia public kindergartens I attended and learning to read with the help of "Tom," "Betty," "Susan," "Mother" and "Father" in my equally excellent Burke Elementary first-grade class.

Some of my best memories are of the math and science and history lessons my mom brought to life when my brothers and I took correspondence courses during our missions assignment in Africa.

Some of my best memories are of the wonderful friendships I made in two private schools — one Christian and one secular — in junior high and high school.

Some of my best memories are of the English classes in my Memphis public high school my senior year that helped propel me into a writing ministry.

Our family needed to make different education choices as God led us to different ministry opportunities. God was always faithful, and each experience was the best for that period of my life.

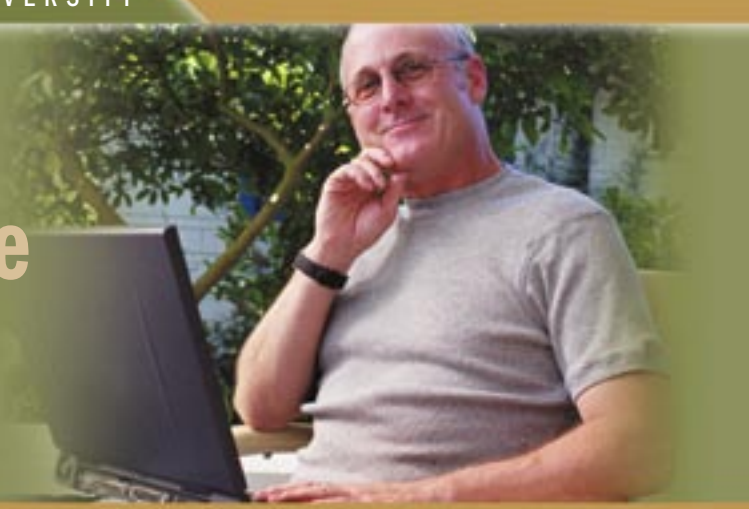
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SCOTT HARRUP is associate editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

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