



## Membership Handbook

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# Join With Us

The Association of Classical Christian Schools was founded in 1994 with the promise and hope that education can offer so much more than a career, or technical skills, or even literacy—rather, it cultivates *paideia* in children. This ancient idea of education is summed up by G.K. Chesterton: **“Education is not a subject, and does not deal in subjects. It is instead a transfer of a way of life.”** Such a transfer requires a community, united around the task of passing on a way of life. We want a Christian way of life to be restored within our Christian communities. This powerful vision is why so many have realized that Classical Christian<sup>1</sup> schools are like a “pearl of great price” in education—greatly valued for those who understand its potential, but largely unrecognized by those who do not.

We ask that you consider joining the ACCS.

## **ACCS members enjoy:**

- Affiliation with the largest and most recognized support and advocacy organization for Classical Christian education.
- Exposure to thousands of parents who use our *ACCS School Member Directory* to find Classical Christian schools.
- The ACCS Employment Exchange (*Forum*) to find qualified teachers, staff, administrators, and college hires who share your school’s passion for Classical Christian education. The ACCS actively recruits participants in this exchange through college partnerships and in other ways.
- Access to our new Member Resource Center (*MRC*) including curriculum, conference and training recordings, statistical information, tools, collaboration, shared documents, consulting, and discounts specifically selected for Classical Christian schools.
- Access to our independent and uniquely classical *ACCS Accreditation* system (school members only).
- *Classis*, our publication for Classical Christian educators and the *Classical Difference*, our publication to around 20,000 parents and friends of Classical Christian schools.
- Fellowship with other member schools at the annual ACCS convention, online, and through other sponsored events.
- Access to our full membership list to share resources and opportunities (schools, affiliates, and associates).
- Collective visibility through our national public relations and advertising programs within the broader Christian community.

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<sup>1</sup> “Classical Christian”, as used by the ACCS, refers to the specific form of education practiced at our member schools. We capitalize our use of the term because, as a single compound phrase, we use it to refer specifically to the form we describe in our definition. We do not use ‘classical’ as a description, but rather a name. The ACCS sometimes abbreviates “Classical Christian” to CC in its documents. We acknowledge that similar terms are in use within the movement such as “classical and Christian” or “Christian classical” which use “classical” as a descriptor, and therefore these uses are not capitalized. We also capitalize the acronym CCE.

## Our Members

Our member schools range in size from 3 to over a 1000 students. We have over 240 member schools representing over 41,000 students. All ACCS members are strongly committed to traditional biblical Christianity.

- We have members in 45 U.S. states and Canada, with a growing number of international members.
- Most are traditional in their school day and programs. Some have limited day-length or meet fewer than five days per week. A few offer online programs, or are online schools.
- Some member schools serve only Christian families. Others serve a community of believers and non-believers. Many of our members have connections to the Reformation tradition (Lutheran, Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, or other Calvinistic denominations). Many others are affiliated with non-Reformed churches or have no specific church affiliation.
- While we believe ACCS accreditation is preferable for Classical Christian schools, some of our members are accredited by regional or other religious accrediting organizations.

The ACCS is an evangelical Christian organization without denominational affiliation. We welcome individuals, families, homeschools, colleges, and businesses as affiliates who wish to identify with the ACCS, access our members, or learn more about Classical Christian education. However, only schools or school start-up groups can be voting members of the ACCS.

We do not represent schools that are non-Christian (charters, magnets, independents, etc.), though they may attend our conferences and access our public resources.



# Who Can Join?

## Member Qualifications

**School members:** Classical Christian Schools within the US and Canada that are organized to serve students in some combination of grades K-12 may join the ACCS if they qualify under the checklist at the end of this document. Member schools may serve fewer grades (for example K-6). However, members are encouraged to have a plan for their students to attend all K-12 grades in a Classical Christian school in some manner. The school may be organized as privately held, or as a for-profit or non-profit corporation. Start-up groups may become members as well.

We have the following membership forms for the US and Canada:

1. **Members:** Traditional day schools in the US or Canada that conform to our full membership requirements. If the school is new and does not offer all grades, they may still become members as long as the grades they do have conform to our standards.
2. **Nontraditional members:** These members conform to our full member requirements, but they are not traditional 5-day per week, or “brick and mortar” schools. Included in this category are schools where students are scheduled to meet fewer than 5 days per week. If grades 9-12 are offered, the school must offer diplomas (or the equivalent in states that do not allow non-accredited schools to offer diplomas). Nontraditional schools also include on-line schools that offer diplomas.

Nontraditional schools are comprised of classrooms (physical or digital) with teachers (not facilitators) where students are sent by their parents to be instructed (not self-paced), regardless of the number of grades. They must be committed to serving more than one or a few families (home-school co-ops do not qualify unless they plan to grow and offer a diploma-awarding day school).

3. **Transition members:** Transition members are schools that previously operated under another educational model and are committed to make a transition to Classical Christian education within 5 years, but do not meet current ACCS membership requirements. These members pay dues and receive all member services, but do not comply with our member standards. They are labeled as “transition” in our directory, have 5 years to meet our requirements, and their voting rights are suspended until they comply with member requirements.
4. **Accredited members:** Full members or Nontraditional members who have gone through the ACCS accreditation process.

**International School Members:** Classical Christian schools geographically located outside of the U.S. and Canada that are organized to serve some combination K-12 (or equivalent ages), presently or at some point in the future, may join as International School Members if they meet the requirements in this document as school members.

## Accredited Member Qualifications

Some members of the ACCS are also accredited by the ACCS. This changes their member status to Accredited Member. Our accreditation is independent—not connected to state-driven standards like common core or state



teacher certification. And our process places a unique focus on the classroom, helping schools grow in the classical Christian model.

Members may apply for accreditation if they meet the following criteria:

- The school serves K-12, or K-10 working toward K-12.
- We do not accredit pre-K, but accredited member schools may offer pre-K. At this time, we do not accredit schools that serve only grades K-6 or K-8.
- Please contact our Director of Accreditation for more information about accreditation for nontraditional schools.

### **Affiliate Qualifications**

Affiliates do not have voting rights in our association.

**Individual Affiliates:** Individuals, families, homeschools, or others who wish to affiliate with the ACCS, but do not meet the requirement of a member school may become affiliates. Affiliates receive our publications, are listed in our “members and affiliates” list, and receive discounts from the ACCS and many other affiliated businesses. They do not have access to all of our member services. They do not receive an electronic member list.

**Business Affiliates:** Businesses or Colleges that wish to associate themselves with the ACCS to support our work or to reach our membership may become business affiliates. Business Affiliates receive the same privileges as Individual Affiliates, but they have access to our mailing list and may receive advertising discounts in our publications.



# What is the ACCS Mission?

## **Mission**

We promote, establish, and equip schools committed to a classical approach to education in the light of a Christian worldview grounded in the Old and New Testament Scriptures. We promote the classical approach and provide accountability for member schools to ensure that our cultural heritage is not lost again. Through these various means, ACCS seeks to set an educational standard for a unified and directed approach to classical and Christian learning.

# What Do We Mean by “Christian?”

## **ACCS Statement of Faith:**

We believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord. Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and was born of a virgin, Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into Hades, and on the third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into Heaven, where He sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From Heaven He shall come to earth again to judge the living and the dead. We believe in the Holy Spirit, one holy catholic church, the communion of all true saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the gift of everlasting life. (Apostle’s Creed)

- We believe that God reveals Himself through the creation, preservation, and Government of the universe. We believe that God makes Himself more clearly and fully known through the Scriptures, which are the only inerrant and infallible Word of God, our ultimate and final authoritative rule for faith and practice. These Scriptures are made up of 66 books, from Genesis to Revelation, the authority of which depend not upon the testimony of any man or church, and are all to be received as the Word of God.
- We believe that there is but one living and true God, eternally existent in three Persons of one power, substance, and eternity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is perfectly wise, the overflowing fountain of all good. He is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. In all things He is limited by nothing other than His own nature and character. We believe the God we serve is holy, righteous, good, loving, and full of mercy. He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Governor of all that has been made.
- We believe in the true deity and full humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, such that two distinct natures, divine and human, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. We believe in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father and in His personal return in power and glory.



- We believe that Adam was made from the dust of the ground and formed after God's image and likeness, which was good, righteous, and holy. Because of Adam's sin all mankind is in a state of rebellion against God. For the salvation of such lost and sinful men, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary.
- We believe that salvation is by grace through faith alone, and that faith without works is dead. We believe that God freely justifies His own, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous, for the sake of Jesus Christ alone.
- We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit, by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life, as the Spirit of Christ within us enables us to do freely and cheerfully what the will of God revealed in Scripture requires to be done. We believe that good works are only those which arise from true faith, conform to God's Word, and are done for His glory.
- We believe God has appointed a day when He will judge the world in righteousness through Jesus Christ. We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; those who are saved to the resurrection of life, and those who are lost to the resurrection of damnation.
- We believe in the spiritual unity of all believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. All who are united to Christ as Head of the Church are united to one another in love, and have communion in each other's gifts and graces.
- We believe that God defined marriage as the life-long covenant between one man and one woman, that it is the only proper basis for sexual activity, and that it is the ideal forum for raising children.
- We believe that God, in creating each person in His image, made each person immutably either male or female, a distinction that is a blessing from God to be embraced.

We welcome members who hold to traditional, conservative Christian orthodoxy and our statement of faith (above). Our board reserves the right to remove members who are openly, in our sole judgement, opposed to the above statement. We also welcome members to adopt this statement of faith for their organization, if they wish.

### **Our Authority**

Our schools operate as an extension of the family, under the authority of fathers who are required to raise their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord (Deuteronomy 6 and Ephesians 6). Some of our schools operate under the authority structure of a church, and therefore these schools have extended authority in the area of family and community.<sup>2</sup> The authority granted to fathers and mothers in Scripture is passed to the school *in loco parentis*. This means that, for the development of *paideia* in students while at school, the school operates with the same authority that fathers have in the raising of children. Our position on authority influences our view of Government and its role in education.

We expect that many schools will have more particular practices and policies regarding faith. Those listed here should be considered minimum standards.

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<sup>2</sup> The authority vested by God in the church is not a matter that we address within this document.





# What Does It Mean to Be a “Classical Christian” School?

Many educators view school as a mechanism that delivers content using an educational method. This results in the mistaken belief that “Classical Christian education” (CCE) simply means that the content is classical and the methodology is more traditional.

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**Education is not a subject, and it does not deal in subjects. It is instead  
the transfer of a way of life. G.K. Chesterton**

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CCE has deep footings that are distinct from modern schools, and even different from liberal arts or classical schools founded after the Enlightenment. There is no single recipe or formula for Classical Christian education. It is a way of educating children that developed in the Middle Ages as an outworking of classical Greco-Roman thought and Christianity. It flourished in the Reformation and thus has a rich and varied form. It starts with a different purpose and ends with different results than conventional education. This document summarizes the essential elements of CCE. For a more exhaustive explanation, please read the books from our reading list.

With so big a promise, we must be careful to implement the form faithfully.



## EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

### What is our objective?

Before the mid-eighteenth century, Christian *paideia* was the purpose of nearly all Western education. This was based, in part, on Ephesians 6 that commands fathers to raise their children in “the *Παιδεία* (*paideia*) of the Lord.” **It seeks an inner transformation of the student. It cultivates the students’ habits of thought and action in order to view the world with certain foundational truths and thereby align their desires with God’s ideal. Classical Christian education’s objective, then, is to shape the virtues and reason so that they will be in line with God’s will. In other words, our objective is to cultivate a Christian *paideia* in students.**

College preparation is not an end in itself, but can often result because most colleges are built on a Western model that reveres language and reasoning. CCE graduates are eager to learn and have excellent faculties in language and reasoning. Thus, college is a natural outworking of CCE. But, the chief end of education is to prepare students to worship and glorify God.

### What is our course of study?

We begin with the unity of all truth around one prime truth—the person and sovereign Lordship of Jesus Christ over everything. From this, we study all of history and nature (science) as His workmanship. We interact with the greatest works of His fallen image bearer (man), both good and bad. We study divinely ordered patterns of truth, beauty, and goodness, and apply them in our interactions with the natural world and with human culture, including great literature, music, philosophy, theology, and art.

We pursue language, both in the study of rhetoric and poetry, and in the study of Hebrew, Greek, or Latin as the classical instruments through which God chose to bring up His church. Words convey truth, chasten goodness, and express beauty; thus language bears fruit for those who are masters of it. And, the mastery of language brings light to God’s revealed and infallible Word, from which all truth emanates, and it links us to each other.

God’s Word is our prime lens used to appraise all things, with a disciplined reason that unifies the faith of students and their worldview. Put together, this universal education cultivates virtue in students, which should be lived out in their lives as their affections are cultivated and disciplined by their immersion in truth, goodness, and beauty so that they may desire God and His ways.

### What are our methods?

- **The Trivium:** These three arts—grammar, logic, and rhetoric—are the Western tradition for learning and language study. Dorothy Sayers, in her 1948 essay, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, observed that these arts were analogous to the child’s phases of learning. Classical Christian schools take advantage of this observation.
- **Integration of content:** Integration reveals the unity of God’s world, so CCE schools value integration of content like history, literature, science, math, composition, language, etc. Some CCE schools teach multiple subjects in the same class to create a unity of understanding. Others integrate in a more conventional classroom organized by discipline or subject.



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We tend to study all our disciplines in unrelated parallel lines. This tends to be true in both Christian and secular education. This is one of the reasons why evangelical Christians have been taken by surprise at the tremendous shift that has come in our generation. Francis Schaeffer

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- **Imitation and practice:** We teach many skills and habits as they form in students during their school years. First we teach habits as a form, then through imitation, and then through repeated practice toward mastery.
- **Recitation:** Memory work such as great oratory, poetry, and virtue sayings are trained through recitation in grammar school and beyond. These advance the student’s vocabulary and aesthetic, and embed virtuous ideas.
- **Socratic discussion:** We train students in the art of reason and argument through dialog (often around a table). We challenge ideas and work from the greatest literary sources. In this, we train students to submit to, internalize, harmonize, align with, and accept God’s truth—not individual, subjective “truths.”
- **Focus:** Classical Christian education was not dismissed, it was pushed out. When good coursework or methods are substituted, it replaces great coursework and classical methods, and competes for the focus of the students. Classical schools focus students on learning fewer things well.

### What is our content?

We study our physical universe, and then reach beyond it into transcendent truth about the Creator through philosophy and theology. Rather than viewing subjects as an end in themselves, we approach all learning with a love of knowledge (philosophy) and the love and study of God (theology), and we live these loves before students.

- **Latin & Greek:** We study Latin as the language of the church and theology, and some schools study Greek as the language of Scripture and early Western texts. Knowledge of these languages is necessary for students to enter the thinking of the classical and early church era. Inflected language, like Latin or Greek, opens the mind to an incomparable way of thinking, thus opening new depth in the student’s *paideia*. Some also study Hebrew or European languages for the academic study of original texts. Other modern languages, when studied at Classical Christian schools, are pursued for other valuable, but secondary purposes.
- **Persuasive writing & thesis:** We base our writing and speaking in the ancient Greek and Roman training in rhetoric. Rhetoric is the art of persuasion, not to be confused with speech, debate, composition, or any other subcomponents of it. The defense of at least one rhetorical thesis before graduation typically completes the K-12 classical experience. (Depending on the school, sources may include the progymnasmata, the five canons of rhetoric as described in Cicero’s *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and Aristotle’s *On Rhetoric*.)
- **Great children’s books:** Grammar school students read higher, excellent literature, mainly from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. We use the complete, unabridged, and original languages (or the most poetic and accurate translations) of these texts wherever possible.



- **Great Books:** The Western canon from Homer to C.S. Lewis, read as close to the original as possible, is the core of our secondary education. *Ad fontes* (“to the source”) is a principle in CCE that values original sources over knowledge digested from textbooks. We encounter each work of art as an expression of some truth, goodness, and beauty. We evaluate each work in light of Christian truth.
- **Great art, music, literature:** You become what you behold. Consistent exposure to the greatness of Western culture (and some others) has a profound impact on the *paideia*. Regular exposure to and appreciation of great music and art in the classroom helps develop the student’s aesthetic sensibility. Classical and great church music are emphasized. Other, more recent forms, like jazz, may also be studied.
- **Logic, science, and math:** The second phase of the Trivium, logic, is also a core subject, typically taught in middle school. It is a bridge between language and subjects like math, philosophy, and science. Science is the study of God’s revelation in the natural world. Math reflects the language of God’s order in creation.
- **History:** We immerse students in the whole sweep of Western history, integrated with biblical and Christian history, from a young age. We emphasize human history and culture, not just geopolitical information. Integration with literature helps achieve this goal at some schools.

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The scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree  
immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press  
and microphone of his own age. C.S. Lewis

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- **Foundational skills:** Handwriting, grammar, spelling, and math skills are practiced and mastered.
- **Seven virtues:** We begin with the seven virtues (Justice, Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude, Faith, Hope, and Love) that should mark a Christian community. To these, we add the many virtues taught in history and the Scriptures. We do this through story, habit, recitation, and community standards.
- **Scripture:** The Bible is not limited to a Bible class, but is integrated into all subjects as a tool to be memorized, studied, and understood. We view the Bible as God-breathed and inerrant. It is also literature, and interpreted as such.



## What environment do we promote within our schools?

- **Marked by the gospel:** We cultivate Christian *paideia* in an environment characterized by the grace of the gospel—at school and at home. First-century Greeks cultivated *paideia*, typically, through unforgiving schoolmasters who were about the business of bending the student into a virtuous person. Christian *paideia* is not brought to a student in this external way. Rather we cultivate it through a lived-out gospel in the classroom. This gospel extends to who Christ is, who we are, and every aspect of life under His authority. These three define the ethos of our schools.

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"I am much afraid that schools will prove to be the great gates of hell unless they diligently labor in explaining the Holy Scriptures, engraving them in the hearts of youth." Martin Luther

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- **A Christian community of learners:** Rather than the posture of teachers as completed experts and students as absorbers of the teacher's words, Classical Christian schools have a hierarchy of learning. The teachers are clearly researching and studying the great works as they disciple the students. Older students promote the pursuit of learning among younger students.
- **Immersion and cultivation in the aesthetic arts:** Beauty is in the eye of God, not the beholder. Our students practice and appreciate the arts, music, and poetry, which shape the soul to love higher things. While they do study some more recent works, these are often crafted with "expression of the artist" as ultimate, and are therefore often less beautiful. We use radiance, harmony, and integrity as measures of art.
- **A beautiful and purposeful environment:** CCE schools convey this artistic distinction as we decorate our facilities and train students. Rather than functionality, we center the school environment on beauty and purpose. Classroom décor pulls children up rather than appealing to a base desire for sensation and entertainment.
- **Joyful rigor:** Few worthwhile things come easily. We impart a work ethic that promotes joy as children accomplish great things, *soli Deo gloria*. Rigor, as we define it, is sustained attention to a worthwhile pursuit.
- **Authority:** Classical Christian schools model a world based on God's authority. Authority flows from God and His word to churches, fathers, mothers, and the government, as God ordained it. And by extension, it flows to teachers and the school. Rather than insist on outward rule-compliance, we cultivate virtue through confession, repentance, and loving restoration within our Christian communities. This approach stands in contrast to common schools where a post-modern undertone of personal truth and egalitarianism inform the culture of the school.



## TEACHERS AT CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

A good teacher is first a Christian, then a scholar, then a teacher. Some have formal graduate degrees in traditional scholarly fields. Others gained their scholarship informally.<sup>3</sup> The student will become like the master. If we desire to produce scholars who seek to learn, and love to understand, and work in the realm of ideas (philosophy<sup>4</sup>), we must have teachers who do so. Those who teach artistry in some form must be masters of their craft, if they are to train masters. Specialized training in teaching, while valuable, is of secondary importance. Teaching is a spiritual gift and should be recognized as such.

Teachers of young students (K-6) are nurturers, but should also be scholars and learners. The level of scholarship required for the teacher increases in the secondary.

## ASSESSMENT AT CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Our goal is to assess humanely, not mechanically. Our assessment recognizes that ideas, understanding, and thought are more important than mere information. Christian virtue lived out is also recognized. For example, hard work and submission are weighed in assessing a student—not just mastery—in accordance with the parable of the talents. Traditional grades, however, are a measure to communicate mastery to outside entities. We respect the integrity of academic performance in grading.

Persuasive speaking and writing are supported in various ways, including oral testing, discussion rubrics, 1:1 engagements and presentations.

## GRADUATES OF CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

The graduate of a Classical Christian school should be marked by a noticeable refinement of manner and intellect. He will be first and foremost committed to his Christian purpose in life, and will love and live the Christian virtues. He will be competent in language, mathematics, natural philosophy (science), philosophy, and theology, and be prepared and interested in studying them further. He will think well, with Christian presuppositions in all areas of his life. He will be wise and full of humility. He will love to learn and will seek to learn throughout his life.

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“The end then of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the nearest by possessing our souls of true virtue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection.” John Milton

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<sup>3</sup> We use the term “scholar” here in the old sense of the word, not in reference to formal collegiate degrees.

<sup>4</sup> Philosophy, here, is also in the old sense of the term—one who loves and pursues understanding.

