

Honoring Our Heritage: A Brief History of Paideia

By Matthew Allen

The following is a transcript of remarks made by Mr. Allen at the January 17, 2019 investiture ceremony installing Mrs. Coad as Head of School at The Paideia School.

Honoring our Heritage ... Living Our Faith ... Forging Our Future.

I have the privilege of spending a few minutes talking about honoring our heritage. A brief history of Paideia.

Now I have to be candid. The story of Paideia began in conflict among Christian brethren. Just as the apostle Paul and his traveling companion Barnabas went their separate ways over a genuine disagreement over whether to take with them on a missionary journey Barnabas's nephew John Mark, Paideia began because of a genuine disagreement among brothers in Christ over how to do classical Christian education in Tampa. (But let me quickly add that the story of Paideia, like that of Paul and Mark, also involves reconciliation. Several families on the other side of the initial divide ultimately became parents and faculty and graduates here at Paideia.)

Paideia opened its doors in August 2006 with 54 students. Our rhetoric school consisted of four juniors. Our dialectic school consisted of one ninth grader, two eighth graders, and five seventh graders. My two girls were in the sixth and third grades. We had donated furniture from a school that had closed and an office that went out of business. We actually had to build our classroom white boards because we couldn't afford to buy them. Someone gave me a Christmas card that first year that had a picture of a pickup truck on it and the image of Socrates. The idea was that we would teach Socrates out of the back of a pickup truck if we had to. Humble beginnings.

Fast forward to this year. We opened the doors in August 2018 with 109 students. In the 12 years in between, we have had around 50 graduates. Of that number, two were National Merit Scholars, three were National Merit Finalists, nine were National Merit Commended students (that's 28%), and most of our graduates received college scholarship money. We received a five-year accreditation from the Association of Classical Christian Schools in 2012, and just last year, an accreditation renewal. At the personal level, my children completed

their Paideia education and went off to college. Sometimes they come back. One of the greatest privileges of my life is to see my own child (Alissa Pagano) teaching the next generation here at Paideia.

What bound us together in 2006 and what holds us together in 2019 is the abiding belief that education fundamentally is not about protecting our children from the culture around us or even academic rigor, although those things are important. Education, at its core, is cultivating wisdom and virtue by nourishing the soul on truth, goodness, and beauty so that the student may glorify God and enjoy him forever. The founding board thought that was so important that we wrote it into the school's bylaws.

The story of Paideia is a story of sacrifice. Our founding headmaster, Joe Bray, had a saying, "Over me." It refers to the fact that soldiers in World War I would stretch their bodies over barbed wire fences so their fellow soldiers could climb over them in a protected fashion to lead the charge. Nobody but God knows the sacrifices that people made to get Paideia up and running and keep it afloat. I certainly don't know all of them. But I know a few.

- One founding family donated its children's college fund – over \$30,000 -- for start-up costs. Without that donation, Paideia never would have gotten off the ground.
- Several more founding families provided personal guarantees on loans. On multiple occasions.
- One parent, a construction contractor, built out the headmaster's office for no charge.
- Countless parents donated substantial time, talent, and treasures over many years with little recognition.
- And then there was the sacrifice of the teachers. Just at the financial level, they could have made elsewhere twice the money they made here at Paideia. They didn't have health insurance. Still don't. But they came and they stayed because they shared a vision and a passion of making disciples, scholars, and citizens out of my children and yours. They sacrificed because they saw a bigger picture than just themselves and their own livelihood.

The story of Paideia involves humble beginnings and substantial sacrifice. But it also involves wise leadership. Joe Bray was and remains the wisest man I know.

Just one example will suffice. When the founding board got together in the spring of 2006 at Bob Bray's house to plan the budget, we figured we would start out with 100 students and construct the budget with that number in mind. Joe told us, not so fast. Let's construct the budget with 60 students in mind. He knew better than we did what we were up against in starting a brand-new school. Joe also led in the development of the Policy Governance Manual – the governing document of the board of directors -- and the wise provisions he insisted that we put in there still serve us well today. He was measured in his words. He did not move hastily. By the way, the same qualities of wisdom and prudence that I saw in Joe Bray, I also see in Debbie Coad.

After Joe retired in 2014, our next leader was Tim Bridges. Tim introduced the house system and a field day. Joe and Tim were different in personalities, but they shared a passion for academic excellence and biblical discipleship. Debbie Coad shares those same passions.

A big part of Paideia is the annual Shakespeare play. Did you know that the plays started as a Seventh-Grade history project? The 7th graders were the main actors in *Julius Caesar*, performed in the multi-purpose room. The same thing was true with *MacBeth*, the following year. Obviously, it grew from there.

The story of Paideia, at bottom, involves God's faithfulness. There were times when I thought we wouldn't make it. At one point in the third year, reenrollment dipped to under 40 students. Mr. Bray offered to become a part-time headmaster for the following year to cut the budget. But at just the right moment, new students started popping up. At just the right moment, volunteers stepped up. At just the right moment, donations were made. At just the right moment, God moved to work. Paideia has always been God's school. And he has proven himself faithful.

We are, of course, in the middle of the Paideia story. I hope we are somewhere near the beginning. We won't know how it all turns out until we get to eternity.

So what is the ultimate legacy of Paideia? It will be the people, the graduates, the Psalm 127 arrows cast into the world to make a difference for the kingdom of Christ. The people who will, Lord willing, save Western civilization and bring revival to our nation and world. This is the rich heritage that Paideia will leave. And I have every confidence that Mrs. Coad will continue to honor that legacy and

perpetuate that heritage as long as she is at the helm. So the Paideia story continues.

That is a brief history of the Paideia School of Tampa Bay. And now we are ready for the next chapter!