

# Public school advocacy vital to Christians' public witness

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DALLAS—Progressive Christians should acknowledge every child's right to quality education as a justice issue, and conservative Christians should recognize neighborhood public schools as the third pillar—alongside the church and the home—for building responsible citizens with moral vision, Charles Foster Johnson told a Dallas audience.

“Public schools are the place where we create a public consciousness,” Johnson, founding executive director of [Pastors for Texas Children](#), told workshop participants at the Red Letter Revival, a movement of Christians who say they want to apply the teachings of Jesus in society. “We need quality, fully funded public schools where every child is accepted.”

Public education for all is a moral duty, and public schoolteachers work in a “holy sanctuary” of learning, said Johnson, former pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio and Second Baptist Church in Lubbock.

“They work long hours at low pay, often serving the poorest children,” he said.

Serious followers of Christ need to recognize public school advocacy as a vital part of their public witness, he asserted. Jesus said, “Let the children come to me.” Likewise, public schools invite all children to receive an education and attain their God-given potential, Johnson insisted, adding, “All means all.”

# Threat of privatization

In contrast, privatized approaches to education serve only those who can afford it, he said. At the same time they serve a select constituency, proponents of vouchers for private schools divert tax dollars—funds intended for the common good—away from underfunded public schools, he asserted.

Charter schools are “a little trickier,” he acknowledged, particularly when they offer educational alternatives to underserved neighborhoods. However, even the best non-profit charter schools typically are governed by self-perpetuating boards in distant locations, and the people they serve have no voice in decision-making, he said.

For-profit schools simply are out to make money for wealthy investors, he emphasized.

“They are making commodities out of our children and markets out of our classrooms,” Johnson said.

In an increasingly polarized society, public schools offer a unique place that can bring together children of varied races and religions—children of privilege and children in need—to learn together and create life-changing relationships, he asserted.

Johnson urged concerned Christians to develop friendships with school superintendents to learn about local needs and nurture relationships with elected representatives, particularly in the Texas House of Representatives, to advocate for public education.

A renewed commitment to public education “can solve a lot of other issues in society,” he insisted.

Churches can make a difference by adopting public schools—providing

school supplies, praying for educators, sponsoring teacher appreciation events and inviting members to become mentors and tutors for students, he said.

“If you want to change the world, read to a kid—particularly a child in the third grade or younger—for two hours a week,” Johnson said. “It’s the most Jesus-led, Spirit-filled act you can do.”

*EDITOR’S NOTE: The third paragraph was edited after the article originally was posted to correct an identification error.*