

“The price of wisdom is above pearls.”
Job 28:18

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
Matthew 6:21

“There should be no economy in education. Money should never be weighed against the soul of a child.”
—William Ellery Channing, Unitarian

“People will pay more to be entertained than educated.”
—Johnny Carson

There is a lot of talk about “values” these days. It is interesting that the word itself is economic in origin. In fact, some say the true measure of our values, the clearest indicator of what we think important, is our checkbook.

Is Johnny Carson right? Have we become a culture that values entertainment above education? Not many would list entertainment as an important value, but an analysis of our spending on vacations, movies, eating out and other forms of entertainment may reveal it to be a higher priority than we would care to admit.

There is nothing wrong with entertainment. We need breaks from our hard work. But if we truly believe that our children are our future, we need to make sure our moral values and our economic priorities line up. There is an old saying that challenges us to “put our money where our mouth is.”

“The price of wisdom is above pearls.”
Job 28:18

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
Matthew 6:21

“There should be no economy in education. Money should never be weighed against the soul of a child.”
—William Ellery Channing, Unitarian

“People will pay more to be entertained than educated.”
—Johnny Carson

There is a lot of talk about “values” these days. It is interesting that the word itself is economic in origin. In fact, some say the true measure of our values, the clearest indicator of what we think important, is our checkbook.

Is Johnny Carson right? Have we become a culture that values entertainment above education? Not many would list entertainment as an important value, but an analysis of our spending on vacations, movies, eating out and other forms of entertainment may reveal it to be a higher priority than we would care to admit.

There is nothing wrong with entertainment. We need breaks from our hard work. But if we truly believe that our children are our future, we need to make sure our moral values and our economic priorities line up. There is an old saying that challenges us to “put our money where our mouth is.”

“For people of faith, public policy is never merely politics, never merely economics. It is one way we try to plow the Biblical vision of shalom into the soil of our history. It is a way of living out the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves.”

—Bernice Powell Jackson, Executive Minister
UCC Justice and Witness Ministries

Ohio’s public schools are in financial crisis. Because the state has provided neither adequate, equitable nor reliable funding, in March of 2004, over two hundred of Ohio’s school district were on the ballot with levies. In August of 2004, more than a hundred school levy requests were brought back to voters in special elections to try to avoid catastrophic cuts in staffing at the beginning of the 04-05 school year.

Like the schools in the vast majority of states, Ohio’s schools rely for much of their funding on local property taxes. This system is a remnant from the nineteenth century when people lived and worked and shopped and educated their children in the same community. In today’s regional economy, a system based on property tax makes less sense. Ohio’s wealthy school districts include communities where there are nuclear power plants, steel mills, and auto plants, but increasingly they are also the places along the belt freeways around our big cities. While most of us patronize the shopping malls, big box stores, chain restaurants and motels in these communities, the property tax dollars from all this commercial activity benefit only the school district that includes the freeway interchange.

In Ohio there is an additional problem related to our over-reliance on local property taxes. Back in 1976, the Ohio legislature passed a property tax freeze law, House Bill 920. HB 920 was embedded into the Ohio Constitution in 1980. It freezes the amount a school district can raise from any school levy at the amount levy generates on the day of its passage. In most places the value of property appreciates, but as the value of your house goes up, HB 920 rolls back the millage to keep your tax flat. To keep even with inflation, school districts must come back to the voters again and again. Because of HB 920 a new levy won’t really buy very many new services; it is really just a way for a school district to keep paying its teachers, keep buying books, keep repairing the buses and keep turning on the lights.

“For people of faith, public policy is never merely politics, never merely economics. It is one way we try to plow the Biblical vision of shalom into the soil of our history. It is a way of living out the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves.”

—Bernice Powell Jackson, Executive Minister
UCC Justice and Witness Ministries

Ohio’s public schools are in financial crisis. Because the state has provided neither adequate, equitable nor reliable funding, in March of 2004, over two hundred of Ohio’s school district were on the ballot with levies. In August of 2004, more than a hundred school levy requests were brought back to voters in special elections to try to avoid catastrophic cuts in staffing at the beginning of the 04-05 school year.

Like the schools in the vast majority of states, Ohio’s schools rely for much of their funding on local property taxes. This system is a remnant from the nineteenth century when people lived and worked and shopped and educated their children in the same community. In today’s regional economy, a system based on property tax makes less sense. Ohio’s wealthy school districts include communities where there are nuclear power plants, steel mills, and auto plants, but increasingly they are also the places along the belt freeways around our big cities. While most of us patronize the shopping malls, big box stores, chain restaurants and motels in these communities, the property tax dollars from all this commercial activity benefit only the school district that includes the freeway interchange.

In Ohio there is an additional problem related to our over-reliance on local property taxes. Back in 1976, the Ohio legislature passed a property tax freeze law, House Bill 920. HB 920 was embedded into the Ohio Constitution in 1980. It freezes the amount a school district can raise from any school levy at the amount levy generates on the day of its passage. In most places the value of property appreciates, but as the value of your house goes up, HB 920 rolls back the millage to keep your tax flat. To keep even with inflation, school districts must come back to the voters again and again. Because of HB 920 a new levy won’t really buy very many new services; it is really just a way for a school district to keep paying its teachers, keep buying books, keep repairing the buses and keep turning on the lights.

“Enlighten the people generally, and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day.”

—Thomas Jefferson

“Next in importance to freedom and justice is popular education, without which neither freedom nor justice can be permanently maintained.”

—James A. Garfield

Great words of wisdom from two who rose to the highest office in the land. James A. Garfield, one of several Ohioans who became president, speaks about “popular” education. This is not about children liking school, but it comes from the first definition of the word from the 1946 Funk & Wagnalls New Practical Standard Dictionary:
1) Pertaining to the people at large.

One of our nation’s greatest success stories is our commitment to education for all people. Many of our great artists, politicians, business leaders, religious leaders, and family members grew up in public school systems developed because of the vision of leaders like Jefferson and Garfield.

Let us do our part to maintain freedom and justice; let us join the battle against tyranny and oppression by ever improving our great national treasure: our public education system.

Enlighten the people generally, and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day.

—Thomas Jefferson

Next in importance to freedom and justice is popular education, without which neither freedom nor justice can be permanently maintained.

—James A. Garfield

Great words of wisdom from two who rose to the highest office in the land. James A. Garfield, one of several Ohioans who became president, speaks about “popular” education. This is not about children liking school, but it comes from the first definition of the word from the 1946 Funk & Wagnalls New Practical Standard Dictionary:
1) Pertaining to the people at large.

One of our nation’s greatest success stories is our commitment to education for all people. Many of our great artists, politicians, business leaders, religious leaders, and family members grew up in public school systems developed because of the vision of leaders like Jefferson and Garfield.

Let us do our part to maintain freedom and justice; let us join the battle against tyranny and oppression by ever improving our great national treasure: our public education system.

“Had I but one wish for the churches of America I think it would be that they come to see the difference between charity and justice. Charity is a matter of personal attributes; justice, a matter of public policy. Charity seeks to alleviate the effects of injustice; justice seeks to eliminate the causes of it.”

—William Sloane Coffin, *Credo* p. 62

Ohio’s method of funding public schools has been found unconstitutional four times since 1997 by the Ohio Supreme Court in the *DeRolph* Case. The majority 1997 decision stated: “By our decision today, we send a clear message to lawmakers: the time has come to fix the system. Let there be no misunderstanding. Ohio’s public school financing scheme must undergo a complete systematic overhaul.” In *DeRolph IV*, the Court reiterated that the funding system remains unconstitutional but then released jurisdiction in the case, leaving the court itself no way to enforce compliance by the legislature.

Why has our system of funding schools been found unconstitutional?

Ohio spends less per pupil today than all surrounding states other than Kentucky.

Spending across Ohio’s 612 school districts remains extremely inequitable. Ohio’s highest spending district spends \$11,500 more for every pupil than its lowest spending district.

Ohio’s over-reliance on local property taxes means that the poorest school districts tend to be in rural Appalachian southeast Ohio, where there is little industry or commerce, and where the land is too hilly to support large and prosperous farms.

Ohio also has eight big cities, and despite their relatively higher tax valuation, large urban districts need to spend additional dollars on support services because, according to the Harvard Civil Rights Project, “The vast majority of intensely segregated minority schools face conditions of concentrated poverty, which are powerfully related to unequal educational opportunity. Students in segregated minority schools face conditions that students in segregated white schools seldom experience.”

“Had I but one wish for the churches of America I think it would be that they come to see the difference between charity and justice. Charity is a matter of personal attributes; justice, a matter of public policy. Charity seeks to alleviate the effects of injustice; justice seeks to eliminate the causes of it.”

—William Sloane Coffin, *Credo* p. 62

Ohio’s method of funding public schools has been found unconstitutional four times since 1997 by the Ohio Supreme Court in the *DeRolph* Case. The majority 1997 decision stated: “By our decision today, we send a clear message to lawmakers: the time has come to fix the system. Let there be no misunderstanding. Ohio’s public school financing scheme must undergo a complete systematic overhaul.” In *DeRolph IV*, the Court reiterated that the funding system remains unconstitutional but then released jurisdiction in the case, leaving the court itself no way to enforce compliance by the legislature.

Why has our system of funding schools been found unconstitutional?

Ohio spends less per pupil today than all surrounding states other than Kentucky.

Spending across Ohio’s 612 school districts remains extremely inequitable. Ohio’s highest spending district spends \$11,500 more for every pupil than its lowest spending district.

Ohio’s over-reliance on local property taxes means that the poorest school districts tend to be in rural Appalachian southeast Ohio, where there is little industry or commerce, and where the land is too hilly to support large and prosperous farms.

Ohio also has eight big cities, and despite their relatively higher tax valuation, large urban districts need to spend additional dollars on support services because, according to the Harvard Civil Rights Project, “The vast majority of intensely segregated minority schools face conditions of concentrated poverty, which are powerfully related to unequal educational opportunity. Students in segregated minority schools face conditions that students in segregated white schools seldom experience.”

Train Children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray. —The Book of Proverbs 22:6

Among all things, knowledge is the best thing: it cannot be stolen, nor can it be purchased, and it is imperishable. —Hitopadesa (Hindu Writings)

The raft of knowledge ferries the worst sinner to safety. —The Bhagavad Gita

Even a common man by obtaining knowledge becomes a Buddha —Japanese Buddhist Proverb

The only medicine for suffering, crime, and all the other woes of mankind is wisdom. —T.H. Huxley, agnostic

Training, knowledge, wisdom, learning — these have been praised and valued by thoughtful people of different faiths through the ages. Education has the power to heal and save. It can change an individual or a nation. It can bring hope, meaning and abundance.

After WWII our nation welcomed home brave men and women who fought against tyranny. Through the G.I. Bill we rewarded them with the opportunity for an education. As the world recovered from WWII, our nation's spirit and economy both soared as we were richly rewarded with the fruits of education.

Let us continue to invest in our future by making sure all children have access to a good education. It can make all the difference.

Train Children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray. —The Book of Proverbs 22:6

Among all things, knowledge is the best thing: it cannot be stolen, nor can it be purchased, and it is imperishable. —Hitopadesa (Hindu Writings)

The raft of knowledge ferries the worst sinner to safety. —The Bhagavad Gita

Even a common man by obtaining knowledge becomes a Buddha —Japanese Buddhist Proverb

The only medicine for suffering, crime, and all the other woes of mankind is wisdom. —T.H. Huxley, agnostic

Training, knowledge, wisdom, learning — these have been praised and valued by thoughtful people of different faiths through the ages. Education has the power to heal and save. It can change an individual or a nation. It can bring hope, meaning and abundance.

After WWII our nation welcomed home brave men and women who fought against tyranny. Through the G.I. Bill we rewarded them with the opportunity for an education. As the world recovered from WWII, our nation's spirit and economy both soared as we were richly rewarded with the fruits of education.

Let us continue to invest in our future by making sure all children have access to a good education. It can make all the difference.

“From the earliest days of our nation, it was our forebears in the faith who insisted on universal, compulsory education.... As people of faith today, we must ask... how we can have a viable, healthy democracy if there is not good, quality public education for all children.”

—Bernice Powell Jackson, *UC News*, June 2004

Today Ohio’s school funding system has been found unconstitutional four times.

- It is inequitable because it is over reliant on local property taxes. Schools in rich areas spend more than \$11,000 per pupil more than schools in poor areas.
- It is inadequate. In Ohio the per-pupil-spending is lower than in all surrounding districts except Kentucky.
- It is unreliable. Because local revenues are frozen at the amount passed in any one levy, districts must return to the voters periodically just to stay even with inflation. School districts cannot successfully plan for the long term, because a levy failure on election day may mean that staff and programs are cut and then perhaps restored after a levy passes, and then cut again after another failure.
- It relies overly on local property taxes means that schools spend the most to serve the wealthiest children and the least on our state’s poorest children.
- What can you do as a citizen and a person of faith to speak for justice?
- Pray for children and teachers in Ohio’s poorly funded schools.
- Become informed and insist that candidates you support for state office courageously address the school funding crisis.
- At candidates forums and in letters to the editor, speak for equitable, adequate, and reliable school funding.
- Invite your representatives to the General Assembly to speak with a group from your church and clearly express your concern about the unresolved school funding crisis in Ohio.
- Work in coalition with other churches and secular groups to build support for school finance reform. Learn about and contact the Ohio Fair Schools Campaign at <http://www.ohiofairschools.org/>
- Establish a school-congregational partnership. In addition to volunteer support, find a way to support the staff and parents by joining in advocacy for better school funding.

“From the earliest days of our nation, it was our forebears in the faith who insisted on universal, compulsory education.... As people of faith today, we must ask... how we can have a viable, healthy democracy if there is not good, quality public education for all children.”

—Bernice Powell Jackson, *UC News*, June 2004

Today Ohio’s school funding system has been found unconstitutional four times.

- It is inequitable because it is over reliant on local property taxes. Schools in rich areas spend more than \$11,000 per pupil more than schools in poor areas.
- It is inadequate. In Ohio the per-pupil-spending is lower than in all surrounding districts except Kentucky.
- It is unreliable. Because local revenues are frozen at the amount passed in any one levy, districts must return to the voters periodically just to stay even with inflation. School districts cannot successfully plan for the long term, because a levy failure on election day may mean that staff and programs are cut and then perhaps restored after a levy passes, and then cut again after another failure.
- It relies overly on local property taxes means that schools spend the most to serve the wealthiest children and the least on our state’s poorest children.
- What can you do as a citizen and a person of faith to speak for justice?
- Pray for children and teachers in Ohio’s poorly funded schools.
- Become informed and insist that candidates you support for state office courageously address the school funding crisis.
- At candidates forums and in letters to the editor, speak for equitable, adequate, and reliable school funding.
- Invite your representatives to the General Assembly to speak with a group from your church and clearly express your concern about the unresolved school funding crisis in Ohio.
- Work in coalition with other churches and secular groups to build support for school finance reform. Learn about and contact the Ohio Fair Schools Campaign at <http://www.ohiofairschools.org/>
- Establish a school-congregational partnership. In addition to volunteer support, find a way to support the staff and parents by joining in advocacy for better school funding.