

Fanning The Flames:

Rivendell's Reason For Being

“The mind is a fire to be lit, not a vessel to be filled...” Aristotle

We at Rivendell believe that a Christ-centered education includes but goes far beyond the goal of helping our students live up to their academic potential, important as that may be. We do not want to be an educational hen house producing eggheads for Christ. Instead, we seek to provide academic rigor as we *pursue wisdom* and understanding; as we *discover truth* in all its glory; as we *develop a love of learning*; as we link *knowing with doing*, in short, as we *gain the mind of Christ*.

Defining our mission is easier than accomplishing it. How do we make sure it doesn't become “Mission: Impossible?” We believe, for starters, that the most fertile ground for learning practically everything during childhood is the imagination. That is the true path to learning, and the key that unlocks a student's mind. Einstein once said, “the gift of fantasy has meant more to me than my talent for absorbing positive knowledge.” Put another way, whatever captures the *imagination* of children will soon capture their zeal and focus. The best way, then, to sharpen the intellect and shape the conscience is through the imagination. That is the primary reason why our integrated units are thematic, and travel comfortably through the arts, science and humanities. That is why our learning skills are not viewed as ends in themselves, but instead are seen as construction tools. Skills such as phonics, grammar, mathematics, and spelling are important insofar as they are used to build something, in this case *virtuous, learned, and creative young people* who can think truthfully and express themselves effectively. So, when teaching students how to read, we provide books worth reading; while guiding them in how to reason, we focus on people, ideas and stories worth discussing.

Since the imagination is our centerpiece, is Rivendell supposed to be fun? No, if by fun one means easy academics, minimal challenges, and an absence of hard work. Yes, school is enjoyable if you define fun the Rivendell way, as satisfying achievements, purposeful activity, enriching accomplishments, and solid progress. Rivendell students tend to learn more than they think they are learning, because the teachers seek to engage their students' imaginations while strengthening basic learning skills. It is our way of lighting the fires of their minds and fanning the flames.

So where does that leave Rivendell with academia's "fast track", in which students are prepared for the best prep schools which will admit them into the best colleges, which will prepare them for distinguished careers, which will enable them to ... to do what? To live a "fulfilled life?" Ah, there's the rub; there is the dead end on the fast track. A Christ-centered education has no such cul-de-sac because a community of believing learners defines life meaning in much more profound terms. A Rivendell diploma is intended to be a passport, not to privilege, but to service.

After all is said and done, we can confidently state that the fulfilled life is experienced only by those who learn habitually to *seek* the truth, and then to *practice* the truth in love. Rivendell's task, therefore, is *life-prep*, and aims to cooperate with the parents in providing young people fit for a King.

Written by Steve Larson, Former Headmaster