

ROCKBRIDGE REPORTER

A Newsletter for Rockbridge Academy

December 2004

A SEASON FOR REFLECTION *by Michael J. McKenna*

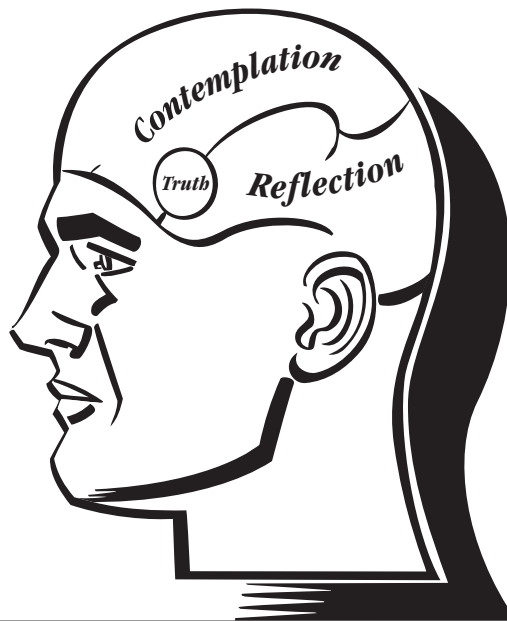
This is the season of year that naturally awakens within the human breast an attitude of contemplation and reflection. The Pilgrims risking life and limb to settle in the New World so they could worship as they saw fit; Thanksgiving and the traditional turkey dinner with all the trimmings—stuffing, cranberry sauce, apple and lemon meringue pies; family in from out of town; Christmas, when the church around the world celebrates the advent of the Savior; Christmas morning with the tree all aglow and the children's faces filled with wonder; more Christmas feasting, perhaps this time with a standing rib roast, Yorkshire pudding and horseradish sauce, roasted potatoes, and a bright Cabernet; two weeks off from school; the hope of snow; yuletide carols being sung by—and chestnuts roasting on—an open fire....

But I don't want to think about any of that right now.

This is also the time of year when parents begin to think about re-enrolling their children. So that's what I'd like to reflect upon for my remaining 1,346 words.

First of all, for many of you, there's little reflection to be done. For you, it's settled that your children are returning to Rockbridge Academy next year and the year after that. Reflection over!

I can say "for many of you" because our retention rate has been in the mid-90 percent range for the



WHEN DID THE MISSION OF
SCHOOLS BECOME TO TEACH KIDS
TO DANCE, REFRAIN FROM SNOBBERY,
DO GOOD DEEDS, APPRECIATE
DIFFERENCES IN OTHERS,
AND BAKE COOKIES?

school's history. So, if our retention is 94% this year, I'm talking primarily to the other 6% of you who will spend the next few weeks doing some serious reflection.

Now, I have to tell you up front. If you've been a headmaster for as long as I have, you hear relatively few reasons why parents decide to send their children to other schools. Apart

from moving and finances, the main reasons parents withdraw their children from school are: 1) sports, 2) a larger social pond for their large teenage "fish" to swim in, 3) desiring their teen to be "salt and light" to students in secular schools, and 4) the question of facilities.

Occasionally there are other reasons why parents enroll elsewhere, but these four are always at the top of the list.

So, with your leave, permit me a little reflection of my own. My hope is that you'll then have something to reflect upon yourself over the next few weeks.

Sports. You can learn a lot from athletic competition. Determination. Commitment. Teamwork. These are great qualities which we all want our children to learn. At Rockbridge, we have three athletic seasons, as you're probably all aware by now—soccer, basketball, and lacrosse—each of which affords our students ample opportunity to learn these character traits and more. The question of continuing at Rockbridge arises when either a child wants to play a sport we *don't* offer, or when a child possesses the ability to compete at a level beyond where most of his teammates' abilities lie.

To address the first, no school can offer every possible athletic activity in which a child may want to participate. What if your child is gifted in curling

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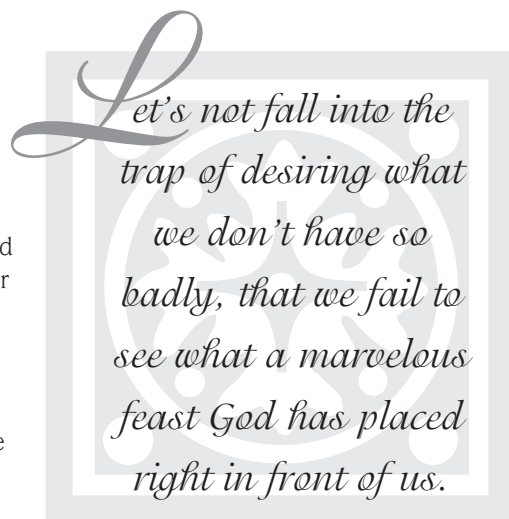
or boxing? There are very few schools that offer those, I imagine. However, we are blessed to live in an area in which virtually any activity we'd care to pursue is available to us *outside of school*. If your standard is that you must have your children attend a school that also provides their specific athletic desires, and those desires don't include our current three, then you're probably going to leave Rockbridge at some point. But, if your desire is for them to learn determination, commitment, and teamwork, then soccer can accomplish that just as well as curling.

To address the second reason, if you consider leaving because your child performs at a level beyond his teammates, consider what you'd be depriving his teammates of by *them* no longer being able to compete alongside of *him*. We have some gifted athletes here, that's for sure. And their teammates are blessed by being able to compete alongside them. If, however, your goal is for your child to be challenged beyond his abilities (not a bad desire), and you can't have this goal satisfied through a county or private rec league, as I mentioned above, then you're probably going to leave at some point, too.

However, let me ask you. Is athletic competition the only way our children can learn determination, commitment, and teamwork? Or can they learn those things in the classroom, on stage, and through other means as well? Even more fundamentally, are athletics the *summum bonum* of education? Are Christians commanded in the scriptures to recreate to the glory of God? Rather, are we not commanded to reason together (Isa. 1:18), be ready with an answer (2 Tim. 4:2; Col 4:6), and bring every thought into obedience to Christ (2 Cor. 5:10)?

Desiring a larger social environment. When children are small, parents invariably want smaller classrooms for their children to grow and flourish in. When the kids get older, and start to

spread their wings (and their mouths?), the tendency then becomes to want a larger environment so they don't feel so confined. The thinking typically goes like this: *If my daughter is in a larger school, she'll learn how to relate to a variety of people, or, If my son goes to Gigantor High, he'll have more opportunities available to him there.* Such a posture assumes that our grandparents and great-grandparents must have been social misfits, because they lived before the advent of the mega high school with diverse racial



communities and elective options dancing about their heads.

Besides, where is the primary locus from which our children should be learning their social graces? Is it not the home and church? When did the mission of schools become not only to teach kids to read, write, and cipher, but also to converse, dance, refrain from snobbery, do good deeds, appreciate differences in others, and bake cookies?

Lastly, children will learn to socialize whether they're in a classroom of four or forty. The importance for believers ought to be that they are in an environment that supports the home and church (Eccl. 4:12b). Let's not make the mistake of thinking *that* our kids socialize is more important than *how* they socialize.

Salt and light. Sometimes parents desire that their children be salt and light to the lost in some secular school context. I've heard this reason given many times over the years. The problem I have with it is this: When we expect young, untrained boys and girls to go out and do the work of evangelism (and let's face it, even we mature adults sometimes feel ill-equipped to talk to our co-workers), the end result is typically that our kids are the ones who get "evangelized." Where in the scriptures are children commanded to go and do the work of the Great Commission? Saint Augustine established his academy in Hippo so as to train young "soldiers" in the warfare of the gospel, but no soldier was sent out into battle until the training was complete. In the framework of a classical Christian education, the training isn't complete until the acolyte has had grammar, dialectic, *and rhetoric*. Why is it that Muslims know that, if their children are going to be consistent Muslims, they have to be taught to *think like Muslims*? Why is it that Buddhists understand, if their children are going to be educated Buddhists, they have to be taught to *think like Buddhists*? Why is it that Christians seem to be the only ones who don't get this?

Facilities. You got me here. Our building is what it is. All I can say is this: Mark Twain was once asked what he thought was necessary for children to get a good education. "A log," he answered, "with a good teacher at one end and a willing student at the other." For His own inscrutable purposes, God has not seen fit to provide us with our own facility as of this writing. But I think you'll agree, God is accomplishing great things within this space. And He has been faithful to provide us with what we *need*, even though it might not be what we *want*.

When the accreditation team was here last year, they noted that among our goals was to graduate young men and women who were articulate, who

A SEASON FOR
REFLECTION...continued

understood how the scriptures related to their lives and the world around them, who were, in essence, *thinking Christians* with a consistent, biblical world and life view. After spending three days here among our students, they informed us that we are indeed accomplishing our goal...and doing it all within these four walls.

Let's not fall into the trap of desiring what we don't have so badly, that we fail to see what a marvelous feast God has placed right in front of us.

There's a lot for you to reflect upon. Please take the time to think about these things over the next few weeks while enjoying a nice rib roast and a fruity Merlot.

Consider giving to Rockbridge Academy. Here's How.

GENERAL GIFTS

General gifts are used to meet the widest possible array of needs at Rockbridge Academy. General gifts are useful because of their flexibility.

DESIGNATED GIFTS

A designated gift can be used to support a specific aspect of Rockbridge Academy's program, such as the athletic program, the science program, or the music program.

MATCHING GIFTS

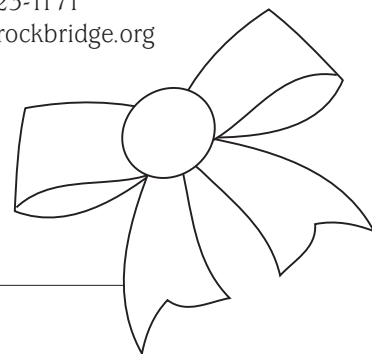
Many employers have a matching gift program to help their employees' gifts go further. Ask your employers if they have such a program. Rockbridge Academy will be happy to work with your employer to help establish a matching gifts program.

SECURITIES

Gifts such as stocks, bonds, mutual funds, even insurance policies, may be made directly to Rockbridge Academy. Typically, such gifts provide the giver with beneficial tax advantages.

You are encouraged to support Rockbridge Academy through these or other means. To make a gift, please call the headmaster, Michael McKenna, at:

Rockbridge Academy
911 Generals Highway
Millersville, MD 21108
410-923-1171
www.rockbridge.org



During Rockbridge Academy's teacher training this past summer, Rich Halloran, headmaster of Woodstream Christian Academy, and Mike McKenna began hatching the possibility of the two schools establishing a soccer tournament, to be known as the "Headmaster's Cup." On Tuesday, October 22, the middle school boys' and girls' teams from both schools finally competed in the long-awaited event. The Woodstream boys' team walked away with their cup for the year, scoring against Rockbridge 4-2. The Rockbridge girls, on the other hand, pulled out a victory over Woodstream, 3-0. Pictured above are the two headmasters with their respective trophies, Mike McKenna (L), and Rich Halloran.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- DEC 17 Christmas Concert at Chesapeake Arts Center @ 7:00 p.m.
- DEC 20-DEC 31.....SCHOOL CLOSED—Christmas Holiday
- JAN 7.....Evening Open House @ 7:00 p.m.
- JAN 14Evening Open House @ 7:00 p.m.
- JAN 17.....SCHOOL CLOSED—Teacher Workday
- JAN 2New Student Application Deadline

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

Mencken's Law:

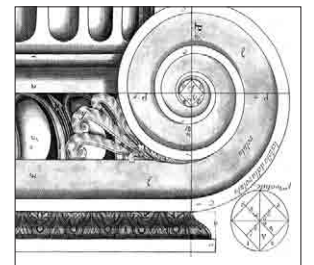
*Whenever A annoys
or injures B on the pretense
of saving or improving X,
A is a scoundrel.*

— H.L. MENCKEN

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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