a LIGHT in a DARK PLACE

"A good teacher is like a candle it consumes itself to light the way for others."

-UNKNOWN

One good teacher can make all the difference in a student's life.

Stephen Carter grew up in a family of five children in Ithaca, New York. Starting school as an African-American student in the 1950s, a distinguished academic career didn't seem a likely future.

But just three words from a teacher, reshaped his life. In eighth grade, Stephen Carter's history teacher, Mrs. Ahlquist, made a comment he never forgot. "She said, 'You're pretty smart,'" Carter remembers. "I had never thought of myself that way before. I had always been an ordinary student, and I had not stood out in class academically."

With Mrs. Alquist's words as encouragement, Stephen went on to become the editor of his high school newspaper, graduated with a history degree from Stanford, earned a law degree at Yale, and clerked for Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall.

Today he is a Christian cultural commentator, a *New York Times* bestselling author and the William Nelson Cromwell Professor at Yale Law School—because one teacher, like a candle, lit the way with her words.

As an educator, I have always loved stories like that. Some of my favorite movies tell the true stories of teachers inspiring students. In *Miracle Worker*, it's **Anne Sullivan** opening up the world to a blind and deaf Helen Keller. In *October Sky*, it's **Miss Riley** challenging Homer Hickam—a coal miner's son and future NASA engineer—to build a rocket for the science fair. In *Remember the Titans*, it's Coach **Herman Boone** uniting black and white football players in a newly-integrated Virginia high school and leading them to an undefeated season.

THE MUCH-NEEDED INFLUENCE OF A CHRISTIAN TEACHER

One good teacher truly can make a difference in a student's life... so think of the *eternal* difference a Christian teacher could make.

My son Luke graduated from a local public high school last May. While I am thankful for our school system, a public high school is not an incubator for a mature Christian faith.

It's a tough place to be a believer.

My two high schoolers have been constantly surrounded by drinking, drugs, premarital sex, bullying, profanity, materialism, selfishness, pride and a secular worldview. When Luke's sociology teacher asked the class who was in favor of gay marriage, 28 out of 30 students raised their hands.

"Public schools represent the most strategic mission field in the United States."

President's Perspective

"Since the co-op programs establishment, hundreds of OCC graduates have gone on to become elementary and secondary school teachers..."

shine through you is inspiring and lets people know loudly and clearly what you believe. Thank you for the life you live and the way you make the name of Christ known."

As a parent, I am deeply thankful for one good Christian teacher whose life shone like a candle in a dark place.

A MISSION FIELD LIKE NO OTHER

For seven hours each day, the public school system in America is home to some 50 million students, making it one of the largest "closed countries" in the world. For almost five decades now, religion has been pushed out of public schools, and only a minority of teenagers today are said to be Bible-believing Christians.

The need for a Christian witness in the public school system is great. Carl Blunt, an executive with The Gideons International, puts it bluntly, "Public schools represent the most strategic mission field in the United States."

Over the last thirty years at Ozark Christian College, we have been preparing teachers for that mission field. In 1982, Ozark developed a co-operative program with Missouri Southern State University in Joplin, which allows our students to earn an associate's degree in Bible from OCC and a bachelor's degree in education from MSSU.

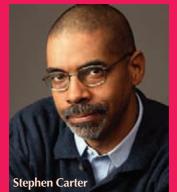
This partnership has allowed Ozark to remain a classic Bible college—with faculty and curriculum dedicated to teaching God's Word—while also allowing our students to prepare for the "mission field" of the public school system.

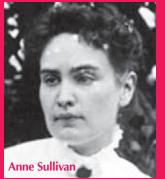
Whether in public or private school, a Christian teacher has a powerful ministry opportunity. Just think: a teacher's daily example of Christlikeness can be seen by students who may have no other significant relationships with a believer.

A teacher's instruction can challenge a student to discover and hone his own God-given abilities.

A teacher's concern can express Christ's love to a child who may have no one else who truly cares. A teacher's prayers—whether a student ever knows she has been prayed for or not—may open up spiritual doors in a young

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That environment takes a toll, and Luke would tell you that during his sophomore year he struggled with his faith. He wrestled with the decision of what kind of person he wanted to be, and he felt lost and confused. It was rough.

But God put Coach Mike Smith in Luke's life at just

the right time. Mike is the high school woodshop teacher, the defensive coordinator for our back-to-back state championship football team, the sponsor for the high school Fellowship of Christian Athletes group, and a deeply committed Christian.

In Coach Smith's classes, Luke learned woodworking skills and made a state-competition-winning pair of water skis. In Thursday morning FCA meetings, Luke heard Coach Smith challenge the students to live sold-out for Jesus Christ. Coach Smith's combination of intensity and humor instantly resonated with my passionate, prankster son.

After his graduation earlier this year, Luke wrote Coach Smith a letter thanking him for his influence: "Whenever I found myself going through a hard time, I looked to your example. I was refreshed and rejuvenated to find another person in a dark school that had the same passion for Jesus Christ as me. The way you let Christ

A Light in a Dark Place

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person's life. A teacher's encouragement can inspire a faltering student to live out his faith in a dark place.

MAKING AN ETERNAL DIFFERENCE

When a teacher shines the light of knowledge, it can illuminate a path for a young African-American boy to go from seemingly-average student to Yale law professor. But when a Christian teacher also shines the light of Christ, it can illuminate a path from the classroom to the very throne room of heaven. In their teachers, some students will see Jesus for the first time.

Since the co-op program's establishment, hundreds of OCC graduates have gone on to become elementary and secondary school teachers, and each one is seizing that ministry opportunity:

- Jeremy Butler (OCC '98) motivates students to develop their God-given creative potential as a high school art teacher in Webb City, Missouri.
- Jennifer Williams (OCC '08) helps students discover God's gift of language as she builds literacy skills with elementary students in Tahlequah, Oklahoma.
- Zach Holden (OCC '02) received the annual Golden Apple Award for helping his Joplin fourth-graders explore God's orderly world of math.
- Breanna Grizzle Hoppal (OCC '06) loves teaching her fourth and fifth graders about God's love in a Christian school in Gilbert, Arizona.

Henry Brooks Adams wrote, "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops." Our education graduates may never have a movie made about their life, but I wouldn't be surprised if they get a few letters from former students someday.

Those letters will say things like: "You helped me fall in love with reading" or "you awakened artistic abilities I didn't know I had" or "you wouldn't let me settle for mediocre study habits." But some of those letters will also say things like: "Thank you for encouraging me with your prayers... for stretching my faith... for showing me Christ in a dark place."

So as a new school year begins, would you join me in praying for Christian teachers everywhere? Theirs is a demanding job, and



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like a candle, they consume themselves to light the way for others.

Let's pray that their lives burn brightly to the glory of God.



Matt Proctor
OCC President

For more information on the Co-Op Program, please contact...

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