

Mars Hill Academy Foundational Documents

History and Philosophy of the Foundational Documents

In June of 2001, the School Board formed an ad hoc committee called “Foundational Documents Committee” with the express purpose of doing the following:

“To identify, establish, refine and coordinate the defining vision, philosophy, assumptions (both theological and cultural) of MHA. A subordinate purpose of the committee is to ensure the effective communication of the above values and priorities to the MHA parent community.”

Families that are considering Mars Hill Academy for their children should carefully read this document in order to understand the basis for the covenantal education we offer. When reading, please begin with the Mission Statement and end with the World & Life Assumptions, the latter being most important in defining MHA as a Christian school. Also, it would be helpful to remember that these four “statements” should be read in light of one another, which allows for each document to help interpret and illuminate the others.

- The MHA Mission Statement is a brief statement of what our most central purpose is as a school. It is intentionally brief, suitable for parents to easily pass on to others and for use in situations where a lengthier statement (or discussion) would not be appropriate.
- The MHA Vision Statement is intended to provide a “snapshot,” if you will, of the most important parties in the school – students, staff, and parents – and what our vision is for them. It is more manageable in scope, but still remains sufficiently broad.
- The MHA Educational Foundations are the convictions, ideas, and beliefs that we have about education in general, and MHA in particular, which are rooted in our World & Life Assumptions and provide the foundation for many of the specific ideas, values, and emphases that will make MHA a unique place to go to school. Again, these are not intended to be exhaustive, but sufficient and representative.
- The MHA World & Life Assumptions are just what they say they are: ideas, opinions, and judgments that we assume to be true about the most basic and fundamental issues. They are necessarily non MHA-specific and non-exhaustive. Everyone, including the unbeliever, makes assumptions; Christians should be conscious and intentional to ensure that we know what our assumptions are and how they affect how we look at the world.

The Foundational Documents were revised in 2022-2023 to incorporate the Core Values, to include a shorter Vision statement while transforming the previous Vision Statement into the Vision Statement Outcomes, and to reflect the adoption in the By-Laws of the Dallas Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel as part of our Statement of Faith.

MHA Mission Statement

Mars Hill Academy exists to assist parents in the duty of covenantal training of their children by offering academic instruction from a consistent, integrated Christian perspective, by equipping our students to learn for themselves using the proven classical method, and by providing them with an orderly and engaging atmosphere conducive to the attainment of our goals.

MHA Vision Statement

To cultivate wise and virtuous men and women who glorify and enjoy God, faithfully applying the Lordship of Christ throughout all of life.

MHA Vision Statement Outcomes

We aim to graduate young men and women who think clearly and listen carefully with discernment and understanding, who reason persuasively and speak precisely, who are capable of evaluating all human knowledge and experience in the light of the Scriptures, and who do so with eagerness in joyful submission to God. We desire them to recognize cultural influences as distinct from biblical, and to be unswayed toward evil by the former. We aim to find them well prepared in all situations, possessing both knowledge and the wisdom to know how to use it. We desire they be socially graceful and spiritually gracious; equipped with and understanding the tools of learning; desiring to grow in understanding, yet fully realizing the limitations and foolishness of the wisdom of this world. We desire they have a heart for the lost and the courage to seek to dissuade those who are stumbling towards destruction, that they distinguish real religion from religion in form only, and that they possess the former, knowing and loving the Lord Jesus Christ. And all these we desire them to possess with humility and gratitude to God.

We likewise aim to cultivate these same qualities in our staff and to see them well paid so that they may make a career at Mars Hill. We desire them to be professional and diligent in their work, gifted in teaching, loving their students and their subjects. We desire they clearly understand classical education, how it works in their classroom and how their work fits into the whole; that they possess a lifelong hunger to learn and grow and that they have opportunity to be refreshed and renewed. We desire to see them coach and nurture new staff and to serve as academic mentors to students. We look to see them mature in Christ, growing in the knowledge of God, their own children walking with the Lord.

We aim to cultivate in our parents a sense of responsibility for the school; to see them well informed about the goals of our classical and Christ-centered approach. We desire them to grow with the school, involved in and excited about the journey. We aim to help them to follow biblical principles in addressing concerns, to be inclined to hearing both sides of a story before rendering a verdict, and to embrace the Scripture's injunctions to encourage and stir one another up to love and good works.

Finally, in our relationship with our community, we aim to be above reproach in our business dealings and supportive of the local business community. We further seek to exemplify the unity of the body of Christ, to develop greater fellowship and understanding with churches, and to bring honor to our Lord in all our endeavors.

MHA Core Values

We Possess the Four Loves

Our faculty and staff desire to embody what we refer to as the Four Loves:

- 1) Love and commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ;
- 2) Love for students;
- 3) Love for our subjects; and
- 4) Love for classical and Christian education.

The Four Loves are our source of inspiration and express our God-given passion for educating children in the classical method so that we may imbue them with a lifelong love for learning and for our Savior, Jesus Christ.

We Partner with Parents

Many schools assert that education is merely about a student's academic development. However, true education encompasses both academic development *and* the formation of young women and young men. While so many schools wish to subsume control over a child's formation in the place of their parents, we exist *in loco parentis*. Mars Hill Academy serves as a trusted caretaker, partnering with parents in raising children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. The goal is to cultivate a deep and lasting love for Christ and the people He has placed in their lives and to see our students' depth of conviction grow in the timeless truths of God's Word — all while learning about the amazing creation of our great God.

We are a Classical School

Rather than chasing the latest and changing fad in educational instruction, we seek to employ the very best of time-tested and proven education methods in human history — the classical method. The classical method draws on the natural development stages as a child matures into adulthood and places an emphasis on utilizing the seemingly lost tools of learning — grammar, logic, and rhetoric — as children progress in their studies. Through the tool of classical education, we desire to cultivate students who can participate effectively in society for the good of others and the glory of God.

We are Distinctively and Genuinely Christian

Faith is taken seriously and joyfully throughout all aspects of the education and formation of our students. All families at Mars Hill Academy ascribe to faith in Jesus Christ. In addition, every faculty person and board member ascribes to personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. Therefore, our faith should be lived out actively in the school community, we should seek joy in our walks with Christ, and our lives should be marked by a striving for personal holiness and God-honoring relationships. We believe the Bible is the primary source of truth and instruction in all matters of faith and life. Our classical and Christian school applies the classical method to provide a wholly-integrated Biblical worldview, where elements of faith are routinely taught and interwoven throughout each subject. At Mars Hill Academy issues of faith and practice are not contained to weekly chapel or a single Bible or religion class but instead provide the foundation for all instruction.

We Value Community

One of the many beautiful results of a distinctive and genuine Christian education is the community of faithful believers that springs to life. We earnestly share life together: praying for one another, discipling students in the way of Christ, enjoying meals together, helping each other with school

projects and special needs, spurring one another on toward greater faith, serving alongside each other in furtherance of our common mission and vision for our school, cheering our sons and daughters on in athletic competition, and in immeasurably more ways. Parents and faculty at Mars Hill hold a shared purpose and, as a result, participate in genuine community.

We are Independent

We value our institutional independence. Independence preserves Mars Hill's freedom to educate and engage in the formation of our students in a distinctively and genuinely Christian manner through the very best of the classical tradition and to do so consistent with our mission and vision. Our pedagogical freedom allows us to focus on proven methods which yield enduring and superior results for both the education and formation of our students and their engagement with society. In terms of culture, our independence grants us wide latitude to evaluate and explore all human history across contemporary and historical cultures, while focusing on the truth, beauty, and goodness found in the Western tradition and boldly embracing our Christian faith. Protecting our institutional independence is essential to the development and cultivation of a distinctively and genuinely Christian and classical model of education and to the intentionally Christian formation of our children consistent with a Biblical worldview.

MHA Educational Foundations

Education Defined

Learning takes place each time a person experiences something new. Education, however, is more than the sum total of facts, people, processes, skills, and experiences imparted in the classroom.

Fundamentally, education involves the transmission of a manner of thinking about the most important and inescapable ideas that would result in changed behavior. Historically speaking, one distinguished the education that took place through the study of the Liberal Arts (Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric, Astronomy, Arithmetic, Music, and Geometry) from the varied vocational training programs that taught a student a skill or task in order to be a productive member of society. The ancient Greeks would have reasoned that the former was the only suitable form of education for a free man (hence, the derivation of "liberal" education), while the latter was appropriate for the slave, who didn't have to think, but merely obey and execute. We wish to maintain this important distinction between education and vocational training at MHA, believing that we are called, as a classical and Christian school, to do the former. It is important to note that while a well-educated man could easily learn the skills of the slave, it is unreasonable to believe that the slave could do the reverse. Historically, a school like MHA (and most certainly the universities and colleges) dealt in education, not in vocational training, which was best suited for apprenticeships and trade schools. The fact that many (if not most) have abandoned a liberal education for a vocational one provides an even greater impetus and rationale for the existence of genuinely classical and Christian secondary schools and colleges.

Classical and Christian Methods

While no pedagogy is inspired, the method of educating children initiated in classical Greece, developed in Rome, and brought to its fullest and brightest expression in the Middle Ages – the Trivium - is the best human system for developing the intellectual capabilities of children and young adults. Our Grammar School will teach students to memorize and observe, in addition to providing each student with basic proficiency in writing, reading, and arithmetic. Our younger Rhetoric School students will be taught dialectic – or logic – and how to reason from a logical and explicitly Christian perspective. The ordered relationships between ideas, events, and data will form the backbone of their

study. Finally, our older Rhetoric School students will be given ample opportunity for self-expression, creativity, and the evaluation of seminal ideas in man's dealings with God and His creation. A multi-year study of classical rhetoric will provide the students with the necessary tools to do this well. The MHA Board, Administration, and Faculty are whole-heartedly committed to this model of education, which aims to teach students to think and learn for themselves. We will strive to grow in our understanding and implementation of what a classical education involved in the past and what it will look like at MHA for future generations seeking to "recover the lost tools of learning."

Classical and Christian Content

The philosophical, literary, scientific, and theological heritage of the Christian West is a rich one. It is our intention to make the students very familiar with it. We do this for two reasons: First, in order to know where one should go in the future, it is imperative that one understands where he has been. We must have context. The content of our students' study at MHA is designed to equip them to know, understand and critically evaluate their heritage that forms the foundation for nearly everything they see around them. Second, we believe that because Christianity has seen its deepest roots in the West, its cultural "artifacts" are the most deeply Christian (with important counter-examples noted) and, therefore, most lovely. Since the Scripture commands us to meditate on these things, we do so without apology.

Classical and Christian Results

Mars Hill Academy students will gain the ability to learn independently from teachers. They will be well equipped to learn a new language, read and understand primary source documents, reason inductively and deductively as the situation demands, and they will, by God's grace, find biblical principles at their disposal as they consider the important issues of the day. They will also be avid readers and interdisciplinary thinkers. They will be poised and persuasive when speaking publicly. Their writing will be elegant and forceful; creative and purposeful. In short, they will have been prepared with the tools of learning. College professors, employers, and friends will find MHA graduates to think from principle, write and speak in measured and well-reasoned thoughts, and be diligent in seeing a job or task through to its completion. They will also find them unapologetically Christian in their convictions and desires.

Students

Students come to Mars Hill Academy ready to work for a time and at a level commensurate with their physical and mental abilities. MHA is a student's workplace. The social interaction and spiritual training that takes place during school hours are subordinate goals for a school. They are better taught in the context of church and home. Work is a gift from God, given before the Fall, which should be relished and enjoyed, not despised. Thus, a sense of responsibility and diligence, not to mention joy, should characterize MHA classrooms. Students in the School of Rhetoric will evidence an increasing social maturity, intellectual curiosity and independence, and Spirit-given fruit that will cause them to love the true things, the good things, and the beautiful things. In general, MHA students will perform at a level equal to or higher than most of their peers. Finally, we also desire to see appropriate expressions of God-given masculinity and femininity throughout the life of the school. Our social interaction, dress, speech, and programming will all attempt to adorn, rather than destroy, the fact that God created two beautiful and complementary persons when he made man "male and female."

Teachers

MHA teachers will be bright, highly motivated, industrious, and humble. They will love each student in their classroom, viewing each child as a gift from God and teaching as an opportunity to sow seeds of grace and truth deep within the students' hearts. They will also evidence a strong desire to grow intellectually and spiritually throughout their lives and be eager to discover and implement classical teaching methods, knowing that recovering the lost tools of learning begins with them. Most importantly, they will possess a radically God-centered worldview that informs all they set their hands to do. They will not be perfect, but competent and teachable. They will not assume to know their students better than the children's parents but offer encouragement and helpful criticism as appropriate.

School Board

Our School Board consists of Christians who have demonstrated themselves to be spiritually mature and gifted for school leadership. Board members possess a love for and a commitment to classical education, never believing they fully understand all that it encompasses but always seeking to grow and learn. They will provide institutional vision, leadership, and serve as spiritual examples to the school community, resisting the influences and biases of the prevailing culture, where appropriate, to boldly direct the school in pursuit of its mission, vision, and goals.

School

MHA aims to assist parents in fulfilling their God-ordained duties to "bring up a child in the fear and nurture of the LORD." As such, MHA operates as a servant to its parent constituency. We have obviously chosen a particular means of doing this: classical and Christian education. Parents may, or may not, agree with MHA's approach to the training and education of children and yet, choosing to join the MHA community, signal their intention to joyfully submit to the school's stated philosophies, policies, programs, etc. While believing very strongly in the uniqueness and efficacy of the classical method, we wish to affirm the legitimacy of other approaches to education, provided they are intentionally Christian.

Life Together

We desire that MHA would support both the family and the church in their respective missions under God's providential hand, neither assuming too much nor doing too little for either. Parents will be encouraged to remain vitally engaged in their child's education. In addition, we pray that God would grant us an atmosphere of love, forbearance, hard work, joy, and intellectual curiosity that would inspire and edify us while honoring Him. We will resist the temptation to gossip, think ill of one another, or to presume the worst, making sure to obey God's word with regards to our personal relationships. Parents, not teachers, will bear the primary responsibility for remaining informed about their child's progress at MHA. The staff will attempt to help parents in this endeavor through regular and helpful communication. Our school culture, academic and co-curricular programs, and personal relationships should imitate, as God gives us grace, the examples and teaching laid down in Holy Scripture and in the most truthful, good, and beautiful traditions of the Christian West.

MHA World and Life Assumptions

The Westminster Confession of Faith, Larger Catechism and Shorter Catechism along with the Dallas Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel define the scope and elements of Christian truth that Board Members, Administrators, and Teachers must affirm and adopt to be considered for positions at Mars

Hill Academy. While we see no need to add a second doctrinal definition, as we believe the Confession to be sufficient, we do want to emphasize certain theological truths as they relate to education. The Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger Catechism and Shorter Catechism should be considered part of the World & Life Assumptions that support and animate the MHA Educational Foundations, Vision Statement, and Mission Statement.

Sovereignty

God alone is sovereign and non-contingent. He possesses absolute authority over all things. He has created all things, sustains all things, and governs all things. He is the fountain of all being and truth. He works all things together for His own glory, which is the ground and the goal of all creation, providence, and redemption.

Holy Scripture

The LORD has revealed Himself to us authoritatively, perfectly, and therefore sufficiently, although not exhaustively, in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in His written expression of His wisdom, the Bible. It is the only infallible rule of faith and life for the Church and as such, should be treasured, studied, believed, and humbly acted upon by all who call themselves Christian. As one theologian put it, “The Scriptures speak authoritatively in all that they address and they address everything.” We would agree, with the caveat that they do not address everything in the same manner, or with the same degree of specificity. We reject any attempt to pit a thoughtful, contextually sensitive, and theologically astute reading of Scripture against a warm, heartfelt, devotional reading. We must not leave “interpretation” to the scholars and “application” to the pastors. Every Christian should do both. As Christians, we confess our need to study, meditate, pray, and obey more than we commonly do, believing that in the Scriptures we will find real life.

Creation

The Scriptures tell us unequivocally that God created everything and it was good. The author of Hebrews tells us that we understand this truth “by faith.” We repudiate, therefore, the modern tendency to accommodate the Creation account (Genesis 1 and 2) to modern scientific discoveries and theories, believing that the goal of Christian scientists is to teach a humble science – one that is ultimately governed by the truths of the Scriptures. Because the origin of all created matter has intrinsic unity, the Christian scientist finds meaning and purpose in scientific inquiry, seeing it as an essential component of the command to have dominion over the physical creation. The fruit of man’s labors, provided it proceeds from a heart of faith and not sin or selfish ambition, is good, as well. We rejoice that God was pleased to create flesh, not merely spirits, and assume that God desires us to use our bodies and the entire earthly and heavenly creation around us for His glory. Man was created male and female, that is, he created man differently. We reject the modern notion that we should, for all practical purposes, ignore this distinction and treat men and women (and boys and girls) the same.

Antithesis

Because of man’s fall in Adam, Christians find themselves surrounded by ideas and actions that are squarely opposed to the way of thinking and living revealed in Holy Scripture. This notion is perhaps best captured by the word antithesis. Some of these ideas and actions are easily recognizable as pagan in origin, while others are extremely subtle, and as a consequence, require tremendous discernment. It is very likely that in order to provide a truly God-centered and Christian education (not to mention classical), it will be necessary to break completely free from the educational philosophy and policy around us. As Christians living in a fallen culture, we must be careful not to make unbiblical

assumptions about any area of life but commit ourselves to a diligent study of Holy Scripture and pray that God would give true discernment as we live in the midst of an unbelieving world seeking to take “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

Worldview

Christianity is more than a set of propositions supported by proof texts. It is rather an entire system of thought. A worldview shapes our perspective and interpretation of everything else in the world. Christianity must be viewed as a whole and not just as a collection of discrete elements. As the Dutch theologian, journalist, and statesman Abraham Kuyper said, “There is not a single square inch of creation over which Jesus Christ does not shout, ‘Mine!’” The Christian’s worldview is the “lens” through which we see, understand, and teach all things. It is antithetical to all other worldviews and thus, requires that we present all ideas and concepts as part of a larger whole defined by Christian truth.

Christian Aesthetic

Perhaps nowhere is the absence of genuinely Christian thinking more evident than in the realm of aesthetics. Ethics and epistemology (the science of knowledge) have received ample evangelical attention, but not aesthetics. We are the worse for it. We believe that the infallible rule of Scripture and the historic witness of the Church call Christians to make judgments of “good-better-best” and “bad-worse-worst” in every area of life. Paul’s aesthetic manifesto is quickly summarized in Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy -- meditate on these things.” God has called us to embrace a life of moral and aesthetic virtue, preferring cultural icons and artifacts that have enduring, classical power and grace.

History

Paul tells the Corinthians that the Israelites’ experience in the Wilderness was recorded “for their instruction.” MHA affirms the legitimacy and necessity of cultivating a historically informed mind, so that we might follow our ancestors in their faithfulness and repudiate their sin. Every generation, every culture, and every age demonstrates the fallen character of man’s heart in unique and often subtle ways. To think that our own contemporary age is exempt from sin would be naïve. C.S. Lewis labeled this perspective “chronological snobbery.” We need our brothers and sisters from past decades, centuries, and millennia - a council affectionately known as the “democracy of the dead” – as well as contemporary voices to help us see the emptiness of our current perspective and situation. Even pagans know that those ignorant of the past are doomed to repeat it. Therefore, Christians individually and collectively should acknowledge our dependence on and need for an historical perspective. The LORD exhorts the people of God living in physical, moral, and spiritual exile to “Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls...” Christians should relinquish the modern evolutionary assumption that only what is “new” is worthwhile, preferring instead to walk on the ancient path of Christian faithfulness and mercy that stretches back to the garden of Eden.

Children

Children, like all men and women, have been uniquely “knit together” by God in their mother’s womb and bear the image of God in their entire person, which means their lives have a dignity and significance that is unparalleled in the created world. At the same time, because of the Fall, children

are now, by nature and experience, sinful, self-centered, and stand under God's holy wrath, apart from the saving work of Christ. Even assuming God's supernatural work in a child's life, they remain, by definition, immature and need the loving training of parents, grandparents, pastors, teachers, and other adults to bring them to a mature status in Christ. Parents are fully responsible for this training, even when they have delegated a portion of it to another.

Family

The family is the most central of divinely appointed, human societies, as it is the "training ground" for godly living in all others. Our homes are "little churches" and "little states." Without biblically virtuous homes, the Church and the State are hopelessly lost. We believe God has called Christian parents into a personal and corporate covenant with Himself – through His body, the Church – and that when God blesses a man and woman with children, those children are holy because they are children of the covenant. These "covenant households" are led by covenant heads (fathers), to study, pray, worship, and live together in a spirit of love, respect, and peace that comes from the LORD. Fathers should set biblical priorities for themselves and their children and reject the unbiblical priorities of the culture around them. Mothers should assist the father in the training of covenant children, as the Scriptures indicate the inestimable role that mothers have in shaping the character and piety (and worldview) of their children. Family life should be shaped by a joyful, Word-centered intentionality. Families led by godly fathers should be deeply committed to Christian education as a duty and privilege, and desirous of growing in their understanding of what constitutes a classical and Christian education, taking advantage of all available opportunities (books, tapes, conferences, spending time at the school) to do so.

Personal Holiness

The Scriptures command and empower the Christian to be holy because God is holy. For this reason, we must strive to live lives that are above reproach, refusing to allow temptation and sin to rule our bodies, hearts, and minds. Stated positively, we are to "love the LORD our God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love our neighbor as ourselves." In doing this, we fulfill the Law of Christ and give evidence of the Spirit's fruitful work within us. Christians must resist the inclinations of their own hearts and the deceptive activity of Satan. When Christians do sin, we should be quick to repent, ask forgiveness from God and any offended party, and offer restitution. Adult Christians should model these ideals to their children, in addition to teaching them "as they go along the way."