

Church Launches Tuition-Free School After Public Library Outrage

Necessity, the old adage goes, is the mother of invention.

Justin Walker, pastor of Salt and Light Baptist Church just outside Louisville, Kentucky, experienced that proverb firsthand—and it birthed a vision for a tuition-free, church-sponsored grade school, First Principles Academy.

The Origin

For years, Walker told CBN News, he led a small but stable congregation alongside his wife Sarah, with whom he shared six children. But then tragedy struck: in the summer of 2020, when the congregation—like many across the country—was struggling to find its footing amid a pandemic, the pastor's wife received a devastating diagnosis.

She had stage four cancer. After months of battling the brutal disease, Sarah passed away in March 2021.

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Overnight, Walker became a single father of six—five of whom live at home and were homeschooled—as well as a bi-vocational pastor working full-time for a family fabric business. It was in that season of struggle, when he was stretched and struck by grief more than ever before, that Walker saw a need.

“I didn't realize it at first, but it really stemmed from my wife passing,” the pastor said, reflecting on the origin of his vision to launch a tuition-free school for kids in kindergarten through sixth grade. “I used to say that ‘we homeschool,’ and then my wife passed, and I realized, ‘Oh, my

wife homeschooled.'”



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That was now Walker’s job. As he began taking on those tasks, the grieving father brought one of his daughters to a local public library to find something for her to read.

“It was the first of June, and they were pushing all of these LGBTQ books on my daughter in the public library, and I was so upset,” he said. “And I just made this personal post on Facebook. I took a picture of the books they were [trying to give my 11-year-old daughter] ... and I was so upset at that. ... I took a picture of [the books] and I posted them on Facebook and I said, ‘Shame on you, public library, for pushing these books on my daughter. We won’t be back.’”

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That post, Walker recalled, sparked “a huge firestorm” on social media and it made clear to him there was “a great need” in his community for a better educational alternative.

“The more I started looking, the more I realized there’s a mission field in our own backyard that the average church is not involved in, and that mission field is 50 million American children that are going to public schools every day where things like what just happened to my daughter in the library are happening all day long. And here I am, the pastor of a church, supposed to be a community leader, and what are we doing about this? No one’s even talking about it.”

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