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Spring 2021

Great Commission Educators: School of Education Leadership Casting a Worldwide Vision

Mark D. Weinstein

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GREAT COMMISSION EDU

CATORS

**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
LEADERSHIP CASTING
A WORLDWIDE VISION**

BY MARK WEINSTEIN



To describe Cedarville University's new School of Education Dean, Kevin Jones, as an academic leader seems a little, how do you put it — understated. Jones has the passion of a preacher, the energy of a college football coach, the vision of a Fortune 500 entrepreneur, and the heart of a missionary.

More than anything, Jones loves the Lord, and he loves students. And he wants to see Cedarville teachers span the country and the globe as Great Commission educators. "My hope is we would send out graduates every single year who will teach students the ABCs and math computations — good pedagogical content — and who will also proclaim God's truth and bring Him glory as they have the opportunity," said Jones, soon after assuming the role of dean this past summer.

In his first 16 weeks on the job, Jones has been busy building relationships with faculty colleagues, infusing them with his contagious enthusiasm and energy, and reaching out to high school leaders throughout the Miami Valley. His plan

But when he entered the University of Kentucky in 2005 to pursue a master's degree in education, Jones had several options to consider. He could pursue a master's degree that would guide him toward K–12 school administration, which, most invariably, would take him down the path of becoming a high school principal or school district superintendent.

Another option was to choose to focus on education policy and work for his native homeland of Kentucky at the state level, or he could pursue a postsecondary education degree. All of his training and experience to that point would have suggested a continued career in the elementary classroom, with an option for an expanded leadership role.

Instead, Jones chose to pursue the postsecondary program, and Cedarville University is the current benefactor from this decision. In 2016, he earned his doctoral degree in education from Spalding University.

As a result of his choice to pursue postsecondary education, Jones parlayed his master's degree into teaching positions at Kentucky State University and an academic leadership role at Boyce College in Louisville, Kentucky. Earning his doctorate was the final academic stamp needed for Jones to take his new leadership role at Cedarville University.

Through all of his experiences and education, Jones has refined his mission for the future educators that he teaches. He wants the faculty at Cedarville to teach students from Scripture but, specifically, with a Matthew 28 perspective.

"What separates Cedarville's education program from other universities is that we have a theological approach to the way we teach," said Jones. "Without question, our pedagogical and sociological approach to teaching is solid, but from what I've discerned from my time at Cedarville is that our faculty bring a Christlike love for our students that demands excellence in classroom instruction and through personal discipleship."

DYNAMIC DUO

But, the new dean knew coming into his role at Cedarville that he couldn't do his work by himself. He needed a colleague to join him at the leadership level to share ideas and dreams so the School of Education could continue to excel.

"One of the first items of business when I came this past summer was to talk with each faculty member in the School of Education to learn from them who they thought would make a great assistant dean," said Jones. "100% of the faculty listed

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is to provide a compelling vision of a Cedarville education that will inspire students, faculty, and educational leaders.

"Dr. Jones has brought an energy and new life to our school in very short order," said Lori (Brown) Ferguson '98, whom Jones appointed assistant dean in the weeks shortly after he assumed the reins of the program. "Although the fall semester was a challenge because of COVID-19, I am encouraged to see all of the faculty from our school moving in the same direction. That is a direct result of Dr. Jones' visionary and approachable leadership."

UNEXPECTED DESTINATION

Jones never thought he would be leading a university education program. In fact, he started teaching at the opposite end of the education spectrum, working with first-graders at Clays Mill Elementary School in Lexington, Kentucky, after he earned his bachelor's degree in elementary education from Kentucky State University. Four years later, Jones shifted to physical education for fifth-grade students at Watterson Elementary School in Louisville.

Dr. Lori Ferguson as their first or second choice. Their input made for an easy decision.”

In some ways, Ferguson’s path to college leadership parallels the path taken by Jones. Both Jones and Ferguson started their teaching careers in public schools. Ferguson spent eight years teaching third-grade students at Cedarville Elementary in Cedarville and eighth-grade math at Baker Middle School in Fairborn, Ohio.

“In all honesty, after I graduated from Cedarville in 1998, I just wanted to be a second- or third-grade teacher in the public school system,” said Ferguson. “I grew up in public schools, and I always loved the Christian teachers that I had, and I wanted to be like them in my career.”

After stepping away from the classroom in 2006 to begin raising her family, Ferguson didn’t know when, or if, she would return to a classroom. That hiatus, however, lasted just one year. That’s when Dr. Sue Baker, Professor Emerita of Education at Cedarville, changed the direction of Ferguson’s professional life.

In 2007, Baker recommended Ferguson as an adjunct student-teacher supervisor. A year later, she added one course to her schedule as an adjunct instructor, which continued until 2011 when she was offered a position as an instructor.

With a master’s degree already in hand from the University of Dayton, Ferguson embarked on a quest for her doctorate in education from the University of Cincinnati. Eight years later, in 2020, and with two children, Ferguson completed her doctoral degree in curriculum and instruction: teaching mathematics.

“I am honored to serve alongside Dr. Jones and with some very incredibly talented and caring faculty members,” said Ferguson. “It is our hope that we lead well so that our students graduate with an understanding for how a Christian educator works and cares for their students.”

Jones, meanwhile, softly sits back in his chair as his assistant dean echoes his views of education and the role of an educator.

“Dr. Ferguson brings a discipline and level of excellence to her new role. We are committed to working diligently so that our faculty and students benefit, not just in their current positions or as students, but for generations to come,” said Jones.

MIGHTY MENTORS

This is a lesson that Jones learned years ago from his upbringing in church, and from mentors like Kevin Smith, Executive Director of the Maryland and Delaware Baptist State Convention; Curtis Woods, Associate Executive Director of Convention Relations for the Kentucky Baptist Convention; and the late Kenneth Chapman, former Vice President of Academic Affairs at Kentucky State University.

“I learned from mentors that my faith is my career, and I must work hard because at the end of my life, it won’t be the superintendent or the principal doing my evaluation, it will be the Lord Jesus Christ who will be giving out my recompense, my just

Dr. Ferguson and I want to be found faithful in the time we are given as leaders in the School of Education.

Kevin Jones

due,” said Jones. “Dr. Ferguson and I want to be found faithful in the time we are given as leaders in the School of Education.”

In the end, Jones and Ferguson are committed to helping their faculty members to continue discipling students so that when they earn their degree from Cedarville University, they will be prepared to go to every city and every country as Great Commission educators.

Mark D. Weinstein is the Executive Director of Public Relations for Cedarville University.

PREACHER AND TEACHER

In addition to being a committed follower of Jesus, an energetic visionary in the School of Education, and an innovative and compassionate educator, the new Dean of the School of Education has a tremendous preaching gift.

Prior to joining the faculty of Cedarville University, Kevin Jones was a frequent speaker in chapel, and he continues to inspire, exhort, and implore students, faculty, and staff.

Learn more about this dedicated educator and gifted preacher by listening to the Cedarville Stories podcast, which featured him this spring. Visit cedarville.edu/cedarvillestories or scan the QR code.

