

CHRISTIAN COMMUNICATORS OF OHIO SPEECH AND DEBATE PROGRAM

There are a variety of competitive speech and debate programs in which young people may participate. While the programs may have some similarities, there are often philosophical differences. Such differences need not be the cause for disputes, rivalries, or factions among programs. Rather, constituents should examine the various program offerings, to determine which will best accomplish the purposes sought by the participants. This document explains what is done in the Christian Communicators of Ohio (CCO) program, and why it is done, so that reasoned people are able to make informed decisions.

To understand the CCO program, one needs to understand the CCO Mission and Vision document. If that document has not yet been reviewed, the reader is encouraged to review it before reading any further.

A Christian Focus: The CCO Speech and Debate Program is marked with an obvious, overt, and unabashed Christian focus based upon a conservative interpretation of the Holy Bible. The CCO Statement of Faith explains CCO beliefs. As a result, CCO tournaments are marked, in part, by:

- Devotional presentations with challenging messages from God's Word
- Prayer
- Singing of Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs
- Fellowship of parents and competitors
- Ongoing challenges to encourage godly living
- A focus on Christian character (amplified below)
- Distinctively Christian Individual Event categories (amplified below)
- An emphasis on a Biblical worldview in all events (amplified below)

“Christian” is not simply the first part of CCO’s name; it is the embodiment of why CCO exists.

Christian Character: CCO recognizes that competitive events can foster negative consequences: undesirable attitudes can be created, and unfriendly rivalries can be established. Yet, the same competitive events can be used to encourage excellence and to drive competitors to mutually higher levels of performance. CCO also recognizes that the acquisition of argumentation skills, like many other skills, can be used for good as well as for harm. Along with the potential negatives, there are tremendous opportunities for great gain; i.e., confidence can be developed, critical thinking skills can be refined, discernment can be exercised, and the competitor can learn how to respond to wins and losses in a godly manner. Deep friendships have been established between competitors. For these reasons, CCO has established a program that places godly character as the most important trait to be developed in young people.

Few Christians would disagree with the goal of character development; yet, the topic prompts an honest question: “How does CCO seek to achieve the goal of Christian character development?” It begins with a Code of Conduct, signed by the parents and students, which is enforced by CCO. It continues with a Ballot wherein an “ethics” violation over-rides the win-loss aspect of the round. (A student who exhibits poor character-related behavior will not be rewarded with a tournament win.) It continues with CCO leaders, parents, and coaches who pray for and with the competitors. And it includes the hard conversations with violators, encouraging them to recognize areas for improvement.

CCO recognizes that all believers are “works in progress”, and is quick to point out that no one has “arrived”. Yet, Christians can, as instructed in Hebrews 10:24 “....spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”

Distinctively Christian Individual Event: Each year, CCO selects an event with an overt, specifically Christian focus, such as Impromptu Apologetics. The goal is simple: to offer an event that will encourage competitors to acquire knowledge that will be directly assisting them to “...be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks (them) to give the reason for the hope that (they) have.” (I Peter 3:15).

Competitors will typically find it advantageous to memorize Scripture for this event, something that will stay with them for years. Examining the works of Christian writers helps the students solidify their own beliefs. Experience has shown that family discussions often center on the topics of this event, prompting natural discussion of spiritual issues, as is consistent with the pattern outlined in Deuteronomy 6:7. These discussions have often been life-changing opportunities for participants. Further, observers at these events have been blessed and challenged by the contents of the presentations.

Biblical Worldview: This topic is discussed in the Mission and Vision document, but it is also discussed here in order to show how Biblical Worldview is emphasized in the CCO program.

In Individual Event (IE) categories such as Interpretive and Public Address, the selection of the pieces for memorization and presentation are to be consistent with Biblical truth. Quality literature is replete with examples wherein a wholesome, uplifting, and God-honoring message is presented. Unfortunately, literature also includes messages that are in conflict with Biblical thought. Competitors must learn that they are responsible for examining the message they are to present to see if it is consistent with their beliefs. Selections are not required to specifically present a Biblical message; however, messages inconsistent with this standard are to be avoided.

Limited Preparation events such as Impromptu and Extemporaneous often require the competitor to evaluate an issue and to present an opinion or a perspective. The goal is to evaluate the issue from a Biblical worldview, seeking to discern what Biblical principles would apply. Christian judges can be helpful in encouraging such thinking. CCO

recognizes that the primary venue for such training is in the home; and therefore, comments from judges and coaches should be evaluated within the home.

CCO utilizes a mixture of judges, including: 1) community judges that may or may not hold similar worldviews to the competitors; and 2) godly, mature Christians who are able to evaluate the messages presented, and who can offer guidance regarding the appropriateness of the content of the material.

Consistent Judge Training: Speech and debate tournaments are competitive events evaluated by individuals called judges. Such tournaments are conducted under a set of prescribed rules enforced by the Tournament Director. Tournaments do not necessarily duplicate the communication situations encountered by most people on a day-to-day basis. Debate, for example, is not an activity wherein truth is determined or the perfect policy is discovered. Rather, debate is a construct that has been developed for training the mind in the art of argumentation.

Standards have been established and are expected to be followed by everyone involved in a tournament, including the judge. CCO strives to ensure that judges are consistently trained so that they know the standards and judge accordingly. If a team breaks the rules, the judge should not award that behavior with a win. It is unfair to the rule-abiding team; and it sends the wrong message: “everything is OK as long as you don’t get caught”. This message, while consistent with much of today’s post-modern worldview, is an anathema to the Biblical worldview. CCO welcomes “community” judges, but prioritizes the use of “trained” judges.

Individual Events Offerings: CCO leadership offers various Individual Events that are expected to assist the competitors in the development of specific skills. The goal of these events is learning. Too often, competitors enter into and compete in events where their personal strengths are exercised. Not surprisingly, they typically excel in such events. When they enter the same event for the second and third year, they continue to exercise such skills, but the learning may be limited. Each year CCO selects events from different genres, each of which is expected to develop new skills. Events are rotated from year-to-year to encourage competitors to participate in new events, in order to learn new skills.

Family-friendly: Participation in CCO speech and debate tournaments is a significant family commitment, involving commitments of time and financial resources. CCO is committed to tournaments with a maximum length of two days; thus enabling entire families to participate in the events. For many home educating families, the father is the primary breadwinner, and the mother is the primary educator. CCO believes it is not desirable for tournaments to be “family dividing” events, separating moms, dads, and siblings. Therefore, a two-day tournament schedule makes a commitment more practical for many families; and more importantly, it keeps fathers involved with the education of their children.

CCO has established a “junior” division, allowing siblings from the age of five years old to compete in their own speech events. The program is safe, unthreatening, and fun for

the youngsters, enabling them to compete just like their big brothers and sisters. In addition to the opportunity to learn, families are kept together in a healthy way.

Traditional Debate Criteria: Traditional debate requires the winning team to win (or “carry”) four “stock issues”. Much discipline is required to debate: arguments can only be raised at certain points; and when an argument is dropped, the opponent wins on that particular issue. Arguments are to be supported by evidence, not simply the debater’s opinion, no matter how eloquently and persuasively the point is presented.

At CCO tournaments, the traditional criteria of carrying all four stock issues will be the primary basis for determination of the win, except when there is an ethics violation. Judges are trained to make their decisions on these criteria and on the content of the round, not the eloquence of the speakers alone. Assertions without evidence are to be rejected by judges as mere claims. Non-conformance with the protocol of debate procedures is unacceptable, and CCO has implemented policies to minimize these practices.

CCO desires that students compete within a defined “arena”, that is, within a set of agreed upon boundaries. Although there are other legitimate forms of debate, certain forms have been disallowed by CCO—not because they are necessarily wrong or harmful, but because they are outside the prescribed “arena”. For example, critics and counter plans are specifically disallowed. Acceptable case structures are also specifically defined. In defining the boundaries, competition is enhanced and learning is encouraged.

A Balanced Program: Participation in speech and debate competition can be a time consuming venture. Successful debaters, in particular, may spend untold hours doing research, developing their case, and critiquing other cases. Superficially, this may seem like the home educating parent’s dream--self-motivated students spending hours upon hours in the pursuit of knowledge. However, balance in life is important, and a student’s schedule should include time for other activities deemed important by the family, including local church involvement, physical activities, other academic subjects, social time, community service, and family life.

CCO has specifically limited the length of the competitive season to one semester. This permits families to concentrate on other issues in an undistracted manner for the remainder of the year. CCO also offers a limited number of IE categories in order to control the commitment of time necessary for participation. Finally, the scope of the debate resolution has been deliberately limited so that the competitor is only required to research a limited number of potential negative cases. CCO believes these constraints will permit the development of the desired skills and will, concurrently, allow the student to participate in other worthwhile ventures.

Evidence Books Disallowed: In some debate programs, it is possible to purchase cataloged evidence, which addresses the resolution and that has facts supporting various positions. CCO believes that learning how to acquire such data is an important skill that is best learned by researching firsthand. Accordingly, CCO does not allow the use of

evidence books. It requires the competitors to be responsible for the quality and accuracy of any and all evidence presented in a debate round.

Purchased Affirmative Cases Disallowed: In a manner similar to the evidence books, some programs allow affirmative cases written by others to be available for purchase. CCO believes that the construction of an affirmative case is an important activity that should be the work of the competitor. Purchased cases are prohibited.

There are other “marks” of the CCO program that are not included here, but this list is provided to identify the key characteristics for which this program is known. CCO is striving to help parents as they raise another generation of God-loving and God-fearing men and women who will make it their life’s aim to bring glory to God. Parents who desire their children to participate in this type of program are encouraged to join CCO.