

A forum for Christian school educators

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Risky? Yes! But, Oh, The Rewards!



Bert Witvoet

The history of humankind is replete with instances of cross-cultural experiences that turned out badly, especially for the less dominant culture. One has to consider only the plight of the North American Indians to realize that cross-cultural contact can be harmful. We earthlings are not wise enough, it seems, to be able to reach across the borders of various civilizations with a view of being helpful to each other. So then why should Christian schools in North America contemplate setting up partnerships with Christian schools in less developed countries as some have done? This issue of CEJ presents accounts of three such partnerships. And we do so with approval.

I myself have recently been to South Africa, along with seven other educators and school supporters. We spent between four to eight weeks with the Venda people in the northern part of South Africa, the province of Limpopo, at the invitation of Principal Wilson Mandende of Theocentric Christian College — an indigenous Christian school. He had asked us to organize a teachers' conference for about 100 educators of black Christian schools in the area. The request was the result of several years of fruitful contact between Canadian Christian educators and several Venda Christian schools (See sidebar to article by Dora Strooboscher on page 9).

A new direction

We asked Worldwide Christian Schools to sponsor our visit. Our project was a new direction for WWCS. Up till now this organization has been focusing mainly on building facilities for Christian schools in foreign countries. Our focus was not building facilities but training teachers. Worldwide Christian Schools eagerly embraced this new direction. Because of our interest in training, we would enter the more sensitive areas of cultural exchange. Buildings rarely evoke negative vibes when it comes to crossing borders. But when you talk about worldview in a society that still labors under the system of patriarchy, polygamy and tribal loyalties, and when you share ideas about pedagogy in a system that is teacher-centered and lecture-oriented, you have to tread carefully and humbly.

To be invited is, of course, an important consideration in this matter of cross-cultural encounters. It's an indication of trust on the part of the host, based on previous experiences, that we would not impose an unwanted structure on a society that is so very different from ours and has its own integral value system, one that requires our respect.

One of our team members supplied some of us novices with reading material on the Venda culture. He quoted Paul Hiebert in his chapter on "Gospel and Culture" in *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (1985), in which Hiebert describes cul-

ture as "more or less integrated systems of ideas, feelings, and values and their associated patterns of behavior and products shared by a group of people...." Cultures usually have a coherent way of looking at the world, called a "worldview." The challenge facing missionaries — and I would include Christian educators who make the leap into a different society — is that they should try to understand the worldview that drives a culture and challenge it only after they have gained trust and only to the extent that the gospel demands it. This implies that the "intruders" spend a lot of time listening and observing, and that they keep in mind their own cultural baggage that may or may not line up with what God intends for his creatures. Above all, instead of telling people in other cultures what they must do, it's more helpful to invite them to think along other lines if there is a problem in the indigenous culture, and to facilitate their desire to make changes.

Giving and receiving

Another important consideration to pack in your mental suitcase is the awareness that a good visit is like a two-way street — the traffic of gifts should flow both ways. We in North America often have the gift of experience in Christian education. Through our collective associations we have developed policies and insights that can really benefit fledgling schools. We often have the gift of financial resources that can help improve the facilities and study materials to which schools in economically less advantaged societies do not have access. But our host schools often have social and spiritual gifts they can pass on to us.

The information we received about the Venda people, for example, told us that they are a hospitable people, and we certainly experienced that. "Relationship building takes precedence over time," I read. Again, that was born out in the way people take time to greet each other and inquire about each other's health and wellbeing. What to Westerners may look like a lack of efficiency can in reality be a matter of healthy priorities. We also discovered (surprise, surprise) that the Venda people are generally not spoiled by extravagant living. Few have cars. Principal Wilson Mandende walks 10 kilometers (more than six miles) to school and 10 kilometers back to his home every day. School starts at 7:30 a.m. There is a certain discipline and simplicity in that picture, traits that are good for both body and soul. It acts as a rebuke to Westerners who take too much for granted in their prosperity.

Against the grain

Another habit we Westerners must guard against is the desire for quick fixes or short-term contacts. The article about partnering

which appears on page 10 explains that partnerships with other schools requires long-term commitment: "It's not only unhelpful to dash in and out of a relationship [one could easily apply this to any relationship including marriage]; it is detrimental to those who experience a brief moment of hope." Our society does not encourage long-term commitments. We want instant results and a quick change of scenery. But the biblical emphasis on covenant, a teaching that we treasure also in Christian schools, more than hints at faithfulness and steadfastness. It is gratifying to see how schools that are mentioned in this issue — Smithville Christian schools, Legacy Christian elementary in Grand Rapids, and Zeeland Christian School — are in it for the long haul.

Of course, the last thing we North Americans want to do is try to turn our partner schools into westernized institutions. We can thank God that secularism has not yet infiltrated some of our partner schools and the societies in which they operate to the extent that it has in our schools and our society. Many of these indigenous societies embody a healthy respect for authority and a strong sense of family cohesiveness. Young people in the Venda culture are able to sing out unselfconsciously in ways that our young people often dare not. It's as if they surrender themselves more easily to the ways of the tribe and traditions, submitting themselves to the task of expressing joy and praise in ritualistic dances and movements. This ingenuousness can make North American educators jealous when on their own turf they constantly bump up against the "coolness" factor of stunted social growth. No doubt the star phenomenon of professional entertainment in our society adds to subdued lyrical expression. Thank God, we still have churches that allow us to empty our lungs with cheerful voice in praise of Someone greater than any of us.

No great sacrifice

I'm going to let you in on a little secret: those who engage in cross-cultural encounters do it to benefit themselves. Don't tell anyone else, but it's true. Forget about the high-falutin' talk of sacrifice and generosity. It's a façade, a charade, an optical and

aural illusion. Whenever you talk to one of these do-gooders, these burdened border hoppers, they will admit that it is more blessed to give than to receive. So where's the sacrifice?

A month after we had returned from our visit to South Africa, I received the following letter from someone in South Africa:

I was astounded and very blessed to meet the great men and women of God who traveled that far to the deep rural area of Venda. We were of the opinion that we are so poor that no one in the world could even bother to take notice. Your commitment and dedication of empowering and uplifting the lives of these poor people of God will never go unnoticed by us and God.

We will never forget you in our daily prayers and may the good Lord bless all of you with health, wealth and prosperity. You sacrificed your retirement time where you were supposed to relax with your children and grandchildren to come to these isolated, dusty villages to pronounce the Good News of God.

Though far, you have established relationships that will be forever! The seeds that you are planting will grow and bear wonderful fruits to us and our next generation!

May the good Lord bless you abundantly!!

Yours in Christ.

Passing on the blessings

This is too much praise for the small efforts we eight educators from Canada made earlier this year. There is so much that needs to be done, and so little that we often do. If we must offer praise for anyone, let it be for missionaries who spend a life-time serving God in far away lands. We were there for only a month or two. And our grandchildren fared very well without us!

But the preceding letter amply demonstrates that the thankfulness one encounters after stepping out into the uncertain space of cross-cultural engagement is more payment than anyone of us can imagine. God uses our weak, humble efforts and turns them into a harvest beyond expectation.

Bert Witvoet

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God Has Blessed Us to Be a Blessing



Students from Zeeland Christian School learn about the Filippino culture through dancing.

by Maria Van Dyk

Maria is a former student of Zeeland Christian School who traveled to the Philippines on the school's first Philippines trip in 2000. She now is a senior at Calvin College in the Elementary Education program and plans to visit the Grace Christian School in the Philippines for three weeks in January.

What would happen if a one-time Christmas fundraiser turned into a long-term relationship between a Christian school in the Philippines and a Christian school in the United States? Grace Christian Community School of Pasay in Manila, Philippines, and Zeeland Christian School in Zeeland, Michigan, saw this possibility become a reality.

At Zeeland Christian it is a tradition to support an organization each Christmas with a monetary fundraiser. In 1999, when

we were looking for an organization to support, Gord Ellens, our school counselor, suggested Grace Christian Community School with which he was connected through Worldwide Christian Schools. Zeeland Christian took this opportunity to raise money for Grace Christian to expand their small school building so that they could accommodate more grade levels. This fundraiser was different from those in other years, however. The contact did not end after the check was sent to the Philippines, but it turned into a relationship that will continue for years to come.

Quality education

Grace Christian School started in 1994 as a preschool with two teachers, Mrs. Elma Ordiales and Ms. Prescilla Rontos, along with 10 students. Our main contact with Grace Christian has been Pastor Leo Ordiales, the spiritual leader of the school

and the pastor of the church that is connected to the school. He explains their motivation to start the school. "The vision to start a Christian school was prompted by the alarming difference between private and public school education. Those who can afford to pay for private school get quality education while the rest of the community will have to make do with what they have in an inadequate environment. The increasing number of children coming from poor families and the needs for facilities and teachers makes the task of providing quality education enormous to achieve even with the noble intentions of our dear educators."

ZCS uses the blessings God has given us in order to bless the efforts of Grace Christian to provide quality education for their students. If these students were not able to attend Grace Christian they would be attending a local public school in which they

would be packed into a small classroom with up to 80 other students in their class. The students would be taught in lecture style and have no chance to ask questions or talk with the teacher.

Exchange visits

After some correspondence with Pastor Leo, it was decided that in order to continue the growth of the relationship between our schools, a group of students and staff would travel to the Philippines. In the summer of 2000, a group of nine middle school students, two teachers, and a board member took the 24-hour trip

to the other side of the world to visit our sister school in the Philippines. The students and school community of Grace Christian welcomed our group with open arms and were very excited about the suitcases full of school supplies that had been collected by our students. Pastor Leo had planned a trip that allowed the group to meet with the teachers, visit classrooms, teach songs and stories, be a part of a chapel, experience the culture, and build relationships. When the group returned to Zeeland, they were able to bring back many pictures, stories, and souvenirs to help share their experiences with the school community.

Beginning the following school year, our school community started to sponsor students in the Philippines who could not af-

ford to attend Grace Christian. In order to pay for a child's tuition for an entire year of schooling parents have to spend only \$275. Every year families and classes of students in Zeeland raise money to send a specific child to school. They are then provided with pictures and information about the student they are sponsoring, so they

can send letters and build a relationship with him or her. Our students have come up with many creative ways to raise money for their sponsored students, such as a

visit our school. After their initial shock from the snow and cold weather, they were able to visit classrooms and talk in chapels, sharing stories of their school, their students, and the amazing things that God is blessing them with in the Philippines. They were also able to bring with them pictures that their students had drawn, bracelets they had braided, and letters they had written. Elma and Leo were also able to visit other schools in the area, meet with local pastors, and experience our Thanksgiving traditions.

In the summer of 2004 Jack Ippel, one of our teachers who traveled with the group in 2000, went with his wife, Cindy, and sister, Jane, back to the Philippines. While they were there they were able to lead in worship and share cultural experiences.

In August of 2005, Pastor Leo and Elma's daughter, Merisha, was able to come to Zeeland and spend eight months here while going to high school. She encountered many new experiences while she was here and met many new

people. She was able to explain her culture and bless us with her gifts and abilities.

Over spring break of 2006, a group of eight students and four staff members traveled over to the Philippines. They were able to meet with the teachers, become friends with the students, learn about the



ZCS student James Los with students from Grace Christian School



ZCS kindergarten classes collected quarters by doing chores around the house. They presented their funds to Percy and Elma.

for a carwash, earning quarters, collecting pop cans, doing chores around the house for cash, and pizza sales at lunch time. This program has grown over the years and last year 82 students from Grace Christian were sponsored.

The flow continues

In the fall of 2002 Pastor Leo and Elma Ordiales were able to travel to Zeeland to

culture, lead worship, and meet with people at many of the churches and schools in the area.

Return blessings

While we did have opportunities to share school supplies, money, and stories, it has always been the case that the people in the Philippines have blessed us in more ways than we could bless them. They always welcomed us and made us feel at home. They were always excited to describe their culture and country to us. But most of all, we have been blessed by their faith. Watching them trust so deeply in God when they have so little is a lesson and a blessing that has challenged all of us who have gotten to know them.

Over the years our fundraisers have raised money to buy a student transportation vehicle, construct a roof over the courtyard, build a third floor for more classrooms, purchase a water purification system and generator, provide typhoon damage relief, and send over numerous boxes full of medicine, clothing, school supplies, and stuffed animals. These initiatives helped create life-long relationships with our friends at Grace Christian in the Philippines.

Grace Christian has also been a blessing to the community around them. When they receive boxes sent from Zeeland filled with medicine and clothing, they share these items with the entire community around

them and also with the two small schools they have started in other areas in the Philippines. They have coordinated student sponsorships for some of the students in these two schools as well as their own. They also use their school facilities to hold community events, such as athletic and cultural events, in order to reach out to the people in their community.

have done many fundraisers over the past years, including sweatshirt sales and penny drives. The money they raised has gone to sponsor students at one of the daughter schools, strengthened the building fund, and helped buy supplies for the school. Two students from Calvin College will be going to Grace Christian for three weeks in January, 2008. The purpose of this trip will

be to impart knowledge about new teaching methods, incorporate more up-to-date Math and Science techniques into the curriculum, and support the initiation of a special needs program. This trip will be the beginning of what we hope will be a relationship between Grace Christian and Calvin College for years to come.

As a school community, our long-term relationship with Grace Christian has given us many opportunities to share the resources that God has given us. We are

also able to watch our friends in the Philippines use those resources to bless others around them. As Christian schools we need to find ways that we can share what we have received with other people in our community or across the world. God has blessed us to be a blessing. ☺



ZCS Principal, Bill Van Dyk, with Grace Christian students

Rippling effect

Similar to the spread of the blessings in the Philippines, the number of people who have given their blessings has also spread through the West Michigan area. Through the years Grand Haven Christian School's eighth-grade class has chosen to use the money they had previously spent on a class trip to pay the salary for the teacher at one of Grace Christian's daughter schools. Also, Kalamazoo Christian School's eighth-graders, under the leadership of Kristi Van Dyk,

Ingwe Ranch: *Pentecost Revisited*

by Dora Strooboscher

Dora Strooboscher (dora.stroo@cogeco.ca) is a retired Christian school teacher and curriculum coordinator living in St. Catharines, Ontario.

"The Spirit of God settled on those present and they began to speak in a language understood by all." (Acts 1,2 freely paraphrased)

It was not supposed to go this way. This was not the way we had planned it to happen.

For two months, our team of eight Canadian Christian school teachers had prepared for a Teachers' Conference for three large schools — Theocentric Christian College, Tshikevha Christian School, and Ghondolikhethwa Christian School, all located in the Limpopo province of South Africa's rural north. The conference was planned for the week of March 25-31. We wrote and made photocopies of plenary speeches, journals, workshops, and song sheets. On the basis of reliable information, we trusted that the \$18,000.00 to cover the costs of a five-day conference for about 100 participants would be made available by one corporate donor.

The first "NO" came on February 16, three weeks before we were to leave. The

donor had reviewed our request but decided not to fund it. There would be no money for the conference! A dismal message went out to Mr. Wilson Mandende, principal of Theocentric Christian College, our contact person in South Africa. We did ask him to keep the dates we had agreed

The conference *had* to take place! God would provide! While we were in Holland for a brief lay-over, the news came through. The last \$5,000.00 had come in from a totally unexpected source. God took a NO and turned it into a YES. **Something marvelous, something we as yet knew nothing about, was going to happen.** The conference was in God's hands.

Another hurdle

The second NO came from two of the large schools. Since it had become uncertain whether the conference would actually take place, a number of teachers had begun to make other plans. It was, after all,

vacation time. Two of our team members, Peter Van Huizen and Peter Roukema, both from British Columbia, who were already in South Africa working at one of these schools, saw the whole venture falling

apart. The rest of us, Ontario Christian school teachers and administrative assistants, were either on our way or still in Canada. What were the two Peters from B.C. to do? In an attempt to rescue the situation, they suggested a compromise: hold an earlier three-day conference, during school time, starting with four of the eight team members. Marc and Dora Strooboscher would have joined the B.C. Peters in South Africa by that time. The other four, Ike and Jennie Witteveen and Bert and Alice Witvoet, would join on the



Entrance to the conference center used for the 2007 Limpopo Christian Teachers Convention



Conferees slept in rondavels in a picturesque setting surrounded by mountains.

on open, praying that God would still open a door. We began a local

fund-raising campaign. By March 5, the day before my husband, Marc, and I left, \$13,000.00 had been raised, \$5,000.00 short of the amount needed.

As a team, we had already made the decision to pay our own way. Could we do more? Were we, for the sake of \$5,000.00, going to tell Mr. Mandende that the conference, the way he had envisioned and we had planned it, would not happen? Together we agreed to dig deeper and come up with the last funds ourselves. It was a unanimous, strong, and exhilarating decision.

second day, one day after arriving in Limpopo.

Even though the rest of us recognized the difficult position the Peters were in and appreciated their attempts to find a compromise, we felt that we should begin the conference as a complete team and hoped that a good number of teachers from Ghondolikhethwa and Tshikeyha would decide to attend anyway. After a number of phone calls, it became evident that only a few would be there. What now? Ingwe Ranch, an affordable conference center in a very scenic mountain location, had been booked. It could comfortably accommodate 90 participants. Theocentric Christian College would send 30. That now left 60 empty spaces. Had we made the right decision?

Resounding response

Mr. Mandende knew of some other Christian schools in the area and began extending invitations. The news that a Christian School Teachers' Conference would take place in the area spread quickly. By Friday, March 23, 96 teachers representing nine schools had registered. Some schools who wanted to send their whole staff were told they would be able to send only a limited number. Regrettably two schools needed to be told that there simply was no more room. Ingwe Ranch was already above capacity, but was willing to put extra beds in the rooms. God had changed our NO'S based on good human reasons, into a resounding YES. **Something marvelous, something we as yet knew nothing about, was going to happen.** Our best laid plans had been put aside. The conference was in God's hands.

The theme of the conference was, "Declaring the Mighty Acts of God." From

March 25 to March 30, we explored this theme by means of plenary speeches, workshops, small group discussions, and curriculum writing. We learned together, chatted together, sang together, danced together, prayed together. At the closing devotions, we joined hands together to make one big



Three of the conferees took along their babies and nannies.

circle and sang, "Bind us together, Lord, bind us together with cords that cannot be broken." The Spirit of God, the Spirit of peace, love, and unity had been in our midst for five whole days. **Something marvelous had happened, something we did not fully comprehend, but something we knew to be very real.**

Heartfelt experiences

In the weeks that followed, the team visited every school in order to strengthen the connections that had been made at the conference. It was during these visits that we heard the testimonies, and it was only then that we began to understand how the Spirit had worked among us. Here are some of the testimonies:

Our staff had not been supportive of our principal and we knew it was making him sick. At the conference, something happened. It was at Ingwe that we realized that we had to change, not him. The second evening, we had a reconciliation meeting. We searched our souls, confessed to our principal, and asked his forgiveness. Now we are one again.

Before the conference, our schools were very jealous of each other. We even tried to steal each others' learners. During the conference, something happened. The principals sat down together and confessed to each other that to work together would please God and help all of us. We started to discuss the possibility of a Christian School Principals' Association so that we would bind ourselves together for support and prayer.

Before the conference, we struggled with what it meant to be a Christian school. Did it mean adding some Bible readings to our lessons? Was it enough to have a pastor come in once a week to lead a chapel? We wanted strong Christian schools, but how? Then, at the conference, something happened. The six presenters brought God into every workshop on many subject areas. They taught us how the biblical worldview must be a part of everything we teach and our eyes were opened. Those are the kinds of schools we want.

The week at Ingwe changed me as a person. I was angry a lot. Now I know that there is another way to live. At the conference, I learned about forgiveness and love.

The week at Ingwe touched my soul. People who were strangers to me became

my friends and models. I thank God for what he did at the conference.

I did not want to leave Ingwe. I felt a strong presence of God in that place and wanted to stay.

Yes, something marvelous happened at Ingwe Ranch during the week of March 25-30. It was God's amazing plan, a plan that brought all these schools together in a most surprising way.

Beyond expectation

After Ingwe, what happened? Four more schools contacted Mr. Mandende. Through the grapevine, they had heard about the conference and wanted to be part of the tie that was binding Christian schools together.

On Monday, May 7, a historic meeting took place at Theocentric Christian College. Eleven men and women, representing ten Christian schools, got together to form the first Christian Schools Principal Association. Another four schools were unable to attend but sent their regrets. They did give their support and planned to be at future meetings. Those who were there discussed such things as a constitution, the importance of speaking with a united voice to the Ministry of Education, and ways to promote Christian education in their own areas. They made plans to work together on curriculum development, beginning in

the Foundation(K-3) Phase. Two principals volunteered to start looking into the possibility of organizing sports, choir and other events. A committee was formed to start

looking into the next Teachers' Conference, to be held in March of 2009, a conference that could well have 200 teachers in attendance. They committed to covering 20 percent of the cost of that confer-

ence and to look for local people who could join the team of Canadian presenters. A spirit of cooperation and excitement characterized that meeting.

And now...what? Something marvelous happened at Ingwe Ranch.

"The Spirit of God settled on all those present and they began to speak in a language understood by all."

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, the Christian schools of Limpopo are now learning to speak the language of cooperation instead of competition, the language of unity instead of rivalry, the language of love instead of jealousy. A mighty Wind is blowing and a Fire that cannot be quenched is burning as the passion for Christian education rooted in strong biblical and reformed principles is sweeping across the Limpopo province of South Africa.

History of contacts

Before the Ingwe Ranch Conference of 2007 took place, the groundwork of coop-

eration between indigenous Christian schools in the northern part of South Africa and Canadian Christian teachers and schools had been laid by others from Canada.

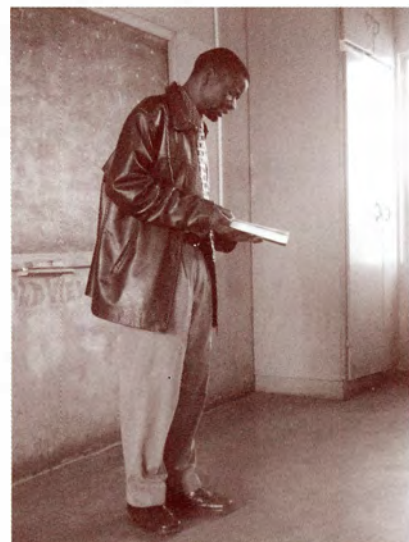
Before 2001: Henny Slopsema, a teacher from Kingston, Ontario, spends a lot of time and a lot of her personal funds working with teachers in South Africa, even sponsoring their education here in Canada. Lee Hollaar, Jim Vreugdenhil, and Dennis and Jenny De Groot also bring their skills and insights to bear on the Christian school situation.

2001: Jim Vreugdenhil comes to Covenant Christian School in Smithville, Ontario to tell the students about his visit to Christian schools in South Africa and challenges them to become partners with one of these schools. Theocentric Christian College responds to letters sent out and a partnership is established between the two schools. Theocentric Christian College was established as a parentally-controlled school in 1999. It now has 500 students and a staff of 25.

2002: Diana Brunsveld, a teacher at Cov-



Peter Van Huizen shows teachers how to teach science through field trips.



Theocentric Christian College Principal Wilson Mandende leads in devotions.

enant, travels to Theocentric. She brings four suitcases full of books and spends ten days at the school. She returns to Covenant and challenges Dora Strooboscher, a senior teacher at Covenant and an OACS curriculum writer, to go to Theocentric when she retires in 2003.

2004: Marc and Dora Strooboscher spend about four weeks at Theocentric. They present workshops, assist the school council in governance matters, and form personal relationships.

2005: Peter and Jackie Van Huizen spend two months working with teachers and board at Ghondolikhethwa Christian School. Marc and Dora return to Theocentric for two months. They bring another four suitcases of books and organize them so that each class has a mini-library. They present workshops, make in-class visits to encourage and assist teachers, especially in the area of integrating biblical worldview into daily lessons. Covenant students raise money so that a well can be drilled while they are there. Their relationship with the indigenous teachers and with the surrounding Christian communities is strengthened.

2006: Smithville District Christian High School, where Marc had been principal for 23 years, decides to send a team of 12 students and 4 teachers to Theo. They raise enough money to begin construction of a *lapa*. This outdoor structure is needed for school assemblies and other events. The team spends nine days at the school. Mr. Mandende asks if it would be possible for a Canadian team to plan a Teachers' Conference for 2007.

2007: A team of eight Canadians — Peter Van Huizen and Peter Roukema, both from British Columbia, and Marc and Dora Strooboscher, Bert and Alice Witvoet, Ike and Jennie Witteveen, all from Ontario — plan and present a Conference. The Ontarians hold book drives in their

communities. The two Smithville schools raise money to ship 1500 books to Theo. After the conference, Alice and Jennie take on the task of organizing all the books ac-

cording to the Dewey Decimal System. We leave behind a fully operating library. Covenant students raised monies for furniture and a computer. ☺



One of the schools we Canadian educators visited after the conference was Life Sewing School. Learners greeted us with a singing of the South African national anthem, which includes lines from five languages.



Ike Witteveen (l.) and Marc Strooboscher (r) admire the work done by Jennie Witteveen and Alice Witvoet at Theocentric Christian College. The new library has become the pride of the school. Smithville Christian schools have established a partnership with Theocentric.

Partnering with Third-World Schools; The Five C's

by Bert Witvoet with Dora Strooboscher

I was talking with two senior supporters of a Christian school about the idea of partnering with a Christian school in South Africa. One of them said, "I hope you don't mean a black Christian school because that is going to cost us money, and you know how we struggle here trying to meet our budget." He was smiling, and I didn't know whether he was joking or not. But I recognized in his statement a very understandable reluctance to add a greater burden to our annual deficit. At the same time, what he said sounded like racism for a number of reasons. First of all, it suggests that "black" equals poverty. Secondly, it seems to say that indigenous schools have nothing to offer in return.

To come back to the understandable reluctance to add a burden to an already burdened school — I am convinced that Christian schools have to encourage its members to be generous towards other more needy communities, even when they struggle to make ends meet. Why? Because the struggle to make ends meet usually has nothing to do with lack of money in the community and everything to do with our priorities. Being asked to become connected with a third-world school, even if that costs us money, is the best prescription against the spiritual malaise that can so easily grip our communities.

Several Christian schools I know have acknowledged the challenge and have reaped the rewards of their generosity. What does a partnership involve? While talking with my friend and colleague Dora Strooboscher, we came up with the following suggestions. Being teachers, we could not resist using alliteration as we list the characteristics of a partnership.



From l. to r.: Bert Witvoet, Principal Elias Makhuha, former Principal Edgar Ligzbeu of Vision Integrated School, and Ike Witteveen. Vision is in the process of establishing a partnership with Beacon Christian Schools in St. Catharines.

Calling: God calls us to be "generous in every occasion." That includes the occasion of a deficit. If a school decides to partner with another school, it should think of it not as "a nice thing to do" but as a calling that asks for a positive response. Whenever God calls us to do something, he does so because it furthers his Kingdom. We are not to be islands that separate us from others in this world but, as John Donne said so eloquently, "Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." Our "continent" is the whole world. The benefit of thinking of our partnership as a calling is that it lines up our desires with a higher plan. Becoming a partner with a needy school is the right thing to do for a school that benefits immensely from the prosperity that surrounds it.

Commitment: Once a school accepts the calling to partner with another school, it must see it as a long-term commitment. It's not only unhelpful to dash in and out of a relationship; it is detrimental to those who experience a brief moment of hope. We as Christians are used to thinking in terms of covenant. We apply this to marriages, to business deals and to other partnerships. Covenants give stability to this world. Covenants tell our partner that they can count on us.

Communication: The first step towards a partnership is to get to know each other. This can be done by means of correspondence between the administrations, the staff and the students. Today's possibilities for communication (think of email, websites and blogs) make this a very do-able process. But communication can be strengthened through visits. Once a school has sent out delegates and received visitors in exchange, the relationship becomes even more vital.

Contribution: The fun part of a partnership is that it contributes to each other's well-being. This is never a one-way street. Although the first-world school may be expected to give up more in terms of finances and resources, both schools can bring to the table cultural differences, spiritual enrichment, prayers for each other, life experiences, personal and social insights, fellowship and expressions of hope and comfort.

Critique: A successful partnership needs to be constantly monitored and critiqued. One thing to watch for in this kind of partnership is to give only what is needed, not what satisfies our own feel-good desires. Also, we must prevent creating in our partner a sense of dependency. Helping a third-world school requires critical analysis of what is really needed and helpful, and what it is that prevents the partner from growing into a self-sustaining community.

Conclusion: There are no losers in a relationship of trust and love. Those who receive give thanks to God and pray for the giver. "And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you," writes Paul to the Corinthians. And as a clincher he adds: "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" We all know to what that indescribable gift refers.

Helping Others Changes Us

by Joan Stob

Joan Stob (joanstob@hotmail.com) is the talent development coordinator, curriculum coordinator, and director of after-school care program at Legacy Christian School in Grand Rapids, MI.

Comfort Enders looked at the faculty lounge table stacked four feet high with books of all sorts — dictionaries, Bibles, textbooks, trade books, library books — surplus books from the merger of Cutlerville Christian School and Kelloggsville Christian School into Legacy Christian School. Jill Ellens, elementary principal at Legacy, told Comfort she could have any books she wanted for her Christian school, Kingdom Foundation Institute, back in Liberia. Ellens thought she might take back a suitcase full. Enders walked around the table, picking up one book after another, and began praising God for answering her prayer. She fell to her knees, and she and Ellens prayed together, thanking God for working out his plan in this wonderful way.

Enders wanted to take all but the American History books back home to her school, where books were in such short supply. There were just a few books for an entire class to share. Jill started to think about all the extra equipment on the Kelloggsville campus and asked Comfort if she wanted that, too. So they drove over to the Kelloggsville gym. When Comfort saw all the chairs, tables, desks, and office equipment she was overwhelmed. Her students had no chairs or desks. “It is too much for us,” she said. “We will share it

with other Christian schools in our country.”

Transformational training

In 1999 Comfort and her husband Jonathan Enders opened a Christian school called K Foundation Academy in

least once a week. She was especially interested in learning about teacher training and curriculum and in seeking out ideas she could use back home at KFI. Now, during that summer of 2006, she had not only ideas, but also an abundance of books and equipment for her school.



The initial KFI school has a dirt floor, woven-net sides and a tarp roof.

Paynesville, Liberia. In 2001, after sponsoring a workshop led by John De Jager, currently the founder and director of Partners for Learning Across Cultures, they renamed their school Kingdom Foundation Institute. The Enders' goal has been to equip leaders for transformational service in God's kingdom and enable the Liberian people to hope for a bright future.

In 2001 Enders began working on her MA in school leadership at Calvin College. During the 2005-2006 school year she returned to Calvin to finish her degree. As part of her studies, she visited local Christian schools and was mentored by Christian school principals, such as Ellens. Since Cutlerville Christian was within walking distance of where she was living, she visited there for half a day at

New facility

While Enders was in the US, Partners for Learning Across Cultures helped KFI begin construction of a new permanent school building. The initial KFI structure has a dirt floor, woven-mat sides, and a tarp roof. Each year it needs repair and rebuilding because of weathering. The Enders plan to use the new facility to provide a Christ-centered education for up to 200 students. It will also eventually serve as a Christian teachers resource center and Christian school association headquarters.

The books and equipment from Legacy could be safely locked up in the new building. But how were they going to get the materials there? John de Jager helped Enders connect with the Firestone Corporation who would be willing to ship a 20-foot container from Baltimore to Liberia free of charge. He also helped raise additional money to buy the container, truck the container at both ends of the journey, and pay for paperwork and customs.

The teachers at Legacy Christian elementary school seized the opportunity to develop an outreach project for KFI during the 2006-2007 school year. Students used whatever ways they could to raise enough money to cover the cost of tuition for two students — one in kindergarten and one student in grades 1-5. Additional money

raised was to be used to buy food and clothing for the poorest students. Students did jobs around home, sold baked goods and crafts, tithed allowances, donated Christmas and birthday money, and altogether raised much more than enough for the two tuitions. Each time the students reached a benchmark in raising funds, a piece of clothing or a meal was added to a poster with a drawing of two Liberian children.

Free shipping

The container was filled and sent off with a special ceremony at Legacy Christian in the fall of 2006. At a later assembly, Enders received a check for tuition, food, and clothes. In the container were Bibles, dictionaries, all levels of reading books, textbooks, math supplies, tables, chairs, teacher desks, student desks, carts, preschool play equipment, old computers, overhead projectors, file cabinets, art supplies, library books, shelving, gym mats, and more. Once the container arrived in Liberia, members of the KFI community held a dedication service and then all helped unload the container into a storage area, to await the completion of the school before being put into use.

Meanwhile, a second container was filled and shipped free of charge, thanks to Firestone and more fundraising by Partners for Learning Across Cultures. There is almost enough for a third container, which can be shipped once funds (\$5,000-\$6,000) are obtained.

Construction of the new school continues at KFI. Several teams from churches in the US have gone to Liberia to work on the school with the Liberian construction workers. The first floor was about 60 percent

usable at the beginning of summer 2007. The Enders hope that it will be completely usable by the beginning of the school year in September 2007. The second floor will take longer to build, perhaps four to five years, since it will be built as funds become available. It will be used for a high school and for continuing education and resource ministries.

Big vision

The Enders' vision for the school is that it will provide a biblical world view for students in all subjects. There are currently hundreds of Christian schools in Liberia.



A 20-foot trailer was sent off to Liberia with a special ceremony at Legacy Christian School in the fall of 2006.

But most are attached to churches and the Christian school fee structures support churches and pastors. These Christian schools are dualistic — basically secular schools plus a Bible class. They are popular with families who can afford them because the state of public education in Liberia is in such disarray. (See sidebar on Liberia)

By contrast, Kingdom Foundation Institute is open to all students, not just those who can afford tuition. Partners for Learning Across Cultures presently provides about 80 percent of the funding for the

school, but hopes to decrease that percentage as the school becomes more self-sufficient. There is an ongoing need for funds both for the new building and for operational costs (see PLAC website at <http://www.partnersinlearningacrosscultures.com/to donate>).

The impact of KFI is going beyond one small community in Liberia. In June of 2007 Comfort Enders returned to the US for two weeks to present a sectional entitled "Christian Schooling in a Global Perspective" with Gaylen Byker, president of Calvin College, at the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee World Wide Partners Assembly.

Enders' vision is that KFI will be a model school for other Christian schools in Liberia. She wants to work not only with her staff but also with other Christian schoolteachers to show them how to integrate their faith into their subjects and how to incorporate effective, Christ-centered teaching strategies. Even the Liberian Ministry of Education is very interested in looking at KFI as a possible model for government schools.

Future connections

When asked what the impact of this project has been on the Legacy Christian community, Ellens said, "It changes us inside. We realize the wealth we have, and it moves us to give of the blessings God has given. The world is open to us now. We know about schools in other countries. We have a responsibility to look for partnerships with them."

She continued, "Beyond giving 'stuff' we also need to look at ways to give of our knowledge. Possibly we can help them with teacher training or we can connect the kids with each other. It is so much more meaningful when we have natural connections with people we know such as Comfort. It's important for us to know about other

Christian schools around the world — to know who they are and what they do — and for them to know who we are. We need to give all students opportunities to live out what they say they believe.”

When asked whether or not the connection between Legacy and KFI will continue, Ellens said it depends on whether or not the Spirit leads us in that direction. “We need to do a better job of seeing where the Spirit leads us and going through the open doors. We need to see the opportunities that God presents to us and then respond. It was no co-



Firestone Corporation shipped the container from Baltimore to Liberia free of charge.

incidence that our schools merged just when Comfort’s school needed books and equipment. It was all part of God’s plan.”

One possible “open door” may be Christian orphanages and schools in Guatemala. Ellens has traveled to serve there with a church group numerous times and she is going again this summer with another teacher from Legacy. One thing on their agenda is to connect with teachers and school leaders there and see if God is leading Legacy to form another partnership there. ☪

Liberia: A U.S. Style Country

Liberia is a West African country on the Atlantic coast about the size of Tennessee. About five percent of the population are descendants of 12,000 freed American slaves who emigrated there in the 1820s. The rest of the 3.3 million population is made up of 16 different indigenous ethnic groups. Forty percent are Christian, 20 percent are Muslim, and 40 percent are animist. As of 2003, literacy was about 20 per cent, and life expectancy 42.5 years. Unemployment is about 85 per cent.

The country, the government of which is modeled on the US federal system, was relatively calm, though dominated by the executive branch, until the 1980s. Since then a series of coups, rebellions, assassinations, civil wars, looting, and war profiteering have devastated much of the economy and infrastructure. Even the capital, Monrovia, is still without running wa-

ter and electricity (except for fuel-powered generators).

Liberia is dependent on foreign aid and carries a debt of \$3.5 billion. The current president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, elected in 2005, has promised reforms that will get the country back on track. Johnson-Sirleaf, the first elected female head-of-state in Africa, is a Harvard-educated economist who worked for Citibank and the World Bank. She is working to get relief from her country’s \$3.5 billion debt and to attract international investors. Restoring power and water to Monrovia and setting up a Truth and Reconciliation Committee to handle war crimes are two other priorities.

English, the official language of Liberia, is used in all the schools. Most of the schools in the country are being operated by churches or Christian missions, among them the Catholic Church, Methodist, Episcopal and a

few others. Some are operated by the government under the supervision of the Monrovia Cooperative School System (MCSS). Most schools are near Monrovia because of the lack of good roads throughout the country, though some Christian missions have extended their schools to other parts of the country.

The majority of Liberian students attend government schools because of the tuition fees charged by most of the church mission schools. But the government school instructors receive low salaries and very little good teaching material since the government spends minimally on education. This results in poor performances by students in most government schools compared to the church mission schools. Improving the quality and affordability of education is clearly one of the most important ways to improve the outlook for Liberia’s future.

Partners for Learning Across Cultures

by Joan Stob

Partners for Learning Across Cultures (PLAC) was founded in 2004 to provide a comprehensive approach to beginning Christian schools in foreign countries. It supports not only developing facilities, but also everything else that goes along with starting a Christian school, such as hiring and training teachers, creating an administrative structure, forming a board, developing a budget, finding and adapting curricula, public relations. It has an informal relationship with World-wide Christian Schools.

PLAC encourages Christian communities, parents, churches, and schools around the world to establish partnerships in learning. These partnerships encourage teachers,

administrators, church leaders, and students to engage one another in the learning process across cultural boundaries. People in learning communities learn from each other and contribute to the discovery of knowledge, new learning methods, and environments.

Under such partnership arrangements, partners discover and define their educational task within the context of taking care of God's world. This helps every learner realize that they belong to him. PLAC promotes the development of Christian global learning communities because it brings God's people together in a common task. It increases the level of learning, knowledge of God, and better understanding of his world. It prepares learners to be fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. This is the heartbeat of our mission, and what Christian schools are all about.

PLAC is guided by the following principles:

Uphold the dignity of each participant

Foster independent learning

Foster excellence in academic achievement and skill acquisition

Experience God's dynamic interaction with his creation

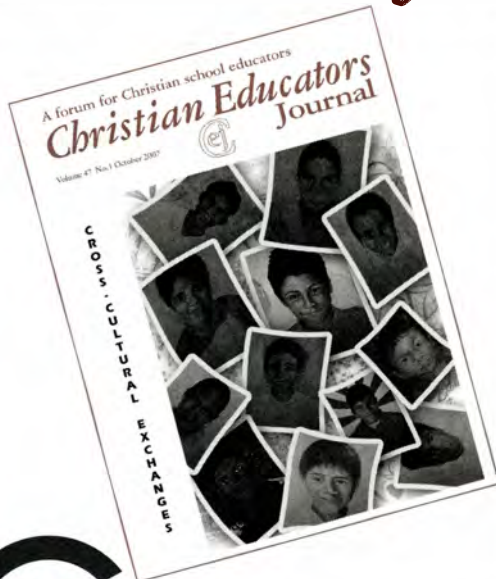
Practice obedience in restoring God's creation

Celebrate inherent cultural differences

PLAC has partnerships with schools or potential schools in Russia (St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Tambov), Nicaragua, Guatemala, Philippines, Liberia, and Kenya. Christian schools, churches, and individuals in North America have partnered with these schools to support them through prayer, gifts, visits, student exchanges, and work.



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The “Un” Tribe

Nancy Knol teaches English and Religion at Grand Rapids Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She is co-author of the book Reaching and Teaching Young Adolescents. Most days you can find her in Room 219.

Once again I am writing my column at the start of summer — the beginning of the new school year seems far away. And, once again, it is rather therapeutic for me to have this assignment — a way to put closure on the past year and to seize an opportunity to make some resolutions for the next beginning.

In general, our teachers’ lounge does not “gripe” a lot — especially when it comes to individual students — but if there is one category of students that does become the subject of conversation at this time of year particularly, it is the category that I will call the “un” category. You probably know already what I am referring to — the uninspired, the uninvolved, the ungrateful, the unmotivated.... Their malady becomes more pronounced at the end of the year, but, truthfully, we have struggled with their condition all along. Poet e.e. cummings aptly refers to them as the “undying” as opposed to “being alive.”

This type of student shows up to some degree in every high school. They are the ones who bond out of a kind of mutual lethargy. They party together on the weekends, and they rarely do homework. “Extracurricular” is a word that seems to be missing from their vocabulary when it applies to music, sports, or drama activities. The reason this group is on my mind is that they made a spectacle of themselves at our school’s final senior chapel this year. It was a meaningful event in many respects, until we sang the doxology. Traditionally, the entire senior class comes forward at this point in our worship and joins hands to lead us in singing the doxology. This year I noticed that the entire front row, oddly enough, was taken up by this “un” group. For many it was probably the first time they had even been on that stage. Without giving unnecessary detail, I will simply say that their behavior demonstrated no awareness of the meaning of the words of the doxology. Nothing in their demeanor suggested worship — it was more an “I-am-almost-out-of-here” pep rally.

Why am I beginning this new year with such an “un” happy, “un” inspiring memory? I guess because I am looking for a way to erase that “un” prefix, even a little. And I hope you are, too. My focus is so often on either the hard-working strugglers or the eager stars; sometimes I think the “un” group has been disregarded so often that they come to us with almost no expectations beyond passing the class so that they can eventually graduate. How do they get this way?

A colleague of mine told me a story about a conversation she recently had with a seven-year-old. She asked her if she was

going to get out of school soon, and the little girl said, “Yes, in seven more days,” and then nearly cried. My colleague said, “Aren’t you excited about summer vacation?” And the child responded, “No! I love school — I want school to keep going on forever.” This exchange prompted my friend to tell the story to her remedial class, and then required of them to journal about whether or not *they* liked school. If they did, why did they? And if they didn’t, when did they stop liking it? The responses were fascinating. Most said that by fifth grade they had figured out that school was hard and that they weren’t good at it. They also said that no matter how hard they tried, they didn’t seem to get anywhere, which discouraged them. Their parents began getting on their case at this point as well, and they frequently started hearing the word “lazy.” In addition, the social climate changed in fifth grade. Kids weren’t nice any more ... cliques developed ... the concept of all playing together disappeared ... people knew if they were popular or unpopular. Former friends suddenly turned away.

Apparently some of the development of “un” is out of our hands as educators. And, yet, when I think back to the fifth grade, which seems to be a critical year, I have many vivid memories, and most of them are of my teacher. Her name was Miss Kuipers. She read to us *Robinson Crusoe* and made us do all kinds of creative geography projects. She encouraged us to write stories. My two children both had glorious fifth-grade years as well, mostly because of their exemplary teachers. What all of these teachers had in common, it seems to me, was more than their creative lesson plans and flexible control of the classroom. As corny as it sounds, I would have to say that they loved us. They looked upon us not as popular or unpopular, bright or not-so-bright, but as interesting people who had something to offer to the microcosm we called our classroom.

I want to work harder at wooing the “un” students next year. I want to, again, in cummings’ words, “coax undeath from fancied fact and spaceful time...,” to dangle before them (somehow) “the sizeless truth of a dream/whose sleep is the sky and the earth and the sea.” How? **I do not know!** But I am going to begin by refusing to write them off. ☺

A Christian School Song for Parents and Teachers

by Calvin Seerveld

Calvin Seerveld (cgs80@primus.ca) is Senior Member (emeritus) at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Ontario.

Christian weekday schools are not “church schools,” we say. A Christian school education is not “Sunday school” plus reading, writing and arithmetic.

Most people understand that a “school” is not a “family,” is not a “church” with elders and deacons, and is not a “state” institution or a “commercial business” enterprise. A “school” is a school, is a school composed of teachers with students, is a school with its own specific God-given responsibilities to educate and cultivate the next generation in a *schooling* way.

Because there are “state-run” schools, however, and “parochial” (Church-run) schools and “home schooling,” the particular school nature of a school sometimes gets lost in the shuffle.

The distinctive task of schooling

I respect all concerted attempts to raise children “in awed respect of the LORD” revealed in Jesus Christ as proclaimed by the Bible. The efforts of individual Christian teachers at work in the dominant state-funded “public/separate” systems deserve encouragement too.

But just as it is important to keep “civil unions” distinct from the institution of “marriage,” so it is important, I think, for us in our reflection and practice to keep “schools” distinct from being franchises of “the state,” and distinct from being a quasi-“church” institution (as it is important to keep bona fide, tax-free “church organizations” distinct from “businesses” and “profit-making” enterprises).

If a Christian weekday school is conceived and practiced as if it be a disguised church (comparable to a madrasa of a mosque community), then education will

have the tendency to slip into catechism and indoctrination, since a church rightly has direct doctrinal criteria for its teaching, while a school rightly has direct explorative and cultivational criteria for its educating task, and only indirectly has confessional doctrinal concerns.

To make the same point in other words: schooling leads immature persons to discover (often playfully) God’s creational order for the world and the way we are to be redemptively faithful in practicing our many tasks before the Lord’s face. This disciplined, trustworthy leading of children should be conducted by wise, seasoned educators, trained to help the young make mistakes! in school, so the youth themselves learn to judge their correctly playing musical instruments, using calculators, telling history, deciding between puzzling alternatives in complex personal interrelational problems. Good teachers are guidance counselors in studies who let students learn to “bewonder,” distinguish, speak about, and practise what is real and relevant for living responsibly in hope and tough love during these complicated days. School teachers should not dictate (doctrinal) the right answers. Christian school teachers should also not pretend to be “neutral” and “non-directive,” instead of oriented by the biblical writings and Holy Spirit in leading children to understand God’s world.

Much more needs to be said about the implications of believing that a school is not a church nor an arm of the state, and that each kind of institution is called to serve the other institutions in society by performing its proper task toward them. (A church is not a school either, even though a church has a catechetical function. And the Canadian or American state is certainly not a school or a church, although political government does confess and inculcate a “bill of rights.”) It is also so that a school does rightfully have a confessional func-

tion among its medley of activities — study a song-text specially conceived for a school occasion.

A school song

When teachers and parents (and school board directors) get together for a school meeting, you need a school song. Not a “rah-rah” school song to accompany a school’s hockey or basketball sports event. Also not a church hymn to fit the fact that most of those present also attend church services somewhere. And unless you are commemorating a national holiday as school society, the national anthem is not so appropriate either as a unifying song. One could use a school song to celebrate a school gathering, the rationale, purpose, and joy (amid hardships) of what calls us together as PTA or a Christian school society (When “home-schooling” families get together for a meeting they could use a “school song” too.)

The text I wrote for this Christian school song credits God’s Spirit for pulling us motley group of people together to guide the young in doing God’s will, especially just-doing in the world, with a passion for the truth. Our school society, dedicated parents and teachers, pleads for the schooling going on to be wise in explicating Christ’s Rule — that is our mission — as we wait for the Lord’s coming again.

The song is a strong melody kept within an octave range, without skips or chromatic difficulties. It is not light and cheery like so many simplified children songs today. It has no modern dissonance, and also not the comfortable sound of nineteenth-century piety. Nor does the song sound like a Methodist hymn of the 1700s with bright emotional clarity. This 1600s melody has the grit and firm determination of a song line that knows what it wants to say in brief compass, and ends with confident assertion.

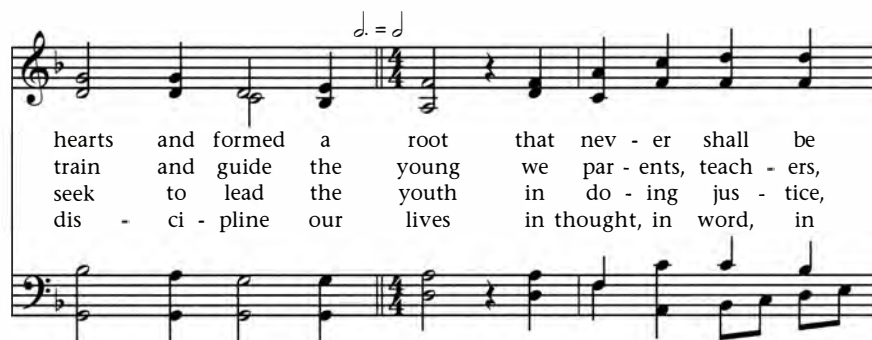
The melody for this Christian school song comes out of a time when schools were still practically an outreach ministry of churches historically, not yet differentiated as independent schools, and many parents at the time were illiterate. For centuries people had had the Bible as their primer to learn to read. And the melody has a forthright toughness and directness we middle class citizens of Western countries might do well to learn today, in developing an awareness of the many Christians in the world whose blood cries out to the LORD for redress from evil. We may have difficulty in paying for Christian schooling, but our persecution is mild, genteel. Yet there is no harm in having an edge to our school song, since in certain ways we educators who follow Christ are still embattled in a rough culture.

It may take a little while for "Here comes a fully laden ship of blessings" (That's the name of the tune — "Es kommt ein Schiff geladen") to become an old favorite of PTA societies and home-school gatherings. But it might be worth a try and a little persistence, this new song, a fresh breeze of Huguenot-like brusqueness, or like a resilient fly in the ointment of sweet and happy Bible choruses. In our post-Church world society, it could be time to try to compose and sing **Christian school songs** that are marked by age-old vigor and certainty. Young song writers should also start composing **school songs** about wisdom and peace-making in the land. ©

Your Spirit, Lord, Has Taken



1 Your Spir - it, Lord, has tak - en our
2 En - trust - ed with the la - bours to
3 Pro - tect - ed by God's car - ing we
4 Con - front - ed by the great need to



hearts and formed a root that nev - er shall be
train and guide the young we par - ents, teach - ers,
seek to lead the youth in do - ing jus - tice,
dis - ci - pline our lives in thought, in word, in



shak - en, and shall bear much good fruit.
neigh - bours, de - sire "Your will be done."
shar - ing a pas - sion for the truth.
real deed, we ask, Lord, "Make us wise."

5 Conceived in faith and vision
our dedicated school
is ready for the mission
to explicate Christ's Rule.

6 As expectation rises,
O Lord, to see your face,
we pray, send us surprises
of your unfailing grace.

Slouching Toward Bedlam

For Your Ice Only or From Bedlam, With Love

by Jan Kaarsvlam

Jan Kaarsvlam has decided to take a sabbatical from his teaching duties at Sonshine Christian School in Anchorage, Alaska, to write a spy novel in the style of Ian Fleming about a teacher at a Christian high school who learns about a former favorite student's plan to kidnap the heir to a candy manufacturing fortune and imprison her in a newly mixed vat of chewing gum. He has tentatively titled the novel The Fan with the Molten Gum. If that book proves to be unsuccessful, his somewhat enigmatic plan is to "watch a lot of television and eat more waffles."

It was 3:08 pm and Rex Kane dropped his gavel to call the meeting to order. "Thank you all for coming. It is important to me to run this meeting efficiently; therefore, I am going to table devotions until next time and get our brass tacks to the grindstone." Rex turned his head when he said "brass tacks" so that the setting sun, visible through the staff room window, would glint provocatively off the monocle he was wearing. He continued. "Now, as you know, the purpose of this committee is to select some worthy cause for our Christian Service Club to raise money for. Last year we bought goats for Bolivia. The year before that, we bought books for that school in Africa. The year before that, we raised money to repair a roof for a poor school in Chicago. This year, I say we do something different."

Rex paused for effect. The members of his committee, math teacher Jane VanderAsch, Bible teacher Cal VanderMeer, music teacher Carrie Wellema, and Counselor Maxwell Prentiss-Hall all stared at him as if they were trying to figure out why a gym teacher would need a monocle. Rex turned his head again for the glint, then dramatically announced: "This year, I am proposing we buy space heaters for Iceland."

The group, which had been quiet before his announcement, somehow grew even more silent. Rex cleared his throat uncomfortably. Sometimes he couldn't believe the lack of vision of his colleagues. "Don't you see?" he continued. "We'd be meeting a need. I mean, HELLO, we are talking about Iceland, THE LAND OF ICE. Those people could use some space heaters."

Cal smiled sadly. "It can be cold in Iceland."

"Exactly!" Rex clapped his hands once in punctuation, excited that someone was catching the dream.

"But," Cal went on, "it is also a wealthy nation of the West. Iceland really doesn't have substantial problems with poverty, at least not when compared to so many other places in the world. Our giving them heaters would be tantamount to our supplying computers to the employees of Microsoft — a nice gesture, but ultimately meaningless."

Just then the door of the lounge swung open. A student named

Kurt Mueselix entered, pushing a dust mop. Kurt was a senior who had taken the job of helping to sweep out the school on Tuesdays and Thursdays, when Mr. McDougal, the school janitor, had to leave early for his viola lessons. Kurt looked at the august group, unsure if he should enter or not.

"Kurt, my boy," said Rex, "carry on with your duties. Just try to do them quietly. We're in the middle of a debate here."

"It's not really a debate," said Carrie. "Cal was just suggesting why Iceland is probably not a good choice."

Rex removed his monocle and polished it cavalierly with the bottom of his sweat suit jacket. "And there's the point of contention. I think Iceland is an ideal choice."

Carrie put her head into her hands so that all anyone could see was her blond hair pulled back tightly into a ponytail. She made snuffling sounds like a rooting hedgehog, and Cal was unsure whether she was stifling laughter or cries of frustration.

"I think this whole thing is dumb." Jane VanderAsch clutched her mug of coffee angrily. "Iceland, Kenya, China, who cares? What are we really accomplishing with these little fundraisers every year?"

Rex, ever the literalist, answered, "Well, as I said at the beginning of our meeting, Jane, if you'd been listening, just last year we bought goats for Bolivia. The year before that...."

"Spare us, Rex. I know what we bought. I just don't know why. We are a school, not a church. Why are we buying goats and repairing roofs?"

"I think I agree with Jane," Cal said. Carrie lifted her head with a look of horror. Cal was an idealist, Jane a cynic. They never agreed. Cal continued, "Our attitude here seems very paternalistic. We do useful things for these schools in other parts of the world, but we don't seem to offer much more than monetary assistance. We play the part of a rich uncle who leaves a tidy sum for a niece or nephew and then disappears, perhaps never to be seen again. We bounce all over the world, but never establish any relationships."

"Can I say something?" It was the Mueselix kid, standing sheepishly in the corner with his broom. "I think a lot of the kids here at Bedlam are sick of all the fundraisers too. Two or three times a year the Service Club or Chapel Council or whoever asks us to give money to people or things that we really don't know much about."

"Another aspect of the problem," said Cal. "Thanks for sharing, Kurt."

Carrie suddenly looked inspired. "So what we need to do is to partner with a school in a third world country ..."

"Like Iceland," Rex inserted. Carrie ignored him.

"... and establish a long-term relationship. Maybe we could

have students from both schools write letters to each other. Maybe some of our students could go overseas on a mission trip to the partner school. Teachers could share lesson plan ideas. Fundraisers would be more meaningful for kids because we'd be raising funds for someone we know rather than for the cause *du jour*."

Rex banged his gavel on the table, suddenly looking more interested that he had at any point during the meeting. "Is that some kind of soup?" he asked.

"Sounds nice, this vision you plan," said Jane. "But it won't work. We tried that here 18 years ago with a school in Mexico. This school in Mexico City was going to partner with us. Well, for three years we raised funds for the school, our students sent letters, our faculty sent letters, we even had a group of four or five teachers go there to deliver two old overhead machines we didn't need any more. But our partner school never really responded. No thank you notes — nothing. Despite all our efforts, the partnership failed."

Cal sighed heavily. "She's right. We tried hard, but it seemed to go nowhere. Maybe it was a language barrier that did us in. Maybe it's that we just live in such different worlds and with such different concerns that we couldn't relate to each other's needs. If I put myself in their position, a small Christian school struggling for survival in a harsh, poverty-stricken setting, I might not have time to devote to a partnership with some rich school in the USA either."

When Cal looked up at Carrie, he felt sad. The young woman



who had been so passionate moments ago now seemed deflated. Beside her, Jane looked somehow triumphant and defeated at the same time. Rex, however, was nonplussed. Having finished cleaning his monocle, he was fitting it back over his right eye and preparing to speak when Kurt's voice rose once more from the doorway. He had finished sweeping and was about to leave.

"You know, back in the eighth grade, I had a science teacher who offered an after-school study session

on Wednesdays. I was failing science and I wanted extra help, so he told me to come on Wednesdays. Problem was, I had to pick up my little sister on Wednesdays from the babysitter because neither of my parents was available at that time to do it. But every time I tried to tell my science teacher, he cut me off and said, 'If you need help, then come on Wednesday afternoons.' He never asked and never let me explain why I didn't come on Wednesdays. You guys talking about that school in Mexico made me think about that story. Maybe that partnership thing would work if you found out what the other school actually wanted. Ms. VanderAsch just talked about all the stuff you guys did 20 years ago, but maybe none of that was what the other school wanted. Did they really need some old AV equipment? Did they want to have pen pals? Did you ever ask them?"

The assembled group stared silently at Kurt. He looked sheepish and quietly maneuvered his broom, then himself, out the door, which he shut quietly behind him.

His question hung there behind him, damning each committee member for her or his arrogance. ©

THE DRAGON SLAYERS

By Robert J. Gerryts

Robert Gerryts (rgerryts@gmail.com) teaches computer science and French at Smithville District Christian High School in Smithville, Ontario.

As a young boy I had a healthy fascination with legends and myths. Almost everything that I read revolved around swords, armor, knights, or fair maidens. In order to make my chores on the farm more exciting, the barn was fair game for my imagination. I remember quite vividly being knighted at age 9 by the King of Hay for feeding the calves properly. Again at the age of 10, I remember with clarity being given the Medal of Bravery for slaying the big ugly rat that lived underneath the granary stairs.

My own deeds aside, it was the stories themselves that held great importance for me. In particular, I loved stories that included dragons. To be even more specific, I loved stories about the people who killed dragons. I'm sure you all know the general plot. A dragon moves into a cave near a small village. The dragon steals food. The dragon burns fields. The dragon eats people. Then just when all hope is lost, and despair begins to settle over the village, a person of no apparent status, with no apparent purpose in life, finds willpower. This person gains wisdom and training from a washed-up old warrior, and then heads out and kills the dragon. The village is saved.

The tales of the dragon slayers were, and will always remain, exciting to me. But what place do these thoughts about dragons have for us as educators in Christian schools? The stories I loved in my youth continue to affect the way I view the world and I regularly, for my own amusement, use my imagination to transform the world around me to gain perspective, insight, and perhaps wisdom. My purpose in writing

this piece is to share one of those altered views. For, believe it or not, the stories of the dragon slayers have much to do with our daily work as teachers.

Education, I like to tell my students, is a lot like dragon slaying. Every concept, every formula, every piece of literature, and every assignment is like one more dragon. Students are the dragon slayers. And, like the heroic dragon slayers of old, they may in their youth appear to have no apparent purpose or status. But they are dragon slayers nonetheless, and

they come to us for the knowledge they will need to slay dragons.

As teachers we play several roles in this recurring drama. Some days we are the squire, other days the stable boy, in the morning the armorer, perhaps in the afternoon the horseman, the guide, or the weapons trainer. Many of us can nimbly switch from mucking out the horse stall of one student, to playing the role of sage for another, and then move to pull hot iron from the forge as we work to create a sword for a third.

For we are the master dragon slayers, called to train the next generation.

We have an understanding that students come to us in order to prepare to kill dragons. We want them to succeed, and so each of us in our own way and with our specific gifts puts forth our best efforts to prepare them for upcoming battles. With this calling in mind we'll give students the map to the dragon's lair. We'll give them all the

equipment they'll need to kill the dragon. We'll even bore them with soggy old stories about the dragons we killed when we were young. We'll help buckle on their armor. We'll cinch up the saddle on their horse. We'll help clean the rust off their sword, and polish their shield. We'll even ride all the way to the dragon's lair with them.

Then we'll point them straight at the dragon and pray as they ride into battle.

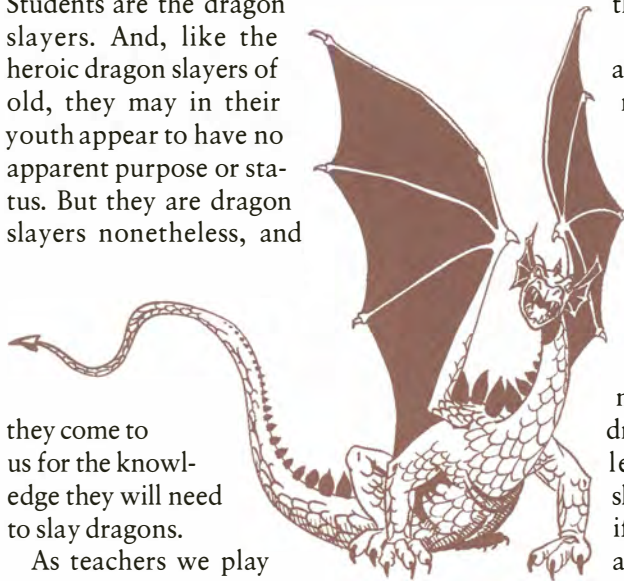
There is, however, one thing we can't do. We can't kill their dragons for them.

This is the thing they need to do on their own. In their own minds they need to come to a point where they decide to tackle the dragon at hand, and master the concept. If we slay the dragon for them, they have not learned, and future dragon slayings will be that much harder, if not impossible. It is a fine balance when we are on that front line of dragon slaying to know

when we are helping, and when we are hindering. With time and experience however we become keenly aware of each student's personal struggle, and we do everything we can to equip them to be successful.

However, no matter how good we do our jobs, no matter how much we prepare them, there is always the chance of failure or success for each student.

Sometimes we watch a student in the midst of battle with a math equation, or science experiment and with our keen eyes we see that glint of hope, the opening in the dragon's scales, and we shout for them to see it, and they don't, and the dragon rises victorious. At that point we pick them up off the ground, tend to their wounds, and begin the training anew. Then, be-



cause we can't help it, we look inward and try to discern what we could have done better to have helped them succeed.

When they succeed in slaying the dragon we celebrate with them in the joy of the accomplishment. Quickly we move on to training them for the next dragon. Time is of the essence. We smile at their complaints that we don't care, as they would choose sometimes to relish in the current victory, rather than move on. We know we care, but we also know that time is valuable, and that the next dragon must be slain. The training must go on.

The beauty of Christian schools, is that despite the fact that we can't slay their dragons for them, there is someone more powerful who can help them. He is the most powerful ally of all. And so as we teach reading, writing, math, and science, as we teach art, computers, geography, and history we also teach the words of the greatest dragon slayer. He who conquers all. He for whom no dragon can stand. He through whom our students can do anything, because he gives them strength.

As teachers we know that we are a mere 6 hours in their day, and a mere 4-8 years in their lives. We also know that there are many dragons beyond the ones we teach students to slay. Someday we will not always be there to help them prepare. In the future and even in this day they'll need to be able to size up dragons on their own. So we hope our teaching will help them beyond the classroom. We hope it will help them to determine the best course of action in any situation, and ride in to master the challenge at hand. It is our hope that the experience of slaying the dragon of math, science, or literature will help to slay the other dragons of the world because at the same time we have instilled in them the knowledge that everything is possible if they believe in Him. That if they call on His name they do not battle alone. That if

they commit whatever they do to the Lord, their plans will succeed.

So go forth and teach your students how to slay dragons. Teach them to do all dragon slaying with God at their side.

For you are the master dragon slayers. I know each of you will face difficulties this day and this week as we continue the training of our students. Today and this week, I wish for all of you and your students to succeed. I hope for all of us Godspeed,

and that we will meet someday. Hopefully with tales to tell of dragons slain.

Scripture:

Philippians 4:13 — "I can do everything through him who gives me strength."

Proverbs 16:3 — "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed."

Mark 9:23b — "Everything is possible for him who believes." ☺

Central Minnesota Christian School
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Interested candidates should send a cover letter, resume, and statement of faith to: *Larry Marcus, Board Chair, CMCS, 204 School Street, Prinsburg, MN 56281.*

What Makes a Christian School Great?

Al Boerema (ajb37@calvin.edu) associate professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., asked the Dot Edu panel to consider the question of “greatness”: Jim Collins’s popular book Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don’t defines great companies as those that have an average cumulative stock price return that was many times higher than the general stock market, an easily quantified indicator. Let’s talk about this in terms of Christian schools. What are the indicators of a great Christian school in your opinion?

September 1, 2007

Johanna Campbell starts:

A great Christian school ... hmmm. Let’s start with the word “great.” If the purpose of our school is to be great, then, no, I don’t want to send my children there. If the word “great” means “wonderful,” “excellent” or “special,” then, yes, I may consider it, as long as those adjectives mean that Christ is honored in every aspect of the school. I believe that one of the main hallmarks of a Christian school should be love and respect. All the activities in the school flow from its core: the love of Christ. How did Christ show his love? In John 13 we read that he showed the full extent of his love by taking a towel and washing his disciples’ feet. In other words, the greatest must become the least. If we have such a community of students, parents and teachers, where all act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with their God (Micah 6:8), then we have a wonderful Christian school. That is where I want to send my children.

Johanna



September 19, 2007

Al Boerema asks for more discussion.

Hello people,

Aside from Johanna’s post, it has been so quiet. Even Tony did not jump in right away. Let’s talk about this question. There are two issues that I am hoping we can focus on — what does it mean to be great in terms of the Kingdom of God, and how do we measure our effectiveness in Christian schools. What do you think?

Al

September 21, 2007

Jolene Velthuisen contributes:

When presented with this question, I talked to a friend who is excited about Collins’s work, and I read some of Jim Collins’s material. It’s important to note that when Jim Collins wrote *Good to Great*, he was not writing a book about the servant love of God in our organizations and how that brings about change.

He wrote his book for a secular audience, explaining Four Stages that make a company great in the business world. I think it would be helpful to outline Collins’s Four Stages on which great businesses are built (or great organizations, which is further explained in his following monograph addressed to the social sector).

Stage 1. Disciplined people: ambitious but humble leaders, and the right people in the right place.

Stage 2. Disciplined thought: confront the brutal facts of your organization. In stage 2, Collins also introduces his “Hedgehog” principle: finding and pursuing the one area about which you are passionate and at which you can excel. Stick to excelling at that only.

Stage 3. Disciplined action: a culture of discipline in the organization. Second, realize that these steps will be like pushing a slow-starting flywheel forward — though slow at starting, your success will gain speed as each of your actions will begin to work together and multiply the success.

Stage 4. Building greatness to last: this includes planning ahead for generations of great leaders.

I know Christian school administrators who embrace Jim Collins’s framework and seek to apply it to their schools. They have done workshops on *Good to Great* in Christian schools. They’ve even started a book. And in some ways, I agree that we can learn from Collins’s scientifically gathered observations on business. But left only with his data, I know there is something





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missing — especially for Christian organizations. I am pulled in the same direction as you, Johanna. There cannot be a great Christian school without the sacrificial love of our Savior being absolutely central to the mission. It must be the foundation from which all other practices stem. And maybe then we can ask: Based on the love of Christ, which practices best serve our children's needs? In this light, Collin's data may help guide our steps.

Jolene

September 22, 2007

Pam Adams adds:

Jolene, thank you for explaining Jim Collin's philosophy of good to great. Frankly when I read Al's question for discussion I thought what is this all about — another secular business model being applied to Christian schools? So to both Jolene and Johanna I say "amen" to their questioning of this business model.



What are the indicators of a great Christian school? There are many, but one that is important to me is whether the school tries to be distinctive in how it does everything. In essence a Christian school needs to be countercultural. I see too little evidence of this as many Christian schools use the same time-honored practices that the public schools do (just think of honor societies, homecoming kings and queens). Can't we break this secular mold and do things in a more thoughtful and intentionally Christian manner?

Pam

September 22, 2007

Tony Kamphuis responds:

In the past I really pushed the "distinctive in everything" notion more than I do now. If our public school down the street has a well-balanced and intelligently constructed physical education program, I am more likely to attribute that to common grace and say, "I don't want so much to be distinctive as to be obedient to God's will in that area." If we end up with very similar looking programs, I'd rather have that than look distinctive just so that we stand out.



I've just finished *Good to Great*, and I think there is plenty to learn here. There are many interests and perspectives within Christianity that can pull a school in all sorts of directions. As a result, a Christian school may end up looking like an amorphous blob that doesn't stand for much. Some clarity and focus in terms of identity and seeking to get the "right people on the bus" may result in catching the eye of people who previously may never have considered Christian education for their children.

I'm not entirely clear on whether acknowledging our sacrificial Savior helps decide if our school should be excellent in the arts, or solid in environmental studies, or whatever. It's too mushy a concept to help us gain traction, and to say "yes" to this and "no" to that.

Tony

September 27, 2007

Al Boerema summarizes:

Okay, now that we have gotten through some of the issues — the nature of Collins's work, the difficulty with the word "great" and a nod to the issue of whether schools can learn from business, let's take one more round and get back to an expanded version of the original question. In concrete terms, how do we know whether a school is doing what Christian schools should be doing? And, since Tony is worried about "mushy" concepts, how do we measure or assess whether we are doing what Christian schools should be doing?

Al

September 27, 2007

Johanna Campbell responds:

Just as you, Al, I want to pick up on that word "mushy" in Tony's reply. Pam, you mentioned the word "countercultural." In my mind, we just don't understand how distinctive the gospel is. If we live by the Sermon on the Mount, our lives will be countercultural because we live right-side-up lives in an upside-down world. We will discover that there is nothing common about grace. Just think about the concept of biblical love as explained in 1 Corinthians 13 and try to live that chapter out in one school day alone! It is impossible. If every thought is to be brought into the obedience of our Lord, and if whatever we do is to glorify God and be motivated by love, we will discover that there is nothing "mushy" about running such a school. That kind of school requires a life of tremendous discipline and self-sacrifice.

I'd like to sum up the core of a "great" Christian school with

four Great C's:

The Great Cultural Mandate (Gen. 1:27,28), by which all of life is examined in the light of God's Word and Christ is honored in all subject areas.

The Great Commandment, cited above (Deut. 6, 4,5 and Lev. 19:18) by which all are encouraged to love God above all and give their lives in loving service to their neighbors.

The Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) by which the good news of the gospel is carried out first of all in the school's home community and then in the country and the world.

The Great Community (1 Cor. 12-14) by which all members of the school community live for God and honor him with their gifts by putting their knowledge into practice through loving service.

This can be done only by the grace of God and through the work of the Holy Spirit. That is why we should not boast about our schools being "great." We don't need to boast, because our works will bear us out. We will be known by our love.

Johanna

September 28, 2007

Tim Leugs concludes with:

Hello everyone,

I am in agreement with the various comments you have made. As many of you have indicated, we are all uneasy about comparing ourselves to the "upside-down world" Johanna describes. It seems that it's not possible for Christian schools to be "distinctive in everything." It is simply naïve to think that we can offer everything that larger schools can provide. On the other hand, we obviously are not involved in Christian education simply to teach Bible, pray, and have worship opportunities.

At the same time, these devotional activities help us define who we are as Christian educators. Tony nailed the issue right on the head when he referred to it as an identity issue. As a Christian teacher, I do have a calling to reflect Christ in all things and in all areas, not simply as one who can lead students to develop a Christian perspective on literature or as one who can lead students in prayer, but also as one who can reflect what a grace-filled community looks like.

Last week, at the beginning of a morning recess, a student walked up to me with a trembling lower lip and worries on her mind. I was in the middle of cleaning up from the previous lesson and was not at first focused on her pain. Taking a moment,

though, I sat down to listen to the student tell me of a family member who was in the middle of a major surgery. A prayer and a quick hug later, the student walked out to recess. Some time later, her mother told me that my prayer had caused that student to feel an immediate sense of comfort covering her, knowing that another person cared for her and reflected God's love to her. "This is why I send my kids to a Christian school," the mother wrote.

This is also one of the reasons why I teach at a Christian school. It is there that we should create an atmosphere where believers build each other up. I don't know that we are necessarily called to have "great" Christian schools that follow the standards of a business model, but I do know that we are called to be faithful stewards in grace-filled Christian schools, following a model of broken but redeemed image-bearers.

Tim

The panel consists of:

Pam Adams (padams@dordt.edu), professor of education and director of graduate education at Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa.

Johanna Campbell (ctabc@twu.ca), executive director of the Christian Teachers Association of British Columbia, Langley, B.C.

Tony Kamphuis (TonyKamp@aol.com), executive director of the Niagara Association for Christian Education, Smithville, Ont.

Tim Leugs (tleugs@cutlervillecs.org) a fifth-grade teacher at Cutlerville Christian School, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Jolene Velthuisen (jvelthuisen@rcsnm.org) a second-grade teacher at Rehoboth Christian School in Northwest New Mexico.



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Training Center for Heads of Christian Schools

GRAND RAPIDS, MI — (News from the Van Lunen Center)

An innovative new center at Calvin College will bring fresh resources to beleaguered Christian school administrators. The VanLunen Center for Executive Management in Christian Schools is being established at Calvin, thanks to a \$2 million gift to the college from the Richard D. VanLunen Foundation. The Center's purpose will be to provide world-class executive management education for heads of schools based on the historic Christian faith — of which there are no fewer than 20,000 across the continent!

The center will serve faith-based schools large and small across the U.S. and Canada. And it will practice a big-tent philosophy, reaching out to schools from a wide-range of faith traditions, including Catholic, evangelical Protestant, Episcopal, independent Christian, Lutheran and Reformed Christian day schools.

Gordon VanderBrug, a trustee with the VanLunen Foundation, says Calvin was a natural choice to host the center. "We were looking for an institution that had a solid understanding of Christian schools and was excellent in management education," he says, "and we found it in Calvin College."

Dr. Shirley Roels has been appointed as the first VanLunen Center director and shifts into the role after a 27-year career at Calvin that has seen her serve the college in a variety of ways, both as a professor of business management and the dean of academic administration. She will continue to serve as director of the Lilly Vocation Program.

Roels, who combines a 1971 bachelor's degree from Calvin in secondary education with a master's in business administration

from the University of Michigan and a Ph.D. in college and university administration from Michigan State, is thrilled about the new challenge on her horizon and says now is a critical time for such a center.

She notes that many schools with a clear Christian mission, sound strategy and good planning are growing, but that the role of Christian school heads is changing — often times in dramatic ways.



Dr. Shirley Roels

Jim Marsh, head of school at Westminster Christian Academy in St. Louis, Missouri, where he has served for two decades, agrees. He says the role has seen a significant shift from internal to external, requiring skills and capacities far different from those of an educational leader

who comes up through the ranks of the schoolhouse.

"School leadership is becoming more complex and challenging," he says. "Boards are looking to the head, the CEO if you will, to set and keep the school's vision, take significant leadership in fundraising and strategic planning, and recruit and retain the best and brightest faculty and staff."

Echoing those sentiments is Bill Burke, head of school at St Sebastian's, a Catholic school in Needham, Mass. He says a three-day course he took years ago on developing executive leadership (in which he was the only educator among 40 participants) was one of the most memorable experiences of his career. And he is eager to see the VanLunen Center make such experiences available to educators around the continent. "The center will fill a huge void," he says. "It is an idea whose time is long overdue. I can't wait to get started."

Roels is eager to tap into that kind of

excitement and to connect to educational leaders from a wide range of circles. "The cultivation of senior leaders from many ethnic groups, both men and women, is important," she says. "God's church includes people from every culture, and future Christian schools should mirror such diversity." School heads like that idea.

"The 'big tent' is really one of the most impressive aspects of the Van Lunen Center," says David Hahn, head of the school at Long Island Lutheran Middle and High School in Brookville, N.Y. "People who connect with the center will have the chance to step out of their personal denominational confines and grow from the experiences and practices of other Christ-centered traditions."

The Center currently is forming a governing board, selecting an advisory body, and considering a number of initial strategies for its first year of operation and expects to announce its first program in the next month.

Roels, the product of Christian grade and high schools, can't wait to get started. "There is no other entity that provides executive leadership development for school heads that is distinctively Christian and specifically focused on Christian schools," she says. "The Van Lunen Center will be a very special place for the intersection of Christian faith, school needs, and executive leadership development which will be without parallel in North America. Other universities and associations provide leadership development for heads of private schools but do not emphasize the special nature of a Christian school's mission and executive leadership imperatives because of that mission. Yet the majority of private schools in the U.S. exist because they are the products of a Christian faith tradition that is determined to teach that faith to the next generation." ☪



Media-rich Classrooms Promote Inclusivity

Tena Siebenga-Valstar serves as Education Administrator at Fort McMurray Christian School, Alberta. We encourage teachers and principals to submit questions for this column, even if they think they know the answer. Send your questions to Dr. Tena Siebenga-Valstar, 168 Windsor Dr., Fort McMurray, Alta, T9H 4R2, or email her at tvalstar@telus.net.

In this column I will answer questions presented by education students at Trinity Christian College. Although I do not have specific training in the area of special education, I believe that all students are created in the image of God and therefore worthy of respect and an opportunity to develop the gifts with which God has blessed them.

Helping all students learn

Question #1

There is much talk of inclusion in the elementary level. Do you have any tips for inclusion in a high school setting, perhaps pertaining to the subject of English?

Response:

Researchers working collaboratively with middle school teachers in two different Alberta school jurisdictions found that classrooms most accessible to students in need of inclusion were media-rich, incorporated the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), required learning-focused networks, and were taught by teachers who made the curriculum accessible to all learners. These strategies affirm that “best practices” used in elementary classrooms can be and likely are used in high school classrooms as well.

The area of English is one in which a variety of media can be effectively utilized to introduce or teach various concepts. Wright (2005) describes the philosophy behind UDL as implementing teaching strategies that are designed for the divergent needs of special populations. UDL embraces several principles: (1) Children with learning or physical disabilities do not represent a distinctly different category, but, instead, fall along a continuum of learner differences; (2) Educators are most successful when they adjust content and delivery of instruction to maximize success for “all” students, rather than concentrating on the needs of the most challenged learners; and (3) Instruction should not be tied to a sole source of information (e.g., textbooks), but instead ought to incorporate multiple resources, including digital materials, to illustrate key concepts and reinforce learning.

The Center for Applied Special Technology (Casper & Leuchovius, 2005) suggests the following approaches which can assist all students:

- If a student learns best through listening, he or she can use a computer to read stories and information aloud, or to pronounce new words.
- If a student learns more easily with large print, curriculum materials can easily be provided in this format.
- If a student can explain things best by using word processing software and a keyboard rather than using pencil and paper, then that will be the method of choice.
- If a student struggles to identify the most important points or to organize information, he or she can use a computer program that helps students learn by doing.

Curriculum guides and textbooks include a lot of information that students are expected to learn. Teachers need to determine the critical information the students must learn, apprise the students of this and present it to the students in a user-friendly manner using a variety of sources including his or her own expertise. Studies (Bulgren & Schumaker, 2001) have shown that, on average, students with disabilities have made performance gains when instructional practices related to organizing, understanding, and recalling content information are used. In addition, other students enrolled in the same classes have made comparable gains. Teachers utilized understanding routines such as the content enhancement approach, concept anchoring and the concept comparison approach which linked prior knowledge to current material in an interactive discussion. The students are encouraged to be actively engaged in analyzing and manipulating the new information.

An advance organizer also helps students learn. It is information that is delivered in advance of the learning task itself that helps students understand what they need to do or learn as they complete the learning task. Similarly, lesson organizers, unit organizers and study guides given to the students enable them to learn the critical concepts. Peer tutoring, small group learning, cooperative learning as well as the use of memory devices all help the students review the information given.

Bulgren & Schumaker suggest that an integrated sequence might have an even greater effect on student performance and success in content courses than the routines in isolation. Therefore, organizer routines might be used to introduce a course, units, and lessons; the concept routines might be used to develop information related to a major concept in each unit; study guides and graphic organizers might be used to help students understand reading assignments; and class-wide peer tutoring and mnemonic



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devices might be used to help students practice and review information for a test.

To conclude, I believe that good teaching practices used in elementary and middle school classrooms are the same ones necessary to teach all students at the high school level. It is evident that research results are guiding the effort to more effectively meet the needs of all students at the high school level and, as is so often said, it is the attitude of the teacher that makes all the difference. Teachers need to know their students so well that they can design lessons that will assist the students in their learning. Together, the teacher and learner will gain a greater understanding of the most critical learnings of the course of studies. I encourage you to research this topic in order to find teaching strategies that will accommodate the differentiated learning of the students in your classroom.

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Not my Johnny!

Question # 2

What is the most difficult part of working with the parents of special education students?

Response:

In my experience, the most difficult part of working with parents of a special education student is the parent's or parents' inability to accept the fact that their child actually has a challenge in the area of academic learning. I have had experience primarily with parents of children who have shown signs of At-

tention Deficit/Hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD). Sometimes parents have experienced difficulty in school themselves and do not wish their child to experience some of the difficulties that they have experienced. An Alberta Education publication states:

"No one direct cause for AD/HD has been identified. AD/HD tends to run in families, and heredity appears to be an important factor, accounting for 50 to 80 percent of the children with AD/HD. Parents and siblings of children with AD/HD frequently have similar symptoms. Like many traits of behavior and temperament, AD/HD is genetically influenced, but not genetically determined (pg 3)."

Because of the above mentioned sensitivity, it is important to give careful thought to the way in which you communicate with the parents. A good approach would be to describe the student's behaviour and performance in class, citing examples as much as possible. Tell about the student's strengths and weaknesses. You may ask the parents if they have seen similar behaviors in their home or church setting. Demonstrate the problems the child is having with learning or social situations without making it appear that the child is a behavior problem to you and not allowing you to carry out your task of teaching. I have to remind myself and the teachers with whom I work that this student is a child dearly loved by the parents — parents who want the best for their child and in no way want their child to be hurt. Show that you also love and care for their child.

Furthermore, provide the parents with information about what the school can offer to support the child's learning. If, however, the parents indicate that they have observed the same behaviors and wish to investigate further avenues of assistance, suggest consultation with their family doctor and any other referrals or assessments that will insure that the child receives the help needed. If, on the other hand, the parents are not willing to see the situation as one that requires assistance, continue to work patiently with them, communicate with them on a regular basis and in a loving manner. At the same time continue to teach the child using all the effective teaching strategies and classroom management techniques you can find to effectively assist the student's learning.

Reference:

Alberta Education. (2006). Focusing on Success: Teaching Students With Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, grades 1-12. Edmonton. ©

Book Reviews

Martin E. Marty, *The Mystery of the Child*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007. 246 pages plus 11 pages of indices and Scriptural references. Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Retired)

I remember from my Latin days being challenged to translate the phrase which, when done right, reads, “The greatest of reverence is due the child.” At one level, that’s not so far removed from the heart of Martin E. Marty’s new book, *The Mystery of the Child*. The poet would no doubt agree with two theses that structure Marty’s book — that those who care for children, at whatever level, need to resist (1) the temptation to control, to manage the child for his own satisfaction and (2) the danger of regarding the child basically as a bundle of problems which require appropriate solutions. But in terms of classical culture, the poet would be at least perplexed were he to encounter the central concern of Marty’s book — the unsettling assertion of Jesus that becoming like a child — and a conversion to that attitude — is the green card that opens up the doors to God’s kingdom.

The reader who knows Martin Marty as a distinguished professor of church history and of service on many boards, committees, and task forces may well be puzzled at the author’s apparent digression into the complex field of child formation. Part of the answer lies in his involvement in a project centered in Emory University called “The Child in Religion, Law, and Society.” His book, prompted by his participation in that project, is intended to improve relationships between children, adults, the Church, and the community at large.

Another part of the reason for the book we do not discover until the final pages, in an appendix of sorts, which he calls “The Abyss of Mystery: Postscript and Prescript.” Here he becomes very personal. He informs us that he is entering his ninth decade, is aware of his own mortality, and speculates realistically on what may lie ahead of him. But rather than indulge in fears or anxieties, he expresses the hope that he will be able to retain what he has defined during the course of his book — the quality of *childness* (his choice of terms).

Sympathetic judge

The book is undergirded by extensive reading. Marty relies on the research of a large variety of sources — from studies done on books about child-rearing to exegetes of the biblical narratives; from philosophers to neuroscientists; from biologists to sociologists; and from novelists such as George Bernanos and Wendell Berry. He is generous in his acknowledgements. He is at once the most sympathetic listener to all these voices and at the same time the most discriminating judge of their positions. For ex-

ample, he learns that most books advising parents about rearing their children approach the child as a series of problems that must be dealt with and provide solutions. However, they fail to acknowledge what lies beyond the bundle of problems — the transcendent mystery of the child. Also, the scientists who have

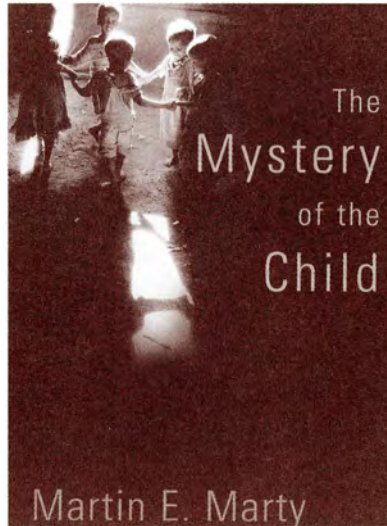
delved into genetics, who have mapped the brain, and who claim the ability to account for the child’s behavior in terms of their specialties, have enlarged our understanding of the child. In fact, their work has added to the mystery of the child. But Marty has his reservations. He discerns at what point the sciences of chemistry and physics offer a “nothing but” account of the child and, again, suppress the mystery of the child. And those who take either side of the “nature” versus “nurture” issue also indulge in discourse which leaves little room for affirming the mystery of the child.

The book is addressed to care-givers — and they are many, and not limited to teachers. Marty furnishes chapters on the subject of care — care seen as a problem, care seen as control. Then we get chapters on the mystery of

the child — the mystery of change, of wonder, a child’s identity as shaped by exigencies and circumstances, the child in context, the problem of good and evil and how to deal with these pedagogically — followed by the personal statement I alluded to above. The book is laced with quotations from his extensive scholarly files and from more specialized works he had to consult more recently for the book.

Various controls

The temptation to control comes in many forms. The disciples exhibited it when they wanted to shoo the children away. Parents exercise control when they use the home as a laboratory for turning their children into their notion of what their children should become. An unimaginative teacher who tries to stereotype the children, who holds up as a model George’s generic drawing of a house while rejecting Emma’s drawing of her own house is exercising a form of control. Religious control can be especially damaging; religious zealotry practiced by a pastor or rigid parents will suppress the sense of mystery. Harsh discipline, an atmosphere of fear, “a catechism view of God,” — all these can squelch the sense of mystery. Home schooling is vulnerable to the temptation of control as well. Marty is no fool, either. The child is actually entitled to many forms of control; they are essential to his survival and a form of liberation. But



Childlike Belief



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such measures differ widely from the manipulative tactics that assault a child's personality and character.

And problem solving — yes, children weigh in with a plethora of problems, from the instant of their birth — even before. Marty admits that he knew the phone numbers of agencies he needed to consult for his children's problems. One needs to be sure about that bus driver and whether the textbooks are appropriate. But there are those who see nothing but problems, and see the child defined by the problems she faces. Far better is an attitude of openness, where the parent helps the child prepare for contingencies in a general way, so she understands that she cannot be perfectly safe all the time and that life will offer many surprises.

Beyond understanding

So, what is this "mystery of the child" all about? It is not simply an idiosyncrasy of the Christian religion. It is not a sentimental, rapturous, idolization of the child. Marty uses a cache of terms to describe it while acknowledging all the while that mystery, by definition, is, ultimately, ineffable. What are the qualities that Jesus saw in the children that were brought to him and that he established as the green card for entrance into the reign of Christ? Well, Jesus never saw children as problems. He practiced what Marty calls "metapedagogy." He is presented to us as "a child-loving Jesus: "...the child is mirror, model, and analogy to the divine mystery." (117) We note, among other things, the dependence of the child. He needs everything and brings nothing. He needs, and accepts, gifts. He is open, receptive, artless, responsive. She is capable of wonder, and awe, and openness.

She has the status of a marginalized stranger, exercising creative dependence.

And all these qualities, by analogy, tell us about God himself, who is their creator and father. From this recognition, many consequences flow. Marty provides fifteen of them, based on Karl Rahner's "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood" (pp. 107-116) — obviously too extensive to reproduce here. What Rahner calls us to acknowledge is the image of God in the child.

Don't grow up

I have already alluded to what Marty regarded as his personal reason for concerning himself with the mystery of the child. He insists that childlikeness is not just for children. It is not just a phase that one leaves behind as he enters into adulthood. He is intent on linking the being of the child to adulthood and the end of life — and vice versa. He quotes a prioress in Bernanos's novel, "...keep your faith in the spirit of childhood! Never become a grown-up person!" Of course, this adult will have had his childness battered and tested and disciplined. But he will never have lost his sense of awe, of wonder, of capacity for growth, of relating meaningfully to church and community. Of such, as our Lord says, is the kingdom of heaven.

This would make a fine selection for a book of the year in our schools. It should at least be given priority over yet another array of books on how to manage and rear our children. This book makes many of these others appear quite insignificant. ☪

Clarence Boomsma, *Why I Still Believe the Gospel*. Introduction by Andrew Kuyvenhoven. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007. 108 pages. \$12.00. Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Emeritus)

All teachers committed to the Christian faith teach in the power of the resurrection. That energy may not be overt or apparent on a given day or in a given class session, but this event, central to the Christian faith, impinges ultimately on every lesson plan and teaching strategy. Easter Sunday is a day that provides motivation and impetus for our work. For that matter, each Sunday is a mini-Easter day, reminding us of the resurrection. And our hymns and sermons and creeds keep this event before us as well. But teachers need refreshers, too.

Clarence Boomsma, one of the leading pastors in the Christian Reformed Church, has left us as a legacy a memoir of the ten-

sions he experienced as a seminary student, pastor, and leader in a variety of settings — tensions relating to the historicity of the gospels, but especially the resurrection. (The book entered the market within days of his demise.) Reading these memoirs should make us all walk taller and proceed with even greater confidence as we present the case for a happening which is a stumbling block to many a seeker after truth. Boomsma's experiences can fortify us for those situations when we need to answer questions from a bright student — or, for that matter, when we ourselves have questions.

As a seminary student, Boomsma encountered especially two

books which challenged him then and during the early years of his ministry. One was Albert Schweitzer, author of *The Life of Jesus*, a doctor who lived a life marked by nobility and sacrifice, though denying the resurrection and other key doctrines of the faith. The other was S. D. McConnell, an Episcopalian priest who had written at the end of his career *Confessions of an Old Priest*, — a work in which he explained why he no longer believed the gospel which he had proclaimed during his ministry of fifty years.

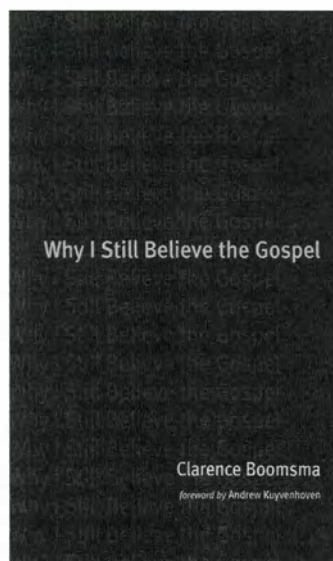
Naturalism exposed

While in a broad sense Boomsma's title is apt, it is the resurrection that engages him. His first chapter, "My Crisis of Faith," narrates his encounter with these men, but the remaining three chapters deal with the resurrection: "The Pivot of Faith," "Modern Denial of the Resurrection of Jesus," and "Christ has been Raised from the Dead." As he accumulated a wide variety of opinions about these matters during his ministry, he was stimulated to fashion a defense of the resurrection, an apologia, along with a refutation of his opponents. His chief adversaries are those who hold to an ideology of scientific naturalism, that corrosive agent which rules out the supernatural from the outset in the epistemology of its adherents. He argues and reasons with skill and integrity. He acknowledges the technological and other achievements of the naturalistic world view — a gesture which adds ballast to the argument and the value of the book. But he pointedly exposes their limitations as well.

Naturalistic humanists question whether there are sufficient causes to produce the effect of the resurrection. Boomsma makes heavy use of cause and effect as well. He points out the division of time between B.C. and A.D. along with all that is implied in that division. He reminds us of the upheaval that occurred throughout the world in the wake of the resurrection — history which can be explained in no other way. Naturalism cannot account for these realities. Their "methodological imperialism," their "absolutization of the scientific method," must be challenged.

The unbelieving historian or theologian can only speculate about what other possible forces could have produced such results. The resurrection brought about the Christianization of the world — including the Roman Empire, which at first opposed it. Christianity created Western civilization and all the benefits and salvific power which accrued from it. Says Boomsma: "It was out of the conviction that God in Jesus Christ had proved himself stronger than the cross and the tomb, that the Christian faith was born."

(97)



Lasting force

The resurrection, then, Boomsma contends, is not a mere appendage to the gospel. It is the event which defined the relationship of the disciples to Jesus. Moreover, the teachings and ministry of Jesus take on their true meaning only against the reality of the resurrection. And the power that these events generated show no

evidence of weakening. Painful dissensions and schisms are part of the history of the Church, but, through the Holy Spirit, it has remarkable power to correct itself. And it keeps on careening throughout history, right into our present time. What other force could have brought about the exponential growth of the church in the countries of the Southern Hemisphere? True, the decline of the faith in Europe is well documented, but we hear as well of attempts by faithful followers to turn the tide. We have the assurance of our Lord himself that the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Boomsma found many allies in his defense of the resurrection. He points out that even folk like Alfred North Whitehead and Jean Paul Sartre made late concessions that belied their earlier beliefs and attitudes. Theologian Barth and others stoutly defend the resurrection. Said Barth, when asked what a photograph would have revealed that Easter morning, "The photographer....would have gotten nothing but pictures of an empty tomb. Jesus was not there. He had walked out of the tomb early that morning." Although Boomsma was never seriously tempted to take the road of Schweitzer and McConnell, he welcomed the support of Barth and others.

Unique faith

For us all, the resurrection is truly the pivot of our faith. Paul reminds us that if Christ was not raised, then our faith is in vain, and we are creatures without hope. For the resurrection binds everything into a coherent body of truth by which people have lived for centuries. The resurrection unites heaven and earth, life and death, time and eternity. And it explains the meaning of existence and defines God's redemptive program. Kuyvenhoven's apt foreword reminds us that whatever struggles we may have, we should not suppose that doubt and faith are friends. They are opponents. And we need to trumpet the uniqueness of what the Christian faith has to offer — the resurrection of our Lord from the dead. We can believe this gospel, live in peace with it, and robustly defend it to our students and all comers. ©