

**Central Alberta Christian High School, Lacombe AB Canada**  
**Mel Brandsma: Principal**  
**Henry Contant: Consultant**  
**Strategic Plan 2015-2020**

Central Alberta Christian High School is a small high school in rural Alberta which began 26 years ago. It began with eight grade 10 students and grew to about seventy students in grades 10-12 over the next five years. Enrollment reached a number in excess of 150 several years ago but has since stabilized in the 90-120 range.

The school has over the twenty six years embarked on three expansion projects, adding several classrooms, kitchen and gymnasium, and last year a sports field was prepared on our proper. Our present facility is now capable of accommodating up to two hundred and fifty students. Support from our community has been consistently strong with fall drives designed to reduce capital costs generally netting \$100,000. School tuition per student is based on the cost of educating the child and not tied to capital costs. Total debt load is approximately \$450,000 at this point. I mention this to help explain later why I feel the time is ripe to begin some new development projects.

My project at CACHS has three main focuses. The first is an evaluation/revision of our present mission statement:

*The mission of Central Alberta Christian High School Society is to provide a biblical, Christ-centered education based on Reformed creedal standards. The school will strive to serve students of differing abilities by providing a balance of academic and practical courses leading towards an Alberta high school diploma. It will challenge students to analyze and critique cultural and moral issues from a scriptural perspective as they develop their God given talents. The school community will provide a nurturing environment in which students will be able to express their faith as Christians in society.*

**What have we done?**

So far we have had a board discussion and staff discussion pertaining to the present mission statement and the possible changes which should be made. Focus is to come up with a shorter, succinct statement which encompasses who we are and why we exist as a Christian High School. A more detailed summary of the school's vision will be further articulated in other documents, however the CACHS mission statement should be a single purpose statement communicating the why we do what we do. The statement needs to be easily memorized and "sounds good" spoken out loud.

### **What I learned:**

Mission statements which reveal accurately and succinctly what a school seeks to do for each student are very difficult to put together. Each participant (staff and board) struggles to find a way to express what we are attempting to do in one or two sentences. In many ways, our present version is one which has addressed a variety of concerns over the past twenty six years.

Rather than being reactionary, our vision and mission statements need to address our central focus, allowing for a more detailed explanation surrounding foundational statements to be stated in an additional document.

The process of re-writing it in an easily memorized version allows it to be used to form the foundation of every program we offer.

Two possible Vision statements are: “Striving for His Excellence” or “Rising to His Challenge”

Mission Statement: “Transformative Education within a Christian Community”

Timeline: Mission statement in draft form should be done prior to the Spring Society meeting. The board would need to endorse it at the August board meeting, allowing for a presentation and vote in the Fall Society Meeting.

## **1. Development of a tech-education program at CACHS.**

### **What have we done?**

For the last twenty years we have heard a constant comment from our families lamenting the fact that we do not have any kind of industrial arts program. We have heard repeatedly that students and families are choosing to attend the local public high school due to the availability of a “shop” program. We heard however the response was always “not yet” as there were more pressing concerns. Classroom space was a concern for a number of years, a gymnasium and kitchen needed to be built, a parking lot needed to be paved, a sports field needed to be created, .....

At the present time, we find ourselves comfortably fitting into our building with room for many more students. The sports field was developed last year and the grass is growing nicely. Our debt load is very manageable and our community has shown tremendous support for our school in each fall drive.

In our community, there is I believe a desire to offer “hands on” education to our young tradesman and farmer. I feel strongly that if an appeal went out to the community with some

specific donors as targets, the money would be raised without affecting our debt load or our ability to offer affordable Christian education.

I have made initial visits to Gateway Christian School in Red Deer AB, Edmonton Christian High School, and Unity Christian School in British Columbia. I also spent time dialoguing with the Principal from Lethbridge Christian School who run a program off campus at a rented shop. After each visit, I become more convinced of our opportunity to begin this new program.

In February of 2015, my consultant, Mr. Henry Contant visited our community and spoke to several key individuals. In an evening presentation to our board, Mr. Contant spoke of board governance, mission and strategic plans. It was an evening that spoke of affirmation but also a renewed sense of direction and possibility. After the evening concluded, Mr. Contant and I both felt that our board was eager to begin this venture. The board in a follow meeting also affirmed the strategic plan and were very excited about this possibility.

Initial steps would be three-fold:

- a. Board to appoint a Tech Ed. Task Force by September 2015 with a mandate to present a preliminary report of their finding to the CACHS Board by February 2016.
- b. Survey of parents/students at the junior high level in our feeder programs. (October 2015)
- c. Visit to a few sites of similar sized schools which have a Tech Ed. program. (Fall of 2015)

Ideally I and a few task force members should visit a couple of schools which have successfully implemented such a program.

### **What I learned:**

This vision will not happen unless God blesses our plan and our administration pushes forward. For many years we have simply wished for this program to happen and now it is up to our leadership team to push it forward. I have spoken to a significant number of individuals within our community about this plan and in addition revealed to students of the possibility of creating an industrial arts program and each time it is met with excitement over the possibilities.

## **2. Development of a shared PreK-Grade 12 vision for Christian Education in Lacombe.**

### **What have we done?**

In our strategic plan, this area will require the most amount of diplomacy and careful planning. The history of Christian Education in Lacombe began in 1945 with a K-9 school system and it wasn't until 1989 that Christian High school education became a part of our landscape. At the time the discussion began in the mid 1980's, the society at Lacombe Christian School rejected the idea of having a high school, so a group of committed supporters began their own society and birthed Central Alberta Christian High School. Some lingering "hard feelings" are still felt within our local.

They say time heals all wounds and I believe the situation at both schools allows for and encourages a re-visiting of this situation. Both schools are in a good position in terms of support, financial and endorsement of vision. Our dynamics in private education in Alberta have changed dramatically over the last 20 years due to an increasing number of schools operating as alternate schools under a public school umbrella. If our schools were to amalgamate, a stronger more concerted voice would be heard with about 500 students in total.

In addition to the stronger voice is the aspect of resources. Having the opportunity to combine school boards, education committees, development director, and business administrator would be an immediate time and cost saving mechanism.

Teachers could also be a shared resource in programs such as music, fine arts, computers, language and physical education. With the two separate campuses located about a five minute drive apart, this should be possible.

Initial steps could be:

- a. Planting the seeds of discussion with LCS (K-9) administration, LCS Board members and LCS families.
- b. Utilizing an experienced outside consultant to facilitate a discussion outlining the positives of creating one PreK – Grade 12 school society. The discussion should be structured and facilitated by an external 'third-party' consultant so that neither LCS nor CACHS are seen as having a 'hidden agenda' to 'take over' the other.

Timeline: The "planting seeds of discussion" should be done this spring with the fall of 2015 being a possible date for the consultant to be brought in to facilitate a discussion on the development of a shared PreK-Grade 12 vision for Christian education in the greater Lacombe area.

**What I learned:**

We are resistant to change even when change will bring about some positives. Many of us would rather stay with the “same” and be reasonably successful than risk change with the opportunity to grow and develop.

We often consider the negatives before the positives. For example, when we discuss this idea with a member of the community, the first things people see are roadblocks or adjustments which will need to be made. “Who will lose their job?” or “How will we equalize the salary grids?” seem to dominate the discussions as each person begins to entertain this possibility. Rather than seeing the growth opportunities, we are often saddled with a fear of change.

I believe one of the best ways to overcome this malady is to initiate conversations with a focus on the positives that will result. This will take time and it must not be a one-time discussion.