



***Fostering a Culture of Philanthropy***  
**Head Administrator, Elisa Carlson**  
**Redmond, Oregon**

**Van Lunen Fellows**  
**Project Summary**

Central Christian School began in 1992 to meet the need for a Christian high school in Central Oregon. Since its inception, Central Christian has grown from 30 students to 250 and expanded its program to serve pre-kindergarten to high school. The school currently functions in leased spaces in a business complex with students traveling off campus for many extracurricular activities. Central Christian School moved into its facility with 100 students. Now with a student body of over 200, acquiring a larger facility is imperative to move the vision forward.

In order to conduct a capital campaign, it was determined that Central Christian School needed to first move from an event-based fundraising model to fostering a culture of philanthropy. Over a ten-month period, a comprehensive Annual Financial Development Plan was designed and implemented with the goal of establishing a sustainable financial foundation that would build momentum toward a successful capital campaign. Achieving that end would fulfill the strategic plan goal, "...to procure an outstanding educational facility for 500 students," with the ultimate reward of allowing Central Christian the privilege of providing more young people with a Christ-centered, academically excellent education.

### **Project Focus—Fostering a Culture of Philanthropy**

Central Christian School has continued to see enrollment increase throughout its almost twenty year history and will open its doors this fall to over 250 students. The school board has proactively planned for student body growth as evidenced in the strategic plan. The vision of the board is to create and implement systems that will accommodate a student body of 500—twice the number of students that are served today. One essential piece in seeing this vision become a reality is acquiring a larger facility.

Tuition and event-based fundraising have been Central Christian School’s primary sources of revenue. In order to develop sustainable funding and prepare for an eventual capital campaign, the school needed to design a comprehensive Annual Financial Development Plan that would foster a culture of philanthropy. This plan would shift fundraising from executing successful events to building relationships with people that care about Central Christian’s mission and ultimately choose to support it financially.

In consultation with Don Distelberg of The Timothy Group, it was determined that Central Christian School would design and implement a comprehensive Annual Financial Development Plan with the following characteristics:

- ❖ Communicates the mission and vision of Central Christian School with a broader audience in order to cultivate relationships with people that care about the ministry.
- ❖ Develops personal ask opportunities and diminishes event-based fundraising.
- ❖ Creates multiple giving streams based on donor interest (for example, Business Partners, Ministry Partners, and Student Sponsorship).

### **Project Method—A Comprehensive Annual Financial Development Plan (AFDP)**

Prior to developing the AFDP, Mr. Distelberg collected data concerning Central Christian School’s current fundraising practices and committed donors. He shared that the goal needed to be to develop annual fundraising as much as possible in order to prepare the school for an eventual capital campaign. After evaluating Central Christian’s fundraising practices, Mr. Distelberg recommended a paradigm shift—to have the largest source of fundraising revenue

be derived from personal solicitations of individuals, corporations, and foundations rather than from events.

Tracking all of the personal and business relationships built with Central Christian was an important aspect to supporting the success of an AFDP. The school's donor database was in need of updating. A decision was made to invest in an internet supported program that integrated with the school's current student management system, allowed multiple users, and provided a format for comprehensive relationship tracking.

Following the initial meeting with Mr. Distelberg, he sent a first draft of the AFDP. The draft expanded Central Christian's solicitation strategies from one to six including: personal, events, telephone, foundation grants, business, and mail. After review by administration and the development coordinator, some minor adjustments were made and the AFDP was approved. The next step was implementation.

Each of the solicitation strategies outlined in the AFDP required some training or coaching with personal solicitation requiring the most guidance. The initial process began with The Timothy Group providing a list of foundations that had granted funds to education in Central Oregon. Central Christian School staff members researched the recipients as well as foundation board members to see if any relationships existed that could be a benefit to the school.

In November, Mr. Distelberg worked with the school to craft its end-of-the-year giving letter. The letter was written to draw in the reader with a story of how the mission of Central Christian is transforming the lives of its students. It then appealed to the reader to partner financially with the ministry.

Writing a Leadership Proposal was the first action taken toward personal solicitations. The Timothy Group provided a template to Central Christian. The school supplied information and pictures to The Timothy Group and one of its staff members patiently worked with the school to create the document. Once the Leadership Proposal was in its final draft stages, Mr. Distelberg arranged for Ron Haas, a vice president and consultant with The Timothy Group, to conduct a telephone training session for Central Christian School administration, school board members, and the development coordinator in carrying out personal solicitations.

Central Christian capitalized on a current giving program and added two new options within the AFDP. For the past five years, Central Christian has worked to develop relationships with local businesses through its Business Partner program. This year, it made some revisions to the program and purposed to share the opportunity with more businesses. In addition, the school adapted the model to create Ministry Partners and Student Sponsorship.

### **Project Results—Cultivating Mission Committed Relationships**

The AFDP expanded and forged new solicitation strategies for Central Christian which are beginning to change the school community's mindset about fundraising. The goal is not to see how many seats can be filled at the up-coming auction because attendees have heard the school has fabulous items to auction off. It is to share the school's story with multiple audiences, large and small, in an effort to build relationships with people that care about the school's mission and will ultimately choose to support it with their prayer, time, and resources.

Changing database programs has benefitted development efforts. The development coordinator is able to make entries, for instance, each time a donor is contacted, thanked, invited to a cultivation event, or gives financially. In addition, the overall database of contacts has increased 29% this school year.

Central Christian School hosted three fundraising events as part of the AFDP—a concert, the sixth annual Matter of the Heart Auction, and Legacy Breakfast. A deliberate effort was placed on sharing the school's mission and vision at each event, as well as inviting guests to visit the school's campus on a Discovery Tour, and to capture contact information. The combined total of revenue from the events was \$109,595.

Personal solicitation efforts were increased as a direct result of the AFDP and Don Distelberg's coaching. Central Christian school board members, administration, and the development coordinator grew in their ability to share the school's mission, areas of need, and ask people to give financially to support the ongoing ministry of the school. As a result of personal solicitation, Central Christian experienced growth in Business Partner and Ministry Partner membership, Student Sponsorship, multiple-year donors, and first-time giving.

Central Christian is preparing to celebrate its twentieth anniversary during the 2011-12 school year. The Alumni and Friends Committee has worked to capture alumni data and will help coordinate reunion and giving efforts. Once in place, the AFDP outlines telephone solicitation guidelines for alumni volunteers to call fellow alumni seeking support of their alma mater.

The last section of the AFDP outlines the development of an endowment fund for Central Christian School. Preliminary work is underway, but has not been finalized. Plans are to include this giving opportunity as part of the twentieth anniversary celebration.

### **Project Analysis and Commentary—What I Have Learned**

- ❖ The first resource I seek in designing and carrying out plans for Central Christian is the Lord. This is His school, and His resources and creativity are unlimited.
- ❖ Proactively plan for additional staffing and volunteers because the demands on development personnel increased almost instantly.
- ❖ Include strategies and resources in the AFDP for cultivating relationships with constituents.
- ❖ Develop positive avenues for people to contribute to the ongoing ministry of the school. A secondary blessing from implementing the AFDP is an increasing number of people that care about Central Christian and want to serve and volunteer in some capacity.
- ❖ Financial support follows vision. Continue to share Central Christian School's story, identify the school's needs, and be prepared to make a personal ask.
- ❖ Building relationships with people that believe in the mission of Central Christian is a blessing, not only to the school but to the donor as well. I think some of my fondest memories of receiving a financial gift on behalf of the school are when a donor's eyes gleam with delight knowing that they are about the Father's business.