



Capturing Hearts for an Urgent Need: A Capital Campaign in a Young, Small School

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Chatsworth, California
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Consultant: Sarah Guldalian
Partnering with Zach Clark, Leadership and Development

Background

In 2010, the Lord placed the vision for a new Christian school into the hearts of the founding families. The question they sought to answer was one they felt couldn't be answered at any other school in the San Fernando Valley - can a school be academically rigorous and spiritually excellent without compromising one for the other?

This question was answered with a resounding yes on August 25, 2010, when Monarch Christian School opened the doors with one teacher, Mandy Diaz, and 11 students. The philosophy of education was unique; one that blended hands on, real life learning with Biblical integration. The result was astounding. Students thrived on a model of learning that engaged and challenged them, and the school flourished, becoming a full kindergarten through 5th grade elementary school with 50 students the following year.

Monarch rapidly outgrew our rented church space and looked for a campus we could call our own. We moved to our current Chatsworth site in 2012 and quickly expanded with the addition of our new Early Education program.

In the 2015-2016 school year, Monarch served over 150 students, from infants to 5th grade, and strives to honor God and pursue excellence, helping students to achieve their highest potential academically, spiritually, socially, and physically. We graduate responsible, respectful, and recognizable Christ-followers using research based teaching methods designed to promote critical thinking and build character. Our students will be influential in their communities as they pursue God's purpose for their lives.

As the school has rapidly grown, we recognized that to be successful in our mission and vision, we must grow our physical campus. For the 2015-2016 school year, Monarch was at capacity in over half of our classes and our physical footprint was at a maximum in our current layout. We also needed to provide additional programming and increase compensation for our staff members to improve retention and facilitate additional student growth. In total, we had space for an additional 32 students on our campus, and that certainly did not allow for financial or attendance growth.

With these factors in mind, the Board of Trustees and I set out to create a plan to raise a \$1,000,000 down payment to secure our campus in phase one of our growth plan, which would allow for a physical expansion of our Early and Elementary Education programs and enable us to start our middle school, launch special education programming, and increase our financial base. It was clear that this was the first step in making our strategic plan a reality.

In partnership with the Board of Trustees, the Board's Development Committee, and my consultant, Sarah Guldalian, with Zach Clark's Leadership and Development company, we focused on raising the critical need of \$1,000,000 by December 2015, when we urgently needed to close escrow on our current campus, and then progress toward our overall goal of \$7,000,000 that will include the rebuild and expansion of our current space.

Preparation and Planning

As a young school, this was our first capital campaign. We had successfully run four Annual Funds in the four years prior, raising a total of about \$350,000 altogether. Our school is mainly middle class families that are sacrificing in some way for their children to attend and approximately 30% of our student body receives financial aid. With this in mind, we fully recognized that the majority of our funds would not come from our internal community, but from cultivation of current donors, our community's connections, and the relationships of Board members.

When we moved on to our campus in 2012, we signed a five-year lease that included a first right of refusal clause with the intention to purchase the property within the five-year time frame. This first right of refusal clause was executed earlier than anticipated and, through a series of difficult events, we found ourselves needing to purchase the property by December 2015 for \$2,100,000 or it would be sold to an outside buyer and we would need to move by June 2016. We became aware of this deadline in March 2015 and, up until that time, we had been focused on preparation and planning for the Capital Campaign, not fundraising or donor cultivation.

With nine months to secure a \$1,000,000 down payment and find a bank that would finance a young school that, while fiscally sound, didn't have an extensive credit background, the Board of Trustees and I sought the Lord for guidance and wisdom as to what we should do next.

In the summer of 2015, I began the Van Lunen Fellowship and quickly saw that Zach Clark would be an excellent support for our project. His partner, Sarah Guldalian, served as a consultant for me and Brittany Hannon, my Director of Early Education and 'second in command' at Monarch. Together, we worked on fine-tuning several documents that were

already in use and created new procedures to increase our effectiveness with donor follow up and follow through.

Learning on the Job

The deadline of purchasing our property by December 2015 was a difficult task, one that the Board and I knew only Lord could help us to accomplish. We worked diligently throughout the summer to finalize what we identified as important documents we would need to approach higher-level donors, such as a brochure, a video, 3D renderings of the full campus plan, and more. We determined a date and the way that we would announce this project to our families, timed prior to our Capital Campaign dinner in November. Our intention was, without alarming our families, to let them know of the goal to purchase our property by December 2015. We chose not to speak about the ‘what ifs’ if we missed this deadline and, instead, focused on the full project plans and the blessing of the opportunity to purchase the property.

With the hope of raising about 30% of the down payment before our October “Family Meeting” announcement with the entire school, I started meeting with strategic families from Monarch Christian School to give them an insider view on what was going to take place and how they could help. I modeled these meetings after our work at the Van Lunen Fellowship in July and began my regular consultation with Leadership and Development around that time as well. For weeks, our consultation worked on identifying and pursuing those that would have potential to partner with us financially. I learned how to do an ask, a new and difficult task for me, as well.

In September, after more than a dozen meetings, we had raised \$30,000- a far cry from the \$1,000,000 needed to save our school’s location. I began meeting with larger donors that had given in the past and following up with connections made through our Monarch families. I was honest and told them about our great need to meet the \$1,000,000 December deadline. Many agreed to pray and see where the Lord was leading them, but, ultimately, their capacity would not meet the need alone. Door after door closed.

Sarah Guldalian worked with me and Brittany Hannon weekly and we developed best practices for our school. She encouraged me to set up more meetings and provided a framework from which I could work from as I navigated the first direct fundraising I’d ever done and with such high stakes. The Board relied greatly on our work with Leadership and Development as they, too, had not taken part in this type of fundraising before.

In October, we still had raised \$30,000 and, as we announced the campaign to our community, we carefully crafted the message to demonstrate urgency, but not an emergency. Zach Clark wisely advised that it wasn’t an emergency until after the deadline and that it would be detrimental to our community to alarm them while there was still so much time for the Lord to move. We prayed that our community would spring in to action, digging deeper financially and reaching out to friends and family, and that the needed money would pour in. But this did not happen.

Our community took our lack of emergency to heart and, while thrilled at the new plan, they did not feel the burden of the project. At our Gala in November, we raise slightly more than the year prior, despite the goal being ten fold. The general sense was that they trusted the Board and I

had it under control and that their participation was not pivotal. For weeks, I worked with Sarah Guldalian to find ways to shift this new cultural norm.

In mid-November, we had raised just over \$110,000. I began working through messaging options with Sarah Guldalian in case we missed our deadline and the Board and I began to reach out to other schools and facilities in the area to see what might be available should we find ourselves homeless at the end of the school year. All doors were closed to us, all donors had been met with and followed up with, and all we could do was wait for a miracle.

A Closed Door Opens

The Board and I continued to seek the Lord, wondering if we had missed the mark or if the Lord was going to open the door to some amazing other property that we hadn't considered previously. Again and again, we felt confident that God had called us to this property, though we had no idea how He would salvage the situation.

In mid-December, a donor and close friend of our Board Chairman and fellow Board member husband, followed up on a conversation they had had months before. He asked to come see the campus and meet with me that week. With the capacity to give greatly, we waited to see if this would be the Lord's answer. I met with him, his wife, and our Board member connections that week, painting a picture of what we've done and casting a vision for the future. He and his wife were encouraging and we waited to see what their response would be.

On December 21, three days before our deadline, our donor confirmed that he would donate \$1,000,000 to our property purchase. In God's amazing timing and will, the donor also offered to carry the loan on the property, allowing us to forgo using a bank for the remaining portion of property. The purchase price was renegotiated to \$2,000,000 and we closed escrow in February of 2016.

A Learning Process

We learned many things in this process, some big and some small. To some, our lessons may seem obvious, but to the Monarch Christian School Board of Trustees and Head of School, they were necessary and grew our faith beyond what we thought possible. For me, I learned:

- a) To continually trust the Board of Trustees as the group the Lord has set before Monarch Christian School and to humble myself before them in recognizing my own shortcomings and lack of training in the area of fundraising.
- b) To utilize consultations much, much earlier in order to proceed in the best practices before we begin, not just to fix things after we've already started.
- c) Consultants are great for what they're good at- consulting- but they're also excellent to use as a sounding board that can hear your concerns and worries and give you wise, best practice advice as to how to proceed. This was especially important when I began doing the ask on a regular basis without the supports typically utilized in a capital campaign, such as additional staff, historical givers, data, and smaller, stepping stone goals.
- d) How to do an ask in a way that authentic to me, my personality, and my passion for our school. As the founding Head, I have a unique vision for the school that is birthed from my heart and soul and I was able to express that in a way that was engaging and captured donor's hearts.

- e) That I can't control everything. As silly as it sounds, many of the things that created the school were in my control. I was able to ensure families' experiences matched what was promised, we met our academic goals, and so on. Raising \$1,000,000 was completely outside my expertise and completely outside my control as to whether or not people would give and give when I wanted them to. This stretched my faith tremendously.
- f) That God's timing is perfect. I knew that and now I know it again.
- g) To remember that Monarch Christian School is God's school. It isn't mine and it isn't the Board's. Our job is to seek Him and do our best to honor God and pursue excellence. The rest is up to Him.

Moving Forward

This project transformed our school on multiple levels. Of course, and most obviously, the funds raised secured our school for a lasting legacy, not one that was at the whim of a landlord. It provided security for our staff and for our families and it gave us a home that is ours to grow and care for.

The by-products of this project, however, are just as important. Following the announcement that we closed escrow, many of our community members expressed to me that they didn't think we would be able to make it; that we wouldn't raise the funds needed in time. I was taken back by such comments, but so glad that God's plan was revealed to them through this process. I believe it reinforced the fact that our leadership seeks God and His will in our decision-making and this was a God-driven decision.

Most importantly, this project reinforced something we've said since 2010, "Monarch Christian School is God's school." This project truly was something only the Lord could accomplish and by using the Board, our consultant, and me, He did accomplish it.

Next Steps

Next, Monarch will embark upon an enormous construction project that will demolish all of our current buildings and rebuild over a few phases. Through the campus redesign, the start of the middle school, and the foundation of the special education program, Monarch will impact new generations for Christ through a well-rounded education that honors the Lord. With limited middle school options currently, students will now be able to continue their rigorous education in a community that is training them up in Christ. Additionally, with no Christian education programs available to students with mild to moderate disabilities, Monarch will provide a cutting edge curriculum to serve a currently underserved population.

The final component of our plan is the building of our multipurpose room that will allow for all school Chapel services and student performances. When Monarch students are able to come together to worship the Lord and learn from His Word, our community will continue to grow both academically and spiritually. We will also help students to flourish in their God given talents through arts and music programming. This final stage will also pay off our mortgage, making Monarch Christian School debt free and will redesign our field space as well.

This massive project will leave a lasting, debt free legacy for generations to come. To Him be the glory forever and ever!