

**“Imagining God’s Vision: 2008-2013”
A Strategic Plan for the Concordia Association of Schools**

**Prepared as an Applied Project for
2007-08 Van Lunen Fellows Program**

The purpose of this Van Lunen applied project was to work with the Executive Council of the Concordia Academy Association of Schools (CAAS) to develop a strategic plan for the new-structured organization. In July 2007, the Concordia Academy completed its merger with Minneapolis Lutheran High School, to form the Concordia Academy Association of Schools, a partnership of 33 Lutheran congregations in the Twin Cities. The plan would include a broader statement of mission, vision, and values and would reflect the ministry of a two-campus, metro-wide ministry. Where the council had previously focused on the ministry of one school in a single geographic area, its work was now much broader.

The strategic plan was entitled *Imagining God’s Vision: 2008-2013*. The final product included a new mission statement for the work of the association, a statement of vision and values, and broad goal in six areas of strategic importance: Christian Community; Faith Development; Developing a Culture of Excellence; Financial Sustainability; Relationships with Association Congregations; and Outreach and Community Impact.

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The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you." Gen. 12:1

Project Focus

The purpose of this Van Lunen applied project was to work with the Executive Council of the Concordia Academy Association of Schools (CAAS) to develop a strategic plan for the new-structured organization. In July 2007, the Concordia Academy completed its merger with Minneapolis Lutheran High School, to form the Concordia Academy Association of Schools, a partnership of 33 Lutheran congregations in the Twin Cities. Concordia Academy had developed strategic plans in 1999 and 2005, but this would be the first comprehensive plan for the combined association. The plan would include a broader statement of mission, vision, and values and would reflect the ministry of a two-campus, metro-wide ministry.

The CAAS operates Concordia Academy-Roseville and Concordia Academy-Bloomington. The Roseville campus has its roots as the pre-ministerial boarding school of Concordia College in St. Paul and currently has about 440 students in grades 9-12. The Bloomington school began as Minneapolis Lutheran High School in 1963 and has about 120 students in grades 7-12. In 2004 the Board of Trustees of Minneapolis Lutheran approached Concordia with a proposal for consolidation of the operations and governance of both schools. One of the challenges of this planning process was to invite participation and buy-in from two distinctly different school communities and donor bases, a new association of 33 congregations, and five separate alumni groups.

Methodology and Process

Because CA’s Executive Council had worked with a facilitator in the two previous strategic plans, they chose not to engage an outside facilitator for this process. Much of the process was based on the work of Alison and Kaye in their book *Strategic Planning for Non-Profit Organizations*. I also pulled from the presentations at the 2007 Van Lunen program and materials provided by Kiki Johnson, our Van Lunen consultant. The Strategic Planning Committee included the Chief Administrative Officer, principals of both schools, a parent volunteer and the Executive Council Chair.

In developing the strategic plan, we followed these steps:

August 2007 – An Executive Council retreat met in a day-long retreat to begin the planning process. The first segment of the retreat was to review a variety of data to inform our discussion. The data included population statistics, statistics about Lutheran schools and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and enrollment figures for our two high schools and our feeder schools.

The Council then developed a new mission statement for the expanded association (previous mission statements had been only for the school) and identified six areas for the vision statement and strategic targets: Christian Community; Faith Development; Developing a Culture of Excellence; Financial Sustainability; Relationships with Association Congregations; and Outreach and Community Impact.

September/October 2007 – Parents and staffs of both schools and alumni of the Roseville school were invited to participate web-base surveys through Zoomerang. The committee grouped the free responses into categories in a basic SWOT analysis. Each survey asked the following questions:

- Please list 4-5 strengths that you see in the overall program of your school.
- What do you think are the 3 most important internal challenges or vulnerabilities the school has which should be considered in our planning?
- Please list 4-5 conditions beyond the walls of the school -- in the greater Twin Cities and beyond -- that you believe present opportunities for growth at Concordia Academy.
- Please list 2-3 challenges Concordia Academy faces from factors outside the school: economic, demographic, political, etc. These may lie in the local community or be more national or global.

In October I also met with both faculties and shared the progress of the planning and the data received.

November 2007 – Members of the committee conducted seven focus groups: two groups of parents from each school, association delegates, and principals of feeder schools to both high schools. The focus groups were asked to comment on the results of the surveys and to offer general feedback on the vision statements from the Executive Council.

Later in November, the Executive Council met in a second retreat to review the survey data and to prioritize strategies proposed by the committee. The Council also placed the strategies on a broader timeline for target dates for completion.

December 2007 – During December I continued to work with the data and results of the focus groups and retreats to write the first draft of the strategic plan, tentatively entitled “Imagining God’s Vision.” The Council reviewed the first draft in mid-December, offering a few suggestions for revision and addition, and received the second draft at their January meeting.

By January the council had approved the plan, which was then shared with the various Concordia Academy audiences in our association newsletter, parent newsletters, a presentation and mailing to the association delegates, and publication on the school websites.

At each stage of the process, the Strategic Planning Committee reviewed the process, the data and the rough drafts.

Results

The strategic plan is entitled *Imagining God's Vision: 2008-2013*. The final product included a new mission statement for the work of the association, a statement of vision and values, and broad goals in the six areas of strategic importance. The new mission statement of the association focuses on the work of the broader association, rather than on the mission of a single school:

“The Concordia Academy Association of Schools develops and sustains exemplary Lutheran Christian schools to equip young people for lives of faith and service.”

Each goal category includes a statement of vision for the future and a series of general goals towards reaching that vision. For example, the vision statement for Financial Sustainability is:

The Concordia Academy Association of Schools will be financially solvent and sustainable through a comprehensive program of development, giving, endowment, and tuition structures. No student that desires a quality Christian education at a Concordia school will be limited due to insufficient financial resources.

Two of the goals related to this category are “Implement financial reporting structures that accommodate two schools and an association and realistically reflect financial positions,” and “Prepare a plan for capital improvements that reflects good stewardship of the facilities at both campuses.”

We already plan to combine *Imagining God's Vision* with our upcoming annual report and will include it with materials preliminary to an upcoming capital campaign. Our task for the immediate future will be to develop specific action plans and annual work plans for each target and to review the targets and progress on an ongoing basis.

Analysis and Commentary

Imagining God's Vision is a plan that provides direction for the work of the schools for the next several years, both at the association level and at the building level. A broad representation of stakeholders - board members, staff, parents, delegates - frequently refer to the plan as the roadmap for CA's future.

Along the way, we have encountered these challenges:

- While the council works hard to remain faithful to the board governance model, it was tempting for them to fall into an operational mode when discussing the plan.
- My intent had been to gather data from a broader cross-section of the association and community, including community leaders and donors. Time limitations simply didn't allow that to happen.

- While we felt we had done a good job in sharing the plan, we still found individuals - including staff - that “didn’t know anything about it.”
- Just because a target or action step is in a plan doesn’t mean that everything will follow the plan. Until February 2008, we had very positive indicators for the Bloomington campus. By April, the council was considering whether we should continue operating the Bloomington campus, and we were engaged in a fund-raising campaign to save the school. CA-Bloomington will be open this fall, but we will need to use the strategic plan as a dynamic, working plan “in progress,” rather than a strict blueprint.

Staying “on task” also becomes a priority. This past winter, two of our feeder schools approached Concordia Academy about the possibility of a consolidation, with the end result being a K-12 CA system. Having a K-12 ministry is part of the broader strategic plan, but this request came at least two years ahead of our anticipated timeline. Some might observe that CA would jump the gun by considering the proposal rather than following the timeline. Rather than waiting, we joined in the discussion with the two schools, and, ultimately, two of the participating congregations defeated the proposal. The goal of a K-12 system is still part of our plan, and, despite the disappointment of not passing the proposal this time around, today discussion focuses more on when it will happen rather than if it will happen.

As Concordia looks to the future of the expanded association, we have attempted to lay out a plan for growth and improvement over the next five years. But in the last few years we’ve quickly learned that our vision may be completely different from God’s vision, and that as soon as we think we have it figured out, God shows us how things really are. Hence the name and our task – to imagine God’s amazing vision for this association.