

## **The Van Lunen Project**

### **Village Christian School**

#### **A Strategic Financial Plan Leads to The Village Campaign**

By Tom Konjoyan

The Van Lunen Fellowship arrived at an opportune time for the Village Christian School (VCS) Crusaders. We were about to begin a quest to implement and fund our strategic plan. This paper and accompanying epic video (the first of a very likely, Hollywood commercial franchise) tells the story about what I did, what I learned and what difference it made to the kingdom of VCS. The video is loosely patterned after Monty Python's Holy Grail (a fact I would deny in copyright court), hence the medieval references.

I entered the Van Lunen Fellowship at the beginning of my third year on the throne of VCS. The school I had inherited was in dire straits. The enrollment had plummeted from close to two thousand, ten years before to less than eight hundred when I arrived. The former regime had sought to stem the gradual enrollment decline of the previous decade by embarking on an ill fated crusade to obtain a forty million dollar bond to remodel the aging campus and provide new facilities to attract students. Their attempt to secure the bond failed, yet they continued to implement one condition the bond required which was to raise their tuition forty two percent in one year. The parents revolted and left in droves. The regime scrambled to retreat from their position and minimize their losses. Finally they admitted defeat and the board sought to bring in a new leader to restore VCS to its former glory.

One of my first tasks as the new leader of VCS was to get everyone on the same page as we sought to turn the school around. I utilized a strategic planning process to listen to the constituents, develop strategies, and to communicate our initiatives. This plan was completed in the year of our Lord two thousand and twelve. The plan contains nine initiatives that are planned to bolster strategic areas throughout the school

identified by the school community as areas of weakness. The scope of the plan is a five year implementation schedule which began in the two thousand twelve, two thousand thirteen school year.

With the support of the Van Lunen Wizards (see video for this cheeky reference) and consultant Don Distelberg, I decided to leverage this project with my need to create a strategic financial plan and resulting campaign to fund the plan. Don held me accountable to meeting with my Initiative Champions (IC) who were tasked with developing cost estimates for their portion of the plan. I created a spreadsheet of their results and combined it into a strategic financial plan. I met individually with each IC to gather their data, and then met with the group of IC's to discuss any duplicates or cross over costs. We then prioritized our requests and sought to make them reasonable, accurate, and doable.

Once I had a vetted version of the strategic financial plan, I approached my board of directors to present the plan. I had several of the IC's come and talk to the board about their initiatives over a series of board meetings. The board and I measured the plan against our predictions of the amount of money we thought we could raise through a campaign. We discussed and debated the length of such a campaign. We agreed that some of the items in the plan would be better funded through the operating budget. Some of the items were too costly for the campaign and would have to be put on hold until a strategic donor or some other funding presented itself. Finally, in February of two thousand and fourteen we agreed to a three year, two million, and eight hundred thousand dollar campaign.

It should be noted that VCS had never attempted a campaign of this length or magnitude in its sixty year history. However, over the past three years, we had been intentionally building the culture of philanthropy at the school to prepare it for this moment. Our efforts had succeeded to the extent that the school was generating fundraising revenues in the seven hundred and fifty thousand dollar range by this past school year. A result that gave the board and I confidence that the campaign goal was to be a hearty, but conceivable quest.

A brief summary of the nine strategic initiatives are as follows:

1. Revitalizing the mission of VCS. The board and leadership rewrote the mission statement of the school to make it easier to remember, more relevant to the current iteration of the historic mission, and front and center in the mind of the school community.
2. The Elementary STEM Initiative focuses on enhancing the science, technology, exercise and math curriculum and programs. Each subject area will be invigorated with new research based curriculum and will integrate vertically into the sixth through twelfth grade curriculum.
3. The Middle School Adventure is our new thematic approach to holistically embracing the middle school experience. Elements include 1:1 BYOD, the Passport program, the Challenge Course, and The March- our capstone experience for students.
4. Concentrations is the title for our signature high school academic program which encompasses twenty first century career fields, student choice, experiential learning, and preparation to thrive in college.
5. The 1:5, Circles of Care Initiative intentionally surrounds each student with up to five, caring, non-parental adults to provide the necessary mentoring and support that each adolescent needs.
6. Our Arts and Athletics programs will focus on creating a philosophy for each area which will result in good decision making on facilities, employees, and programs. These areas elicit passion for parents, students, and employees, so getting everyone on the same page is paramount to the plan.
7. Our technology is expanding our facilities and our facilities must be designed with technology in mind. This initiative focuses on creating the school of the future by investing in both our technology and facilities.
8. Volunteerism is necessary to keep programs high and tuition low. This initiative creates a new volunteer leader at VCS and provides the governance oversight to improve all volunteerism at school.
9. The final initiative provides the funding for the plan. The Village Campaign (as described below) will couple with our admissions growth strategy to provide the resources to implement.

The Village Campaign will seek to raise donations of two million, eight hundred thousand dollars over three years. The campaign will be comprehensive in nature and will incorporate the annual fund and volunteer group fundraising where applicable. Our strategy will be to use a peer based fundraising process where we recruit teams of volunteers to help us prospect, identify and solicit gifts. The added benefit to this strategy is that the volunteers are encouraged to give first before they begin soliciting, creating a mass of lead gifts to the campaign.

A campaign brochure is being designed listing the case for the campaign, a gift chart which details the number of gifts at each milestone dollar amount to get us to the goal, and donor recognition programs. Our most highly anticipated donor recognition program will be our brick campaign in the center of our campus. VCS has a red concrete cross in the center courtyard of the school named. The cross is quite large and will be transformed into bricks. Donor recognition bricks will be available to donors who give to the campaign, larger bricks for larger donations. We believe that our extended school community will be very interested in the brick program and will help us to meet our goal. It also gives us a good avenue to reach out to our alumni, grandparents, and others.

The Village Campaign has already begun as we have secured a Chair and Honorary Chair. We have begun the process of recruiting a Campaign Cabinet made up of key donor prospects from our Board of Directors and Foundation Board. We plan to solicit lead gifts from our boards and other key donors by September. Our quest has begun and we pray that God will indeed bless our efforts.

In summary, I believe that our strategic plan, funded through the Village Campaign will enable VCS to become a school that will attract students in large numbers. When we are successful, we will have a thriving school with the programs, people, and facilities to lead us into a new chapter in our ministry. I am eternally grateful for the Van Lunen Fellowship as it had enlightened me and provided me the wisdom, tools, and network to successfully lead our school into this quest. One of the most profound takeaways from the fellowship is the importance of leadership in creating the environment for any new program or

initiative to thrive. Throughout the strategic planning process, we were brainstorming good ideas and drafting exciting plans, but until our focus this year on leadership development of our staff (much of which I took from the fellowship), we would not have been ready to succeed in our implementation. I truly believe that God brought me to the Van Lune program for such a time as this.