

July 1, 2014

Dear Trustees of New Covenant School,

The following is a narrative of the thinking and planning I have done for the development of New Covenant School as part of my responsibilities for the 2013-2014 school year, and as partial fulfillment of the Van Lunen Fellowship Program. As I sought to build a community of learners that passionately worships and serves the Living God (our vision) I was encouraged to examine my role at NCS, and was led to step down as Head of School to become a teacher in our Grade 5/6 classroom. This move brought me into closer partnership with parents and the community, and lead me to re-examine our school's mission:

To educate children whose

Hearts love God and others,

Heads pursue academic excellence,

Hands serve with outstanding character and ability,

Lives joyfully extend the blessings of God to the world.

The self-examination process that occurred this year as I reflected on the core values of NCS, and my role in promoting them, was the most important aspect of my project. This has made me a bit uncomfortable as I have written this summary because it will seem at first glance that I haven't done very much compared to what God has done in me!

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As the Board has affirmed, you are committed to seeing the vision and mission of our school continue into the foreseeable future. I am happy to say that I am even more excited to work together with families and colleagues to help each other grow in our knowledge, understanding, and application of our Six Words of Servanthood: Courage, Humility, Respect, Integrity, Seeker of God, and Teachability.

The conversations and prayers regarding the development of the school over this past year have been guided by two strategic questions. The first: How can we grow our school by adding a Grade 7 and Grade 8? This grew out of a profound sense of loss of those grades two years ago due to declining enrollment and scant resources to fund a complex middle grades program. In fact, we have struggled to reset our program and curricular goals based on younger students being the oldest in the school, and this may have been the cause of more frustration than we realized.

The second question: What are the steps we need to take in order to provide the leadership to take the school forward? In addition to the internal shuffling of personnel, the Board initiated a search for a new head of school. This has culminated in the hiring of a qualified candidate who assumes responsibilities this summer. The future looks bright.

I began this project in September by spending about two hours with each of the families of our Fourth and Fifth graders. I outlined a progression of program goals while affirming that NCS would continue to promote our vision and mission, and to provide the environment that grows our children in love and wisdom. The meetings were met with approval and buy-in, and a sense that God was leading us forward.

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By November it became clear that we wouldn't be moving forward with the development of a Grade 7&8 program until we had hired our new head, and we had the assurance that the resources were available to meet our strategic goals. At that point I let go of the sense of urgency I felt about pushing my agenda forward, and recommended to the Board that growth of the school would be more gradual, taking place over the next 3-5 years.

The middle of the year was a difficult time for me. I was able to relax and let God show me his timing was different from mine. But, I struggled with wondering if God had ever intended me to be a strategic planner for NCS. At best, I had stirred up hope in ideas and plans that sound exciting for the education of our students. I had rallied families around our core values, and affirmed their importance. At worst, I caused frustration on the part of community members at my insistence of "the need for", and "if we don't . . ." Perhaps I wasn't listening for God's direction in my own life, and that caused me to look inward and upward. This was faith-challenging for me and my close friends as they sought to support and counsel me. I found the time we spent as Fellows in Arizona in January was crucial to helping me think through what was troubling me at the time.

As the Head search progressed, I was able to cast my uncertainties on God about the future of the school. I resigned my teaching position, and told my supervisor that I would be looking at other opportunities for '14-'15. I traveled to China in February, and visited two international schools, one in Hong Kong and the other in Chengdu. I started thinking about what was going on in other areas of my life – the summer camp in New Hampshire that my siblings and I own and operate; the health and well-being of our

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parents; and how God might want to use some measure of His deposit in my life over the next decade.

It was exciting to get a call from the Director of the International Christian School in Hong Kong in March: the school was looking for a Grade 5 teacher, and a Middle School Art teacher (my wife's area of expertise). They preferred a teaching couple. Were we interested? Our hearts turned to our elderly family members – we really needed to be here to assist in their care.

New Covenant School went through the hiring season (including picking a new Head), but we were still missing a Grade 5/6 teacher. Would I be interested? It was then I felt like I could be one of the people needed to help accomplish two things over the course of the next year: share the institutional memory with the new Head, and lead our oldest students into becoming the next Grade 7 class in '15-'16. I have accepted a position teaching Literature and Mathematics for the Grade 5/6 class for the upcoming school year.

The process of reflection on my own motives, goals, and God-at-work-in-my-life has made this a challenging year. Holding something loosely in my hand, whether an idea or desire, in order to let God take it and mold it to His liking has provided extraordinary 'moments' of growth in my faith walk. I appreciate the support given me by the year-long Van Lunen program, in more ways than can be explained here.

As yet, it is hard to see what has changed in our school. The work of walking through a series of transitions with dear colleagues has been rewarding. Not seeing (yet) what God has planned for the future of NCS is unsettling. The need for more and

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continuous prayer, the deepening of relationships among faculty, students and parents has been a testimony to the power of God's spirit to transform- to Him be the Glory!

A few exciting things happened this spring. Our landlord informed us that the building that houses our pre-school will no longer be available after the '15-'16 school year – we're on the clock! A nearby church that have consistently been supporters of the school over the years asked if we would consider moving our school to their property if they were to build a structure that would suit both their and our needs. Finally, the board has grown with new members representing the next 'wave' of families who are committed to our brand of Christian education.

I sense that much of what I did as Head of School, and what has happened this past year, has been to lay the groundwork for what God intends for the future of NCS. For the school, Isaiah 62:10 – “Pass through, pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway. Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations.” In my own life, Jeremiah 6:16 – “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.”

I am thankful to the board for encouraging me to grow professionally and personally. As God is about the transformation of lives, I pray that He will accomplish His purposes in and through us as a community.

Sincerely,

Henry Utter

School Growth and Development

Henry Utter, Van Lunen Fellow 2013-2014

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What I did:

New Covenant School is seeking to transition to new leadership, and develop a growth plan for the next 3-5 years. Having recently become independent from Covenant Church after 27 years as a ministry of the church, we have hired a new Head of School, and will be under his direction as the school moves forward. I gathered groups of constituents and informally polled them as to their ongoing affirmation of and support for the vision and mission of NCS. I strengthened the relationships among my colleagues and families. I listened harder to what others had to say, and I became better at reflecting on what God is about in my life and those around me.

What I learned:

I learned that the process of building consensus is time consuming and often messy – I needed to hear the things that weren't 'good' as well as what others thought was working well. Good listening takes practice. I learned to hold my ideas and desires loosely in my hand so that God could take them, mold them, and give me back something better. I also learned it's good to struggle with uncertainty for a time, in order to see God at work bringing clarity and direction.

What is the difference it made:

The difference my work is making in our school is to aid in the transition from being inward-looking to developing a growth mindset. This has happened in the school, the community, and in our own individual lives.