

## **A Sign of Hope in the Midst of a Pandemic**

### **Project Summary**

#### **1. What did you do?**

For my Van Lunen project, I decided to write an article that could be published in a Christian school association newsletter or magazine. My article focused on the school project that we launched a few years ago, but came together specifically in the last two years. I work as the principal at Calvin Christian School in Hamilton, Ontario, and for at least a decade the school has been experiencing tremendous growth, so much growth that we have had to create a waiting list for families seeking Christian education.

As part of my Van Lunen project, I decided that I would summarize the path that we took when it came to addressing our capacity issues, specifically as we explored the launch of a second campus. The project details the different options available to us in addressing the waiting list. Four main possibilities were considered:

1. Southward Development - grow to the south of CCS with a development of a JK-8 school provided that this satellite campus has a schooling model similar to CCS.
2. Middle School - develop a middle school for Grade 6-8 provided that the school is located either on Hamilton District Christian High School lands or CCS lands for ease of transportation, and provided that current tuition structure and costs remain similar.
3. Surplus School Purchase - consider the purchase of Mountain Secondary School (a surplus public school adjacent to CCS).
4. Second Storey Addition - proceed with the plans for the second storey addition on the West 5th Heritage campus (CCS) regardless of other choices.

In my project, I thought it would be important to outline the value of seeking community input in the decision making process, as well as the importance of expert help, clear communication and reliance on God's leading. My article outlines the exciting steps in planning for the opening of a second campus, while at the same time acknowledging the twists and turns that occur in the planning stages. Part of the article outlines the steps taken to arrive at a final decision and how following the above process allowed us to make what we thought was the correct decision.

#### **2. What did you learn?**

Given the fact that I was trained as an educator and not as a project manager or a developer, there was plenty to learn, most of it as on-the-job training.

First, of all, I discovered that board involvement and backing was absolutely critical. The Calvin Christian School board of directors was involved in all the conversations from the very beginning of our second campus planning. Their backing provided the support that I needed to feel confident about the decisions that were made.

Furthermore I learned that involving the supporting community was also very necessary as they are the stakeholders that would be asked to support the building project on both a prayerful and financial basis. Bringing them along through the formation of the Compass Committee and the discussions at the town hall meetings was crucial in knowing that a sound plan would be supported by them, supported both initially, but also long term.

Given my lack of experience in school design and planning, it was also very important for me to rely on the experts, both the experts in our community and the experts who could provide professional advice. One of the first steps I took in planning for the launch of a second campus was to involve highly invested members in our school society to join us in the planning stages. These individuals had skills and talents that I did not possess and it allowed us to come to a wise and responsible decision in the end. On a couple of occasions we also hired outside support to help us take the steps that we either didn't have the time for or the necessary skills. In one instance we hired a consultant who could help with a demographic study, while on another occasion we hired a firm that helped us with a very focused market study. This decision to seek experts both within and outside of our school community allowed us to feel confident that we were doing justice to the school project.

I was also thankful for Christian organizations like Edvance and the Van Lunen Fellowship program, as both provided me the opportunity to bounce ideas off of experts in the field of education, promotion, governance and finances. Without these important sounding boards, I'm not sure we would have been able to move our building project along as well as we did. These organizations certainly provided me with guidance and wisdom.

Furthermore, I learned that it is difficult to communicate too much when it comes to important decisions, especially decisions that are going to affect people's pocket books. The town halls, brochures, and communiques used to share information, allowed our membership to stay abreast of the latest developments in our school project, but also allowed them to have a voice in decision making, a crucial step in garnering their support.

Finally, I learned that no matter how prepared and thorough our planning might be, one can never discount God's role in revealing his kingdom plans. Although we felt we were ready to open our second campus in the fall of 2020, we quickly discovered that a world wide health crisis overmatched all the planning that we did. Learning to trust God's timing and his leading was probably the biggest takeaway for me when it came to our Unity Campus opening. Continuing to trust that God will provide a way forward for us gives me hope that our plans to open a second campus are not over, but simply delayed.

### **3. What difference did it make?**

Our goal in opening a second campus, from the very beginning, was to provide an affordable and reliable Christian school option for parents seeking a Christ centered education for their

children. Given the fact that Calvin Christian School has been operating at capacity for many years, and has a waiting list, meant that if we want to make Christian education accessible for families in the greater Hamilton region, we needed to be willing to take the necessary steps to consider a new school option in this area. Although we have not been able to open the school just yet, we are confident that in the not too distant future we will have families excited about our Unity Campus option and that over the course of time, this campus too will have many students roaming its hallways.

#### **4. Because of COVID-19, I have not been able to complete my project. Because of this fact, what still has to happen?**

We are still committed to opening our Unity Campus. Delaying the opening by a year was viewed as a wise decision by most in our community. Having the extra time to plan and raise money, will hopefully allow us to do a better job of serving families in the greater Hamilton region when the school is finally opened.

It is clear to me that the best laid plans are never our own. I continue to learn that reliance on God allows me to trust that he is leading me and our school community in a way that reveals his plans and his kingdom. I have learned that God's timing means exhibiting patience in the midst of trying and difficult times. Because of COVID-19, it is easy to get discouraged and worried. Trying to stay optimistic in the face of such adversity helps me cope from day to day and to keep the big picture in mind - the picture of God's enduring kingdom.

Writing about the journey our school community took to establish a second campus and provide Christian educational opportunities for more families has allowed me to understand the importance of bringing others into the conversation. Even though this journey is not over, it is clear to me that we are on the right path when we work as a community and when we trust the experts to share their wisdom with us, but more importantly, we trust God to deliver on his promises to us.

Finally, I hope that someday down the road, I will be able to look back on our plans to open a second campus and recognize that I played a small part in advancing God's kingdom here on earth. Calvin Christian School's vision statement is "Equipping to Shine". I believe that someday, a second Christian school campus will provide an opportunity for hundreds of more students to be equipped to shine for God's glory.