

# Van Lunen Applied Project Summary Paper

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## 1. What did you do?

On March 12, 2020 all Ontarians received word from our Provincial Premier that schools would remain closed following March Break for two additional weeks due to the outbreak of Covid-19. At the time, this seemed like a smart decision although most people believed that we would take a few weeks away and then return to school. As it turned out, our lives have been completely and permanently altered and no schools in Ontario re-opened at all for the remainder of the school year.

Just prior to March Break, I had begun focussing on the pre-work in the lead-up to a potential capital campaign for my school, London Christian High. Although we are still years away from formally launching anything publicly, discussions were beginning to pick up steam and momentum was growing for an overhaul of our facility behind the scenes. It has been our desire to see our building updated and expanded to reflect 21st century learning realities, and excitement was building with some key stakeholders, albeit outside of the public eye for the moment.

With the outbreak of Covid-19, it became clear to me immediately that the economic impact of the virus was going to mean a delay of this campaign. So, rather than focussing on the possibility of fundraising and everything that would entail, I decided to go back to our central purpose documents. The reason I felt compelled to go back and look at them was because our world had changed so dramatically, I wanted to be sure our focus and energy was pointed in the right direction. I knew we were going to be in for a long stretch of hard work to flip all of our learning online in response to the virus and that there was no definitive ending in sight even heading back into school in the Fall. Given all of these things, I wanted to be sure our resources, energy, people and community were focussed on the right things.

To be specific, what I did was a complete update of all of our core purpose documents given the new realities that we are facing in our world. This included a brand new 'LCH Core Purpose' document, a 'LCH Educational Creed' document, a 'LCH Staff Core Values' document and also the start of a brand new 'LCH Strategic Plan' document. All of these documents were discussed and re-imagined with our leadership team at multiple meetings and they were also discussed to some degree with our board as well. As most of our energy over the past semester has gone into crisis management, that is as far as I could go with this project to this point. However, we plan to pick up this conversation again in the Fall and we also plan to include several other layers of feedback including more from our board, eventually our staff and finally a representation from our wider community as well. In the end, it is my goal that these documents serve as a catalyst to move us boldly into the unknown future, according to God's leading.

## 2. What did you learn?

I learned a great deal during this process, although I would not have gone this direction to start with. However, I do believe that God is working to bring good out of difficult situations (Romans

8:28) and so I have tried to be intentional about asking God what He is doing in me and in the LCH community during this time. As noted several times throughout our Van Lunen experience, leadership is a 'deep dive into oneself'. Although the last number of months has been trying and difficult on many levels, and even though the future seems more unknown than ever, one of the key things that I have learned is that the more the world feels out of control, the more I am reminded that I am not in control to begin with.

Further, some of my other biggest learnings in this time had a direct application back to some of the first Van Lunen sessions that we did together last July. I distinctly remember Bruce Hekman challenging us to be intentional about spiritual practices for ourselves so that we, as leaders, are healthy. During the crisis, that has been a key for me. I have been much more intentional about my health and mental wellbeing during this time because, frankly, I have had to be or I would have burned out a long time ago. Simply reading my Bible more consistently and being reminded of prayer and quiet times has been a lifeline during this time.

I am also reminded of Mychal Thom's session on caring for your mission. This actually turned into a key point for me as I pivoted away from my original project idea and moved towards making our vision clearer, more compelling and sharper in the face of uncertainty. I had to ask myself more deeply - what is God doing here in the middle of this crisis and where is He leading me and our school? Along these lines, I also often come back to Chuck Evans' presentation where he challenged us to charge what the school costs and everything associated with that line of thinking. As we tried to think strategically about what our economic model was going to look like next year in the middle of the uncertainty, I actually had a deeper sense of courage keeping our tuition increase in place, knowing that our families could likely pay for it due to their values and commitment to the school.

Based on the three documents that we produced as a leadership team, we now feel like we have a good basis to continue our strategic planning process heading into the Fall. It took some humility for our leadership team and our board to move away from the idea of a capital campaign at this time, but it also made the most sense. Looking back on this process now, I am actually more excited about the prospects of our new strategic plan because I believe our core purpose and values statements have been better refined and are clearer. This provides us with a great launching pad to further refine our strategic plan in August and to start to gather more feedback further on in the Fall.

Aside from a deeper reliance on God, perhaps one of the biggest things that I am taking away from this project experience is the value of getting clear about your 'why', which Simon Sinek notes in his 'Golden Circle' idea. When we are clear about our why, the rest of the questions become much easier to discuss. It took a good deal of conversation and reflection, but it was time well spent with our leadership team. Again, being clear about the 'why' of your organization is freeing and clarifying in a powerful way.

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

As I just noted, this project made a huge difference for me personally and for our leadership team. I am reminded of a quote by Andy Stanley where he says, "If it is a mist in the leader's mind, it is a fog in the organization." This project allowed me the time, opportunity and structure

to step back out of the day to day crisis mode that I was in to re-evaluate 'why' the school existed and where we should be heading as a result.

Even though we have not formalized the new version of our strategic plan, we have already begun making key decisions that we know will show up in the plan in some form. For example, because of the crisis, we realized even more that our building and the spaces in it need to be flexible and able to adapt to unpredictable situations. As a result, we have started looking at some of our commons spaces and we will be re-imagining them to be more flexible classrooms and learning spaces for the Fall. Some of these ideas are crisis-based, but some of them we may well continue to use whenever we are able to get back to 'normal'.

Another key takeaway for me with a practical application is that we have always wanted to focus our learning on connections with our community. We have a vision for our school as a hub for the community to come in and for us to be a blessing for our community. We decided to update and strengthen some of the language in our purpose statement and core values document to reflect this commitment to our community in a clearer way. We have also envisioned some new dynamic learning opportunities in a few of our classes heading into the Fall and beyond that involve cross-curricular learning with an orientation towards blessing others outside of our building. We are excited about the possibilities.

In the big picture, I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to be a part of the VanLunen community for the past year. The learning has been invaluable and the community and camaraderie with fellow school leaders has been second to none. It is unfortunate that our time together has ended like this. However, we trust again that God has a good plan for us and for the VanLunen program. I look forward to a time where we are able to meet again.

As I noted in my video, in answer to the question of what difference this program made for me - I know I have been changed and as a result our whole school community has benefited as well. Thank You!