

## **Van Lunen Fellowship Project: To Infinity and Beyond**

**Great is God's Faithfulness  
July 2019 – July 2020**

### **Hillcrest School: Educating Global Disciples of Christ**

My initial proposal to Van Lunen Fellowship focused on the process of succession at Hillcrest; what could be put in place so that administrative turnover could happen seamlessly. Beginning with discussions in 2000, Hillcrest moved from receiving the majority of professional staff and administrators seconded through mission agencies to directly hiring for open positions. This change in how people came to Hillcrest, coupled with outdated mission and vision statements, resulted in mission drift and administrators doing good work and with good plans for the school but with little continuity. In January 2019, after an almost 10 year process, Hillcrest adopted new statements of mission, vision and core values. I found myself consistently using the language of our new mission, vision and core values statements. Processes for administrative succession are important, but without alignment to these new statements succession can lose its grounding. The implementation of our new mission vision and core values laid the groundwork for a change to my project from looking at administrative succession to Board of Governors, Staff, Alumni and Hillcrest Foundation development.

#### **Project:**

##### **1. Board of Governors Development**

- a. Began the move from a managerial style Board to the practice of a visionary style Board:
  - Implemented Board Training: every-other year  
Joel Westa Christian Schools International CEO: [September 2017],  
September 2019 conducted a 3-hour BoG training via Zoom.
  - Adopted and implemented new meeting schedule and use of consent agenda:  
September 2019, January 2020
  - Adopted and implemented BoG self-evaluation tool: February 2020, May 2020

Hillcrest's Board of Governors had, traditionally, met 4 times a year, once each quarter for 2 days each, a total of 8 meeting days. The meeting schedule dated back to a time when some Board members were traveling long distances to attend the meetings. These meetings were long, had become a time of Admin reporting to the Board what had happened the past quarter and by day two everyone just wanted to be done.

Our new meeting schedule gives us seven 1-day meetings a year, 3 first semester and 4 second semester. The BoG meets four times 2<sup>nd</sup> semester as this time period includes Hillcrest's budget planning for the following year. The plan is:

- +August meeting will include goal setting for the year (August 2020)
- +May meeting now includes report on and discussion of Board self-evaluation (May 2020), goal setting direction with the Superintendent (August 2020) and reflection on how well the Board met its own goals for the academic year (August 2020).

b. Expand Board of Governors membership to better reflect current mission organizations present in Jos:

-Mission Africa: Welcomed to full membership February 2020

\*Discussions with Mrs. Pamela Gayia a missionary from Ireland with Mission Africa regarding the feasibility and desire of Mission Africa to join Hillcrest's Cooperating Bodies and sit on the Board of Governors: August – October 2019

\*Mr. Toop (Scotland Mission Africa): meeting with Dr. John Brown, Chairperson Hillcrest's Board of Governors January 22, 2020

\*Mrs. Pamela Gaiya seated as Mission Africa representative to Hillcrest's Board of Governors, February 2020

The only change in membership to Hillcrest's Board of Governors had been by attrition; Hillcrest's Cooperating Bodies had dropped from 13 to 7. For instance, the Baptist Mission officially left Nigeria late 1990/2000 and consequently withdrew from the Board. Wycliffe had to withdraw, due to an unfavorable political climate toward their organization and were reinstated at a later date. The United Methodist Church of Nigeria lost their seat on the Board when their representative passed and they failed to, after 4 years, provide a replacement.

In 2016-2017 I proposed and it passed by the BoG, that Hillcrest add a non-voting member from the PTA and an Alumni (each vetted by Admin). This proposal passed and a PTA seat was added to Hillcrest's BoG composition. As of this year an Alumni has yet to take their seat at the Board. Despite these additions our Board was missing representation from a stable, long-standing mission in Nigeria. Mission Africa has been in mission to Nigeria for over 1 hundred years. They have sent children to Hillcrest for many years. In alignment with Hillcrest's vision statement that begins, "Based on our missional roots." it seemed clear that conversation be broached both with Hillcrest's current BoG and Mission Africa regarding the addition of Mission Africa to the Board. Both parties were thrilled with the proposal and Mission Africa became an official member of Hillcrest's BoG February 2020.

c. Designed and Implemented 360-degree Superintendent's evaluation:

-worked on with Board of Governors sub-committee to align evaluation tool, job description and goal setting process: May 2019 – September 2019

-BoG carried out new evaluation tool. Results presented and discussed by Sub-Committee to superintendent, goals for 2019-2020 were developed:

September- December 2019

-Superintendent goals shared with all Staff December 2019.

-[2019-2020 goal and performance evaluation; setting of 2020-2021 goals: May 2020]

It was 18 months before I found the current superintendent evaluation on Hillcrest's 'm' drive. My first evaluation happened as a surprise. I learned that I had been evaluated when, at the May 2016 Board meeting, the BoG Chair dismissed other administrators and announced the BoG would now discuss my evaluation. The existing practice for the superintendent's evaluation was that the BoG chairperson sent evaluation forms to all staff members, forms were anonymously completed and returned. Results of the evaluation were then presented to the superintendent by the BoG. There was no goal-setting component and little direct connection with the superintendent's job description. Superintendent evaluation at Hillcrest was completed

perfunctorily—a ‘one and done’ and now let’s move on to our next academic year. It was clear that this evaluation was used more to check a box or, potentially, remove a superintendent, but nothing was directed toward a growth model. In fact evaluation was a bit scary. Now the superintendent’s evaluation is completed by direct reports using a form that is broken into sub-categories of Hillcrest’s superintendent’s job description. From the results of the evaluation, goals are developed. These goals are aimed at both the growth of Hillcrest and the growth of the superintendent.

## **2. Staff Development**

- a. Re-aligned Administrative Structure: Moved from 17 direct reports to the Superintendent to 11 direct reports. Added role of Administrative Principal and assistant principals (as extra duty assignment in each school) included a potential .5 elementary principal position
- Discussion began February - April 2019
  - New organization possibilities presented to BoG September 2019
  - New organization approved by BoG February 2020.
  - New organization fully implemented June 1, 2020

Hillcrest’s administrative structure had grown according to need. Any new position became a direct report to the superintendent. If there were squabbles between an administrator and one of their direct reports the solution had been to remove the position from the administration and create a new direct report to the superintendent. Consequently when I took the seat, the superintendent had 17 direct reports: Academic (Principals-3, Business Office, Chaplin/Youth Pastor), Non-academic (recruitment, immigration, member care, nurse, personnel office, main office staff, IT, Hostel), Support Staff (maintenance, security, Support Staff Ex-Co) and Miscellaneous (Uniform Store).

With some finesse of Admin, we agreed to this new structure and unanimously presented it to the BoG. It passed with little discussion. The new Administrative Principle has responsibility for many of the non-academic roles at Hillcrest: IT, Nurse, Support Staff, Recruitment, and Hostel. As we work with this new system we are open to realignment of responsibilities. A month into our implementation I can report that all is working well. Now I, as superintendent, am afforded good ‘think’ time—to be the visual representation of Hillcrest’s mission, vision and core values—guiding Hillcrest as we develop programs, academic and otherwise, to support our mission community, our teachers, our students, our support staff and bring Hillcrest into our next 75 years.

### **b. Member Care + Teacher Recruitment**

- Re-structuring Hillcrest’s Member Care position to provide time and resources for intentional member care work with first priority being Direct Hire expatriate staff and then all staff: January 2020 and on going
- Re-designing and implementing New Teacher Orientation: August 2019 – August 2020
- Developing an Education Assistant to teacher pathway: In process

Member Care: In the past, Hillcrest’s orientation of teachers to Nigeria and Jos and living cross-culturally was left to the sending Cooperating Body. Hillcrest took care of school issues: schedules, IT process, lesson planning and the like. As more teachers came to Hillcrest via direct

hire, the cross-cultural piece covered by mission organizations tended to be left out. At that time the Member Care position was filled by a spouse of a teacher or someone with a few extra hours in their week. Now our Member Care position has a renewed job description and dedicated time. A hallmark of our Member Care is weekly dinners together with new teachers to foster conversation of cross-cultural questions or concerns. These conversations about living and working in Nigeria and Hillcrest are alleviating questions before they become issues.

Teacher Recruitment: Put very gently, the current state of university education programs in Nigeria is not good. Finding gifted Nigerian teachers who can teach using an inquiry based North American teaching technique is rare. At Hillcrest our vision statement: 'Educating Global Disciples of Christ' refers to our teachers as well as students. To this end we are in process of developing a mentor program that will give current Education Assistants the opportunity to intern and student teach at Hillcrest. Thus earning a Hillcrest 'teaching certificate' and having the needed experience to apply for a teaching position at Hillcrest. I'm working with the Elementary and Administrative Principals to create this process.

Proposal to Board of Governors: First Semester 2020.

### **3. Hillcrest Alumni Association:**

- a. Working with Nigeria Alumni, developed and activated (officially registered) the Hillcrest School Alumni Association Jos, Nigeria: December 7, 2019
  - Implemented Acting Hillcrest School Alumni Board and Alumni Trustee Board: September - October 2019
  - Established Hillcrest Decade representatives: December 2019  
60's, 70's, 80's, 90's, 00's and 10's
  - Hosted Alumni meetings: Jos—December 7, 2019  
Abuja—[not held due to COVID-19]  
Lagos—[not held due to COVID-19]
  - Place Alumni representative on Board—not yet. Goal: August 2020
  - Develop Alumni connections outside of Nigeria with the focus on Europe, UK, Lebanon and Dubai: Not yet

The flow of working with alumni is different than the flow of working with current teachers and staff. Hillcrest Alumni are 'all in' for a meeting or two and then.....nothing. There was great excitement and ideas after the December 2019 meeting, the Association was official registered as a Nigerian organization, and then. . . .COVID-19 became a reality in Nigeria. Lagos and Abuja suffered the most and interstate travel was banned since the end of March – end of June (unless you had a pass); Alumni have mostly 'hunkered down.' We, Hillcrest as an institution, are now more intentionally including local alumni with communication from school and have invited an alumni (accepted) to be a member of the New Gym committee.

### **4. Re-activate/organize Hillcrest Foundation** –a legal arm of Hillcrest School in the U.S.

- Met with Abe Vreeke (former Hillcrest BoG Chair and Superintendent) and Bob Murray (former Hillcrest teacher and HS principal): February 8, 2020
- Position the Foundation to be able to accept charitable donations; set forth plans for the succession of Foundation members.
- Added new members to Hillcrest Foundation Board as per 403-c guidelines: March 2020

The Hillcrest Foundation was registered as a 403-c in Kansas in 2010 with the stated purpose to “support the development of Christian education in Nigeria.” Its formation coincided with the death of a beloved P.E. teacher. There was anticipation that donations in honor of his memory would flow into the account. This dream did not happen, but the Hillcrest Foundation was formed. Since then Hillcrest has used Foundation funds to purchase supplies in the U.S. which are not available in Nigeria or West Africa. Recently we have been able to remit monthly rebates to any professional teaching staff that have U.S. bank accounts. The goal is to have the Foundation account by the recipient of charitable donations to Hillcrest School. At its next meeting, November 2020, The Foundation Board plans to draft goals to reach out to Hillcrest Alumni in the U.S.

### **Important Learnings:**

1. Talk with your Board of Governors (BoG) Chair and BoG members. Listen to their history and bring them along into your vision. I arrived at Hillcrest without handover notes or a Board Chairman on site. I began simply doing the job of the superintendent; drawing on my past administrative practices. My cross-cultural teaching came from Auntie Tittle, Hillcrest’s Admission Secretary for the past 30 years. I now contact Board members at least once a month and have regular meetings with Hillcrest’s Board Chair. Culturally, information is powerful and brings understanding of potential issues on ground—before they get big.
2. When decisions are visibly rooted in *authentic* mission, vision and core values statements, even if staff/admin disagree with your decision, you will be supported.
3. Equity for all staff is very important. Equity needs to be part of all decision-making and not assumed to be understood. Hillcrest has an international, cross-cultural staff. When systems are being changed there is less ‘buy-in’ if staff perceive the change favors one group over another.

### **Making a Difference:**

My project is already making a difference in the administrative structure at Hillcrest. By meeting more often, yet for less time, the BoG conversations began to be more robust. They now see themselves as part of the school whose decisions and vision *will* guide Hillcrest into our next 75 years and less as a rubber stamp organization. I am excited to begin the 2020-2021 school year with a goal setting activity with the Board and guide them from goal to evaluation during the course of the year. Hillcrest’s Board of Governors is becoming a visionary Board.

The addition of the Administrative Principal, implemented June 1, 2020, is already showing positive results. Since this new position was established, we meet weekly to iron out details of the new job description. I am already spending less time with details of Maintenance and Support Staff and can hand off projects, like the New Gym Committee, confident that all is consistently aligned with Hillcrest’s mission, vision and core values. This position will remain as part of Hillcrest’s administrative structure as long as Hillcrest is able to successfully recruit for this position when it becomes vacant.

Since registration of the Hillcrest School Alumni Association with the Nigerian Government, it is here to stay. How the Alumni Association supports Hillcrest remains to be seen. I look forward to the time they finally seat someone on the Board of Governors—perhaps by December 2020. Likewise the Hillcrest Foundation, as they become more focused by their charter and see the impact they have on sustaining Hillcrest from the U.S. will, I believe, remain a functional organization.