



The BEACON

News for family and friends of Ann Arbor Christian School 2021-2022 No. 2

HEADS UP by Wayne Sit, Head of School

Growing a God-Centered Worldview



During the end of my sabbatical in December, my family received many catalogs in the mail promoting Christmas sales and gifts that could be purchased for loved ones. The usual assortment from JJill, LL Bean, Lands' End, MindWare, Amazon, Meijer, and the list goes on.

However, the catalog that stood out for me was the World Vision Gift Catalog. In that catalog, you are still purchasing gifts for others, but all the gifts are directed to caring for families in developing parts of the world—families who do not have access to basic resources that we take for granted in our country, such as clean water, a steady food supply, protection from insects, medication, and education for our children.

What a stark contrast between the World Vision Gift Catalog and the other catalogs! I am certainly not trying to be the Grinch because I think the giving of gifts on Christmas is a wonderful and joyful occasion for many families. However, seeing the World Vision catalog alongside the other catalogs gave me deep pause

about how my family and I use our resources, how we determine who our “loved ones” are, and what lesson God wants my family and me to learn as we look at these catalogs. In the end, we purchased mosquito netting for beds, some farm animals, fruit trees, and fishing kits and have committed to World Vision as part of our annual Christmas gift giving.

Likewise, I continue to hope and pray that Ann Arbor Christian School is working alongside parents and churches to radically shape a view of the world that is permeated with Jesus view of the world and the people in it. Rather than conform to patterns of the world or conform to hollow and deceptive philosophies, I pray that God will use AACCS to transform and renew the minds and hearts of our students to see through a clear, biblical, Christ-centered lens. Whether engaging in a science lab, learning about the Civil War, performing a class service project, listening to guest speakers at chapel, winning and losing graciously on the court, or praying for a classmate or teacher, may our students remember that every square inch of this world belongs to our God and that we are called to be His instruments in it.

As we approach the final months of the 2021-2022 school year, I invite everyone reading this article to stay engaged with our mission and to be part of our efforts to transform new generations of students who use their minds, hearts, hands, and feet to be culture makers for Jesus Christ.

Here are some ways you can do this:

- Pray for AACCS regularly and with fervor
- Tell families to apply to AACCS
- Call me to arrange a visit (in person or by Zoom) to see what's happening
- Follow us and encourage us on Facebook and Instagram
- Keep us in your prayerful planning of your annual giving
- Learn more about and participate in our 30th Anniversary Auction & Dinner on May 14: annarborchristian.org/give/30th-anniversary

LASTING SIGNIFICANCE

Sue DeZeeuw Reflections

By Becky Johnson, Spiritual Life Coordinator

Sue and Darren DeZeeuw recently moved to Maryland after being involved with AACCS in one form or another for over 30 years. Here are some reflections from their involvement with Ann Arbor Christian School.



When did you move to Ann Arbor and get involved with the school association?

We moved to Ann Arbor in 1988 because Darren was starting his PhD program. We joined Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church and became active mem-

bers of the association wanting to start a Christian school. We both joined the PR Committee initially as that was where there was a need. Later, I (Sue) joined the Education Committee, which worked on curriculum development and teacher hiring.

What memories stand out for you from the early days of being part of the Ann Arbor Christian School Association?

Everyone was tasked with looking for land or a rental building for a new school. The area was divided up geographically, and we were all looking for anything that would possibly work as a school. We tried to think outside the box—looking at factories, older school buildings, undeveloped property. Eventually, we actively looked at two different properties, but the neighbors were resistant, so we didn't proceed. Over time, the AACRC was looking for more Sunday School space, so we worked out a deal to put modulars on the back of the property that could also be used by the church on Sunday mornings.

Another memory is sanding and staining the bookshelves that are still used in the classrooms. A group of us would meet at someone's home and at times work until midnight trying to get all the bookshelves ready for classroom use.

What did you see as core values of AACCS in the early years?

The same values that are still core today—that AACCS is Christ-centered and academically excellent. One thing that stands out from the early years is the high level of commitment from the

school community and broader association. People who would never have kids at the school were willing to serve. There was so much to do, so many needs. Everyone was active and excited about the mission of Christian education.



What jobs have you, Sue, held at the school over the years?

Part-time administrator, 4th grade math teacher, kindergarten music teacher, 6th grade math teacher, art teacher, 8th grade U.S. history and Bible teacher, initiator of Advisory Program, Lead Teacher of Middle School, Academic Support Coordinator, Scheduler, chapel leader, logistics planner, AV coordinator, Accreditation Co-chair, math enrichment provider in multiple grades.

What roles did Darren have over the years?

PR Committee, Building Committee, Board member, Construction Manager (helping oversee construction of current building), IT Committee chair (got first computers going in building—people saved their receipts to get free computers from Kroger), AV support, girls' and boys' basketball/baseball coach, Beacon publisher.

What challenge or encouragement would you like to give this current generation of families and staff of AACCS?

I would encourage parents and staff to be committed—get involved, take part, grow your own school.

I would also encourage the AACCS school community to trust God. Be willing to take steps of faith. Be willing to take risks. When the school first started, we had to step out in faith and trust God for finances, for our first teacher, for students. God worked in amazing ways, but we had to take a step of faith.

What has AACCS meant to you? What will you take away from your time at AACCS?

I have grown as a teacher, as a parent, and as a Christian because of my involvement with AACCS. My relationships with my colleagues and the collaboration we shared have enriched my life. It has been a HUGE gift. I have also been blessed by the freedom to try new things, to be innovative, and to not be stuck in a rut. Our administration supported teachers in trying new ideas for the sake of improving education, furthering community, and meeting the needs of our students.

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BEYOND THE BASICS

Enhancing Student Learning

By Renée McKeone, Curriculum Director



Most people think of curriculum as the courses of study offered, essentially the “what” of learning—focusing on what topics and subjects will be covered. However, a quality curriculum must not only define what is

being taught, but also seek to deliver that knowledge and information in the best possible way to enhance student learning. This view expands the definition from not only “what” is taught, but to “how” and “why” do we teach those topics? At AACs, we strive to provide teachers with the professional development needed to build knowledge and understanding of best practices in various disciplines in order to develop not only the “what”, but also through the “how” and “why” to provide a truly strong curriculum.

Ann Arbor Christian School was awarded a grant of \$3,900 from the Michigan Equitable Service Collaborative, an organization which was created by the Michigan Department of Education and charged with directing professional development opportunities through Title IIa funds directed to non-public schools. This grant is being used to fund a year-long initiative in improving writing instruction in all grades at Ann Arbor Christian School.

The grant was awarded to AACs based on a documented need to improve writing instruction. We have not offered school-wide writing specific professional development in more than 10 years. Additionally, on a professional development survey given in spring 2021, 100% of responding staff chose “agree” or “strongly agree” to the question, “I am eager to learn more about being a teacher of writing.”

We are currently using this grant to implement a year-long training program, including professional development and instructional coaching centered around writing instruction. For this project, we are working with Sarah Lorenz, one of the researchers and directors of the Eastern Michigan Writing Project. Sarah, a former teacher at Franklin Road Christian School, understands the unique needs and challenges of Christian educators and schools. The grant is funding Sarah’s work with our staff, including whole staff sessions as well as several shorter targeted sessions for each grade band. This allows multiple ways to learn from Sarah and time to process new information and techniques to ensure we are meeting the needs of each grade level. Sarah also helped us to identify professional resources, and our grant funding provided teachers with books to develop their understanding of teaching writing as well as helpful online resources.

Our work with Sarah has already allowed us to have important conversations between staff members to discuss the challenges in each grade level related to writing instruction and curriculum. This

yields more common experiences and expectations around writing, which will translate to better student outcomes. Sarah has also reminded us that writing is hard work, and there are not any “quick fixes” to helping students develop their writing. One aspect of her work at the Eastern Michigan Writing Project, which mirrors the National Writing Project, is to help to develop the idea of the teacher as writer. We started off our first session with Sarah by engaging in a writing exercise and have used that experience to frame our thinking about teaching writing. As teachers themselves enter into the processes of writing, they are better prepared to guide students in class. Another key idea has been the theme of teaching writing, not simply assigning writing. This allows teachers to focus on the skills and techniques that students need in order to complete a writing assignment successfully and to support them as they learn those skills.

As we are halfway through this initiative, we look forward to seeing the benefits of investing time and energy into this area, working with an expert to guide our teachers and creating space for needed conversations and thinking about writing. All these are critical aspects to improving our writing curriculum. Louisville Writing Project Coordinator, Sheryl Block, has summed up the importance of teaching writing in this way, “*When you are teaching kids to write, you are teaching kids to think. Writing is the window through which all thinking starts.*” Through this initiative, Ann Arbor Christian School teachers are not only guiding their students to be better writers, but deeper thinkers, as well.

Restorative Practices

By Becky Johnson, Spiritual Life Coordinator

You see students sitting or standing in a circle, one person who’s holding a “talking piece” and sharing their idea while others are listening.

You see students in two concentric circles talking to the person across from them; recalling key events from today’s lesson.

You see a teacher asking a student who was unkind to a classmate the following questions:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking at the time?
- What have you thought about since?
- Who have you affected by what you have done, and how were they affected?
- What do you think you need to do to make it right?

These techniques were learned in our fall professional development titled Restorative Practices. The training was led by Betsy Winkle, an educational psychologist from All Belong, an organization that partners with Christian Schools to help meet the



(Continued on page 4)

BEYOND THE BASICS

Restorative Practices

(Continued from page 3)



needs of diverse learners. What are Restorative Practices and why are we training our staff in this?

The aim of Restorative Practices are to develop community and to manage

conflict and tensions by repairing harm and restoring relationships. Eighty percent of this program is proactive, focused on building relationships, and helping students see each other as image-bearers. Twenty percent is responsive, helping to work through conflict in ways that get at the root of the issue and repair the harm that was done. Restorative Practices dovetail with our new Social Emotional Curriculum (see November's issue), working hand in hand to empower our students to be community builders both in and out of the classroom.

Community is something we have always valued at AACS. As we grow, it is important that we continue to have intentional practices that build community. It is so easy in the midst of busy schedules and demands to not take the time to make connections, see similarities and differences, and grow in valuing and loving one another. Community doesn't just happen. It requires time and attention.

But you may ask: is it worth the time? Shouldn't schools just focus on academics? Doesn't taking time to do community building circles detract from student learning? Studies and our own experience show that, when students feel known and loved, academic success increases. Students who feel disconnected from their teacher or from their classmates have increased anxiety and are less ready to learn. So, an investment in building community is also an investment in students' academic achievement.

Furthermore, when students are in conflict with each other, when they have unresolved anger or hurt over a recess incident, or when they are repeatedly frustrated by a classmate, their ability to focus on learning is also impaired. Teaching students how to work through conflict is one of the biggest gifts we can give any child.

As we have put our training into practice, we have had the joy of seeing two middle school students who have had conflict since elementary school identify the issue, come up with a solution, and move forward in greater peace and harmony. We have seen classes

grow in taking responsibility for making their classroom a welcoming place. As we continue to hone our skills as a staff, our prayer is that our students will continue to experience AACS as a place where they are known and loved and where they are given the tools they need to work through conflict in a way that honors God.



BOARD UPDATE

Remember to Celebrate

By Ryan Peterson, President, AACS Board

In reading Scripture, it is quite obvious and apparent that God desires that His people celebrate. Throughout the Old Testament, we see the evidence of God establishing festivals and feasts whereby the Israelites would celebrate God's goodness, provision, and faithfulness. But they did not simply celebrate for celebration's sake. They remembered. The call was to remember:

- Remember what God did by leading them out of slavery to freedom.
- Remember how He provided for them in the wilderness.
- Remember His mercy and love, demonstrated in real, tangible ways.
- And therefore, remember to celebrate! Jesus did this, as well!

Ann Arbor Christian School is celebrating 30 years of growing by God's grace, and the Board of Directors is eager to celebrate with all of you. We are excited for this monumental event and extremely grateful for the hard work of so many who are making it possible. If you see one of the Anniversary Committee members, please thank him or her. Their love for AACS is evident through their generous hearts of love and service for this event. All of the details for the 30th Anniversary Celebration are within this Beacon, so be sure to read and participate. In addition, will you pause right now and pray for the Lord's blessing upon every detail of the event—from the current planning, to the health of all, to the generosity of many—that, in every aspect of our celebration, we would give all glory to God?

Your AACS Board will continue to make decisions and ensure the proper stewardship of resources so AACS can fulfill its mission of offering "Christ-centered, academically excellent education that challenges students to live and act in society as committed followers of Jesus Christ."

Remember to celebrate! Not only on May 14 (though certainly that day!), but in the various spaces and places we occupy. God has been faithful to Ann Arbor Christian School, and we pray for His continued blessings in the decades ahead.



CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Looking to the Future

By Wayne Sit, Head of School

In September, we shared an update on significant vision casting for the school's future that the Board of Directors and Head of School are currently exploring. As many of you know, part of the role of the AACS Board of Directors and Head of School is "to pray about and dream about the school that doesn't exist." In every season, the school seeks to discern God's good plans for AACS and what steps to take to guide its future, including steps that plant seeds for 30 and 50 years into the future.

During this summer and fall in a series of capital campaign update meetings, the school began sharing a new vision for the school's future and gathering feedback. Rather than building a new wing onto the existing facilities to foster future growth, the school is pursuing expansion in a new way: starting a second site for AACS on the south side of the city. In this second site, we would also begin the start of high school grades, starting with Grade 9 by fall 2023. Feedback was generally very favorable.

A summary of reasons include:

- Listening to a growing hope by current families in recent years for AACS to have a high school
- Positioning AACS to more greatly impact the city of Ann Arbor for God's kingdom with two locations with a shared culture and mission
- Equipping AACS to enroll more students as more Christian

families seek a school aligned with their family and church worldview

- Serving a broader geographic range of families in the city and county
- Retaining the strengths of being a small community on each site while becoming a larger, multi-site school (the two sites would come together for key events and share resources and some staffing)
- Filling the void of an interdenominational, Christian high school in Ann Arbor
- Partnering alongside families in raising their children during pivotal and increasingly challenging high school years
- Sending off the next generation of Daniels into the opportunities beyond high school



The school has been exploring ways to make this feasible and looking at different venues. I spent a portion of my sabbatical on fleshing out more details and engaging with the Board since my return. This spring, Association members of AACS will receive an important update about this dream as we prepare for the Annual Association Meeting in late April.

We hope you will pray for AACS as we seek God's direction in this time of growth for our school. We look forward to seeing you at future meetings when we share and discuss exciting possibilities for AACS and its future.

#AACSLIFE



Check out photos like these on
Instagram & Facebook

AACS 30TH ANNIVERSARY

An Event to Celebrate God's Faithfulness

By Lisa Hawley and Dawn Geldermans, co-chairs



Join Us May 14th to Celebrate 30 Years of God's Faithfulness at AACS!

Join us as we celebrate 30 years of AACS with a celebration under the stars at The Valley at Frutig Farms on May 14, 2022 with a LIVE and silent auction, hors d'oeuvres, dinner, and so much more!!

Please contact anniversary@annarborchristian.org if you would be interested in donating a product or service to be auctioned at the event. The event team is also looking for companies that would be interested in financially sponsoring the event. For more information, tickets, and updates please keep checking our event website at www.annarborchristian.org/give/30th-anniversary.

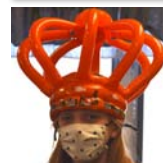
AACS students and families have kicked off the celebration this year with several school events that are leading up to the main event in May. We wanted to have everyone involved as we celebrate God's faithfulness and share that excitement with the current students and families.

We have had spirit days where students dressed up in crazy ways, to a slushy surprise party, to penny wars, to just recently, a day where students were able to put their tickets in for a chance to join an experience with a teacher or staff.

Student's Have Already Raised:

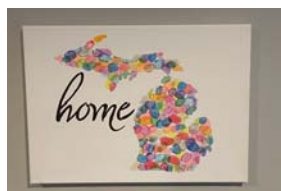
Penny Wars — \$3,647.38

Teacher & Staff Experiences — \$4,383.00



AACS students putting their tickets into the boxes for their picks for the teacher and staff experiences.

Sneak Peek of Class Projects to be Auctioned:



Tickets Are Now Available:



Thank you in advance for your support of AACS!

Auction Wishlists:

We are in the midst of planning for our 30th Anniversary Celebration and are looking for anyone who would be willing and able to help us with our auction wishlists.

Do you have access to any unique items or experiences that could be added to our auction? Do you know anyone who might? BE CREATIVE!

We are hoping to connect with folks that have special and unique skills or access to fabulous hands-on experiences.

Some ideas to consider:

- Special Services: landscaping, interior design
- Training: sports, music, art, cooking, bartending, strength and conditioning
- Hangouts: celebrity meetings, wine tastings
- Free Access: summer camps, boating or fishing, private tours, vacation rentals
- Autographed items: sports memorabilia

Please let us know if you can help make this celebration a memorable one!



Students had a meaningful time this year as they met author Trilla Newbell and heard first-hand about her book.



A COMMUNITY GATHERED

MLK Day with Author Trilla Newbell

By Renée McKeone, Curriculum Director

This year's MLK day celebration featured a virtual visit with Trillia Newbell, author of *God's Very Good Idea*, to hear about God's wonderful plan to create a delightfully different family – all made in His image. Trillia's book was featured in our chapel and inspired and challenged our students to recognize each person as made in God's image and loved by Him.



A Tribute to Mark Doorlag



As some of you know, alumni parent Mark Doorlag passed away suddenly this past December from cancer. In addition to being an alumni parent of three graduates, Mark was a regular fixture at AACs as the chair of our school's IT committee and the soccer coach of hundreds of students, even after his last child graduated. For the staff, he almost felt like another colleague with his regular presence

on-site helping with technology issues. For many families, he was the person who planned the annual ski trip for the community. For others, he was a beloved uncle and a brother. To his family, he was a loving and faithful husband and father who pointed them to Christ as the family's foundation. As shared in his funeral by his wife Leslie, this first question from the Heidelberg Catechism was what Mark thought about and shared with his children before he joined the Lord:

What is your only comfort in life and in death?

That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

On behalf of AACs, we continue to send our love, support, and prayers to the Doorlags and thank God for their amazing presence at AACs over the years.

GO EAGLES!!!!



Every sports team has done well this year, proving to be the league's powerhouse! Congratulations to all the teams! Go Eagles!!



Thanks to our Rooted & Relevant Donors, AACs had NEW BLEACHERS installed this year!

#AACSLIFE

SCIENCE FAIR 2022



AACs is a school that loves both God and science! #faithandsciencetogether



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Takeaways from My Sabbatical

By Wayne Sit, Head of School

As most of you may recall, I was away on a three-month sabbatical from October through December. It was a generous gesture and investment from the AACCS Board in giving me this extended time to rest, to rejuvenate, and to prepare for another season of leading the school into the future.

I would like to share a few of my takeaways from my sabbatical with the hopes that it may also encourage you to find a substantial place for rest in your life.

1. I need to return to planned times to be with my wife more. Years ago, Wendy and I had alternating and regular date nights with each other and with one or two of our five children. We fell out of that habit, but my sabbatical renewed my conviction to return to prioritizing these important times again.
2. Since returning, I generally work off-site on Thursdays in order to give myself an interrupted time to focus on a handful of projects. I even
3. avoid checking email in order to stay focused on my designated tasks for the day.
4. Speaking of email, rather than checking email throughout the day, I check email in a few chunks during the day. Email is naturally an important form of communication, but it can also be a tremendous distraction that interrupts workflow and thinking. By checking only a few times per day, it has made my days more productive.
5. I turned off my notifications for large parts of my sabbatical and loved it! I now keep my notifications on a lower setting to minimize the visible alerts, dings, and vibrations of my devices.
6. October was really hard not thinking about AACCS as I completely separated from the happenings of school. While away, I learned to really trust my admin team and staff to run the school well without me. A critical part of good leadership is building the leadership of others, and I was so proud of how well Renee McKeone and others led the school. In the end, it was also trusting and remembering that God is the true Head of School.

