



The BEACON

News for family and friends of Ann Arbor Christian School 2021-2022 No. 1

HEADS UP by Wayne Sit, Head of School

The Next Photo

For some of you, the first photo here is very special and brings back deep memories of the founding of AACS. You lived what that image captures. It was the first year of our school. For another group, the second photo brings back another set of memories, and you remember when that photo was taken. It was our 20th year.

Regardless of whether or not you know the people and stories behind the images, I would like to propose that these photos should stir up something deep and profound in all of us. Every generation gives something to Ann Arbor Christian that they can fondly cherish and remember at that time in history, and each generation's actions and decisions transform the school in small and large ways for the current and future generations.

Isn't that amazing to ponder?

To think that what you did then not only served the school at that moment but now also blesses the current generation of families and staff. To think that what you do now strengthens AACS beyond the current families who attend and is planting seeds for what AACS will look like in its future.



Image one: founding class of AACS in year one. Image two: cross image made with students of AACS taken in our 20th year. Image three: how can God use you?

Did you help set up the first classrooms? Were you on the first board of directors? Did you help create the school's first website or make the school's first social media post? Did you take out

a home equity line to help the school purchase our current property? Did you help design the school's current logo? Did you help organize our amazing 25th anniversary event in our gym? Did you coach a team? Did you serve on the buildings and grounds committee or technology committee? Did you help the school to pay off its mortgage? Did you make an apple pie or serve as a recess parent? Did you write a staff member an email or card of encouragement during the past two years?

As we approach our slightly pandemic-delayed 30th anniversary celebration on May 14, 2022, only God knows what our school's future is, but He stirs every generation, past and current, to act together to make sure that Ann Arbor Christian will be here in 2030, 2050, and 2075 - the same school with the same mission, but even better and even more vibrant.

What will that blank image be? How can God use you to be part of that image?

2021 UPDATE

Capital Campaign Update

By Wayne Sit, Head of School

In a recent letter, we shared an update on significant vision casting for the school's future that the Board of Directors and I are currently exploring. As many of you know, part of the role of the AACCS 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 AACCS and what steps to take to guide its future, including steps that plant seeds for 30 and 50 years into the future and that will serve children yet to be born.*

This summer in a series of capital campaign update meetings, the school began sharing a new potential 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 AACCS on the south side of the city. In this second site, we would also begin exploring the start of high school grades, starting with Grade 9 possibly by as early as fall 2023. While we are still gathering feedback and some natural questions have been asked (e.g., how to staff two sites), preliminary responses have generally been positive. Getting feedback is critical in helping us to discern our path forward.

The summary of reasons include:

- Positioning AACCS to more greatly impact the city of Ann Arbor for God's kingdom with two locations with a shared culture and mission

- Equipping AACCS to enroll more Christian families as more 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 one larger, multi-site school (the two sites would come together for key events, share resources and some staffing, and possibly offer shuttling services between locations)
- Filling the void of an interdenominational Christian high school in Ann Arbor and knowing that many current AACCS families are hoping for high school grades
- Partnering with 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

Our building is nearly at capacity, and we have several classes with a wait list. With many school families in love with what AACCS offers, rapid changes in our culture, and the greater success of private schools in navigating the pandemic, we anticipate the demand for Christian education in the greater Ann Arbor area will increase notably in the coming years, and we want AACCS to be ready to be creative and to serve more Christian families. The school has been exploring ways to make this feasible, and I will spend a small portion of my sabbatical thinking about the school's future, including talking with Christian schools in western Michigan that have a successful multi-campus model.

We hope you will pray for the AACCS Board and me 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 new possibilities for the school's future.

WELCOME TO THE AACCS FAMILY!

Welcome Our New Teachers & Staff

Daniela Chacón-Beltran

ELEMENTARY SPANISH TEACHER

Daniela is so blessed to be joining the AACCS family while getting her BA in Spanish & French Teaching as well as TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) at Eastern Michigan University. Daniela is originally from Colombia and loves languages and language learning. Daniela's biggest passion is learning about God and His Precious Son, Jesus, her Savior and Redeemer. Daniela is passionate about God, and His church and loves her family so profoundly. For as long as Daniela remembers, she has dreamed of becoming a teacher as she comes from a family of educators in different fields of knowledge. She believes teaching is the greatest of all professions: without it no other professions could come to life. Daniela believes that a Christ-centered family like AACCS is a wonderful place for kids to learn about their Almighty God while they learn about the beauty of the Spanish language.



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WELCOME TO THE AACCS FAMILY!

Welcome Our New Teachers & Staff



Abby DeBruin
THIRD GRADE TEACHER

Abby DeBruin is so excited to be joining the AACCS family! Abby recently graduated from Dordt University in Sioux Center, Iowa with a BA in elementary education and a minor in reading. "My teachers have impacted my life immensely, and I knew I wanted to do the same for my students." Abby is thrilled to be a part of this Christian community, working together to help God's children grow and be who He has created them to be. She and her husband were married their Junior year of college, and then moved to the Southfield area following graduation. They love to hike, play games, water-ski, and work on their fixer upper home together! They are currently attending New City Presbyterian Church in Ferndale, Michigan. Abby shares, "I am so excited to be a part of the Ann Arbor Christian community and I can't wait to see what God has in store for all of the 3rd graders!"

Heidi Eliason

PR/DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANT

Heidi first joined the AACCS family in 2008 when her oldest child entered 3rd grade. All three of the Eliason children went on to graduate from AACCS with the final graduation in 2019. Heidi is excited to be back at AACCS, serving the school in a different capacity this time around. AACCS provided a wonderful community for their family and all have lifelong friendships. She believes the teachers and staff are special at AACCS. They pour into the students' lives with creative and challenging academics and show them Christ's love and intentional care. Heidi and her husband will be forever grateful for the years their children attended AACCS.



Manuela Mansour
MUSIC TEACHER

Manuela is so thankful to be joining AACCS! She moved back to Michigan (where she is originally from) two years ago after living overseas for more than 25 years. She speaks four languages: English, Swiss German, German, and Arabic. She and her husband have four amazing children. Manuela studied Music Education and Classical Piano Performance in Zurich Music Conservatory in Switzerland. Manuela loves to play the piano, sing, and lead worship. Her passion is to teach children music and is looking forward to seeing all that God has planned for this year!

Mike Myers
BUILDING MANAGER

Mike attended Washtenaw Community College for a time, then changed directions and was hired as an Instructors Assistant in their auto body shop. He accepted Christ on January 10, 2011, at 22 years old at Camp Barakel and attends Calvary Bible Church in Ypsilanti. He teaches Sunday school and is an AWANA leader. He loves to serve, and this position has opened a great opportunity to serve the staff, kids, and families every day. He lives in Dexter with his two sons, and if not at work, he is with them out in the woods on their mountain bikes. Mike is also an amateur blacksmith.



Mary Wiland
M.S. SCIENCE AND BIBLE TEACHER

Mary first joined the AACCS family as a parent when her oldest child entered 5th grade. A homeschooler of 14 years, Mary was drawn to the AACCS commitment to Christian education through their integrated unit studies approach that incorporated faith and values into every aspect of student learning. Mary's experience as an educator spans three decades, first teaching German drill sections while a student at Hope College, then leading college-level biology labs as a graduate student at U of M, then designing and implementing a variety of home-school co-op classes spanning multiple subjects and age groups, and finally teaching high school mathematics at Washtenaw Technical Middle College and college-level math and biology at Washtenaw Community College.

The past couple of years afforded Mary three opportunities to travel with her husband to Burundi to minister to a team of medical missionaries in this rural region of East Africa. During their most recent trip, Mary served at Kibuye Hope Academy - the K-8 school for missionary kids - where she taught science, art, and math enrichment. Mary is especially excited to pursue her passion for teaching science and Bible from a Christian perspective at AACCS and nurturing the students in their personal, intellectual, and spiritual growth as sons and daughters of the King!

LASTING SIGNIFICANCE

Growing the Heart of a Servant Leader

By Julie Straight, middle school teacher

Leading chapel families, participating in fundraisers, and being positive role models in the middle school are all important jobs for our 8th graders. Many of the students have looked forward to these opportunities for many years and were eager to jump into these new responsibilities. Being effective in these new roles, however, doesn't always come naturally, so the 8th graders took a day off from their typical academics to spend time learning about leadership, bonding as a class, and planning for their chapel families.

At the retreat center, Our Lady of the Fields, in Brighton, MI, the 8th graders spent the morning on the low ropes course, stretching their problem-solving skills and strengthening their communication skills. Working together as a team was the key to successfully completing the ropes courses, so the students had to get creative as they navigated the course. Debriefing later in the day, the students were able to analyze what



worked and what didn't work so that they could learn from their experiences. With classmates new to our school, this learning experience was especially beneficial in assimilating newcomers into the class and in creating an identity as the

“new” 8th grade class of AACs.

Later in the morning, the students dug into Scripture to take a look at how Jesus led and cared for his disciples. The concept of “servant leadership” was our focal point and we discussed the many ways that the 8th graders can lead their chapel families and younger middle school friends with a Christ-like attitude. Students also learned that leadership can be demonstrated differently with different personalities. While not everyone is gifted with “upfront” leadership skills, the 8th graders recognized that everyone has the ability to encourage, to affirm, and to model behaviors that help others grow in their faith. We ended our time at the retreat center by praying over each chapel family.

How amazing it was to hear the names of each student at AACCS being brought before the Lord in prayer!

A group of approximately 15 students are gathered in a wooded area. Some students are standing, while others are lying on the ground, possibly participating in a team-building exercise or a game. The students are dressed in casual summer clothing like t-shirts and shorts. The background is filled with tall, thin trees and green foliage.

After a hearty lunch at the retreat center, the group returned to AACs and



spent the afternoon preparing for Friday's first all-school chapel. We would

love to make this an annual tradition at AACs—where the 8th graders take a day early in the year to bond as a class and to prepare spiritually for their individual roles as leaders in the school community. Hopefully the skills learned during the retreat will carry the 8th graders through a successful year as leaders here at AACs, and then beyond our walls and hallways as they head into high school and into the future.

#AACSLIFE



Check out photos like these on
Instagram & Facebook

BEYOND THE BASICS

Social Emotional Learning Fall 2021

By Renée McKeone, Curriculum Director



Fourth graders, learning about the process of setting goals, started with a class goal and then worked to the final task (in groups) to write a goal and the steps. This challenge was to stack cups with only the use of a rubber band and four strings while not touching the cups with their hands. All groups succeeded!

As a school that values community, Ann Arbor Christian School is excited to implement a new curriculum focused on social and emotional learning. Across the country, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has come sharply into focus with the increased attention on student well-being, one area impacted by school closures related to the COVID pandemic. However, for Ann Arbor Christian School, social and emotional wellbeing is more than a trend or "educational buzzword." It encompasses our deep desire to establish a Christian community that honors God and enables students to live out the command to love one another in our personal interactions.

By implementing a social emotional learning curriculum, Ann Arbor Christian School will streamline this learning through a common approach and common language to teach skills to manage emotions, handle strong feelings, demonstrate empathy, and solve problems. Research shows that when students are able to manage their social and emotional well-being, they are in a better place to learn and academic achievement also rises.

Our decision to adopt an SEL curriculum grew out of our teachers seeing the need for students to build additional skills to navigate the challenges of relationships within their classrooms as well as increased anxiety and stress in children, in general. We worked with our partner organization, *All Belong*, a consulting group that supports Christian schools in inclusion practices to meet the needs of all students, and spoke with other schools in the Christian Schools International network. Based on those interactions, we selected the Second Step Curriculum as the tool to best meet our needs. The K-8 program contains digital resources to ease the implementation for our teachers and the PK program is delivered using delightful puppets and child friendly resources. The program is not explicitly Christian but our teachers are integrating a Christian worldview

to the topics and selecting lessons that align with a Biblical perspective on healthy emotions and relationships.

In 2020, in preparation for this program, Ann Arbor Christian School focused time and attention on staff well-being, helping teachers grow in awareness of how stress can impact their lives and providing awareness and tools to manage that. Over the summer, teachers participated in a book study/discussion and most of our teachers read *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Peter Scazzero. This has helped teachers experience and benefit from focusing on their own social emotional health and learn skills and techniques to personally grow in this area. Becky Johnson, Spiritual Life Coordinator, is serving as our SEL leader and is part of the Second Step Implementation team. This better equips our staff in implementing this in a way that promotes God's design for a healthy emotional life.

The lessons have been launched in all grades, and teachers are finding their classes responding very well to the content and ideas. The first unit taught the importance of goal setting and developing a growth mindset. Julie Straight, lead middle school teacher, has noted that the middle school students have really enjoyed the lessons. They have spent the past couple of weeks talking about growth mindset and having fun learning some new skills/games to "stretch" and grow their brains. The middle school students have all picked a special skill to teach the class—everything from juggling to piano playing to learning the alphabet in sign language. They've loved doing these tutorials!

We are excited to see the effects of this curriculum as we continue to explore the lessons and resources in the area of social emotional learning to strengthen our community and help our students grow in every aspect of their lives.



View a short
video on SEL.

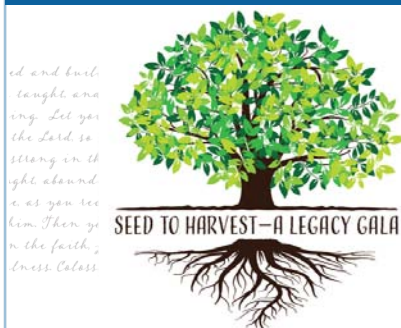
Save the Date to Celebrate 30 Years of God's Faithfulness at AACS!

By Lisa Hawley and Dawn Geldermans, co-chairs

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 people or companies that would be interested in financially sponsoring the event. For more information and updates please keep checking our event website at www.annarborchristian.org/30thanniversary.

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, golf courses, private tours, vacation rentals
 - Autographed items: sports memorabilia
- Please let us know if you can help make this celebration a memorable one!

BOARD UPDATE

Time Well Spent

By Ryan Peterson, President, AACS Board



In mid-September, your AACS Board of Directors engaged in a weekend Board Retreat led by consultant Henry Contant. Henry is a great friend of Ann Arbor Christian School, having equipped our Board in the past with his experience and counsel.

This was time well spent, both Friday afternoon/evening and Saturday morning.

The bulk of our time together focused on equipping our Board for transformational leadership. Our AACS Board of Directors is a strategic board, focused on creating our own future. We are not an operational or

management board. That is an important distinction we must remind each other of and model through our leadership. Through Henry's guidance that weekend, we discussed the following key principles.

A board like ours exists:

1. To *protect* the mission of AACS.
2. To *direct* the vision of AACS.
3. To *select* and *equip* appropriate people to lead AACS.
4. To *respect* the proper decision-making process of AACS.
5. To *expect* each board member to wear the right 'hat' when serving on the Board of AACS.

These five principles of the Board inform our meeting agendas and guide our strategic priorities. We must be mission-driven! At each monthly Board meeting, we begin the meeting by reading out loud again (and again!) the mission and vision of AACS. Then we spend time in devotions and prayer before jumping into our regular agenda. As a Board, we continue to covet your prayers. May we all, together as the family of AACS, pray and support our staff, students, and one another.

2021 AACS BLESSINGS

So far in 2021, God has blessed us abundantly, including the highlights below. They are happening because people are coming together with their time, prayers, and giving!

01

2021 PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

Thank you, parents! Our parent survey rated AACS with an overall rating of 8.4 out of 9, with 62% of families giving us 9 out of 9. Academics got 8.5 out of 9, with 62% giving a 9, and spiritual life got 8.6 out of 9, with 75% giving 9.



02

2021-22 ENROLLMENT INCREASE

215 students now walk our hallways, enter classrooms, and play on our fields, making this our biggest enrollment in history with several grades at capacity with a waitlist. This is nearly 10% larger than our enrollment in September 2020.



03

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN PROGRESS

"Be Rooted. Be Relevant." Capital Campaign goals being fulfilled: audio visual equipment, bleachers, fully-equipped kitchen (2022), maker space (2022)



04

SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATED COVID

By God's grace, we successfully completed the 2020-2021 school year without closing a single day and only had four school-related COVID-19 cases all year. We rallied together to provide the best in-person experience we could in surreal times.



05

NEW CURRICULAR INITIATIVES

Social emotional curriculum: teaches students essential skills around conflict resolution, recognizing and managing their emotions, listening to others, and more. Implementation of Learner Goals: a high-level framework for how every grade level will develop a student's mind, heart, and character.



2021 Apple Pie Update

By Rachel Bush, Lauralyn Bottom and Kerry DeKraker, AACS parents

Another successful apple pie fundraiser! Thanks to a great crew of people this year, we were able to make all 960 pies in 18 hours! That's nearly one pie per minute! These delicious, homemade Dutch apple pies have been a long-standing AACS tradition - handmade with freshly picked apples, boxed and frozen to bake at home. We would like to extend a **BIG THANK YOU** to all of you for enthusiastically supporting this annual fundraiser. You make our jobs fun! It is indeed one of our favorite weeks of the school year!

Thank you again for supporting God's work at Ann Arbor Christian School!



Thank you, 8th Graders, for all your hard work and help with this year's fundraiser! You did a great job!



A COMMUNITY GATHERED

Encountering Jesus: Fully Known and Deeply Loved

By Becky Johnson, Spiritual Life Coordinator

As a product of Christian elementary education

and a “PK” (preacher’s kid), it is safe to say that I believe in the value of Christian education and the importance of children being raised in a Christian home. But are there any risks to being raised in a Christian home and going to Christian school?

Yes! One of those risks is that familiarity with Jesus and the gospel can replace genuine intimacy with Jesus and deep awareness of God’s great love. It is the difference between knowing **about** someone and actually knowing someone **personally**. This risk of familiarity rather than intimacy was highlighted in a recent book I read this summer called *Faith for Exiles* by David Kinnamon, the president of the Barna Research Group. This is why our chapel theme this year is **Encountering Jesus: Fully Known and Deeply Loved**. An encounter is a face-to-face interaction rather than mere knowledge about someone. For students to develop a lasting, resilient faith, they need to move from knowing about God to knowing God personally and experientially.

So how do we counteract this risk and move toward intimacy with God? One way is by providing opportunities for children to encounter Jesus personally and connect with God with both their minds and their hearts. In our chapels this year, we are endeavoring to do just that. Each chapel focuses on a personal encounter an individual or group of people had with Jesus. By asking several key “I wonder” questions, we seek to allow our students to engage with God’s Word rather than simply telling them the point of the story. Then during a follow-up time in the classroom, the students have the opportunity to hear the story again, this time imagining themselves in the story and being open to encountering Jesus in His Word.

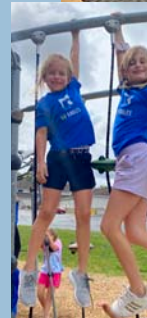
Secondly, we join Paul in his prayer found in Ephesians 3:17-19, “*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*” These were Christians Paul was writing to. They knew the truth of God’s love in their minds. Yet, Paul prays that they may have power to grasp the enormity of God’s love and to **know** this love that surpasses knowledge. The word “know” in this verse means a personal, intimate, experiential knowledge. Thus, we invite you to pray for our students, that the truths they are learning in class would sink into their hearts and that they would grow in grasping (taking hold of, internalizing, experiencing) that they are fully known and deeply loved by God.

Thirdly, we help children grow by experiencing this love through Christian community. We are so thankful that we are back to in-person chapels this year. Chapel families, multi-age groups of students led by our 8th graders, are places where students begin to feel known and loved. What an unexpected surprise to have 33 of our 7th and 8th grade students

volunteer to serve in the Praise Band, Praise Team, and the AV Team! As we love one another as Christian community, people encounter Jesus.

Finally, in order for students to grow in grasping the love of God, they need to see us encountering Jesus in our daily lives. We can’t give what we don’t have. In our busy, frantic world it is easy to tick off “daily devotions” on our to-do list, but somehow miss receiving God’s love for us personally. As a school community, may God help us all to grasp the height and depth of his love as we encounter Jesus and discover that we are fully known and deeply loved.

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The **BEACON**

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ALUMNI PROFILE: RACHAEL (MACHIELE) ORAM

Year of Graduation from AACCS: 2001

Grades of attendance: Kindergarten through 5th grade

What high school did you attend? Huron High School

What college did you attend? B.S. Biology at Calvin University (2012), M.Ed. Secondary Science Education from the University of Michigan (SOE 2013)

Favorite memories or experiences of your time at AACCS: Grinding rocks in my fort and singing while swinging on the tire-swing with friends. I also loved field day, the science fair, all school units, and my kindergarten reading buddy (special shout out to Lauren Mitchell), but mostly I loved the rich community that feels so much like family. I have been blessed to have the toddlers I babysat as a teenager now babysit my toddlers!

Special personal accomplishments since graduating AACCS? I have been a high school science teacher and instructional coach for Title 1 virtual schools around the country. I love teaching science teachers, and I love working with students preparing them for a bright future ahead. My daughter Lucy is now at AACCS in preschool, and I am so happy to continue to be part of this wonderful community!

How did your experiences at AACCS impact you? I greatly appreciate the faith formation, music which still gets stuck in my head, and the important lifelong friendships.



Like us on Facebook, follow us on Instagram (@annarborchristian), or check out our hashtag #AACSLife to see what our students are up to here at AACCS.

