

Jake	Chris VanderVeen
Chris, when did you start teaching at Brantford Christian School?	In 1969, teaching grades 5 and 6.
What was your first impression of Brantford Christian School? [BCS]	<p>A good one. The Education Committee interviewing me for the grades 5&6 position in the spring of 1969 was a friendly, encouraging group. The school was small compared to my previous school. It had only four, double grade classrooms whereas my school in Brampton had mostly single grade classrooms. I liked the small, school atmosphere.</p> <p>In September of that year I discovered that the children in my class were generally a happy, good hearted bunch. I was thankful.</p>
How many years did you teach at BCS before you became principal?	Six years. From 1969 to 1979. I didn't teach from 1973 to 1977.
Was becoming Principal a natural progression or was it a bit of a surprise to you?	<p>Total surprise. It was 1979 in the springtime. The principal and two other teachers were moving to other schools. I was the only one that was staying. During the hiring process the board could not find a suitable person for principal. Teacher candidates were scarce at that time and the Board felt compelled to hire three new, college graduates; one for grades 1&2, one for grades 5&6 and one for grades 7&8. I was the grades 3&4 teacher.</p> <p>I was then asked if I was interested in taking on the principal's position. The Board felt that I could do it. I would be allotted a half day per week for administrative time and a secretary would be hired one morning a week. I could use a half day per month to travel to a neighbouring school in Hamilton to ask the principal for sorely, needed advice.</p> <p>I really did not want the job but asked for some time to think and pray about this matter. I had eight years of teaching experience but no training or administrative courses to my credit. After two weeks of praying and deliberating I agreed, but only if I could try it for one year as acting principal and as long as I could stay in my class as grade 3&4 teacher. I can honestly say that I was scared and relied heavily on the Lord's leading.</p>
What kind of educational changes have you seen over the years?	<p>A big change happened in special education. At first we were a school that catered mostly to academically adept students. We however wanted to include as many children from Christian families as was possible, regardless of their ability. We only had volunteers to help us with students who had daunting learning difficulties. We asked the board for a special education teacher [now called Resource Teacher]. Over the years we learned about dyslexia, autism, A.D.D., A.D.H.D., students who were developmentally delayed, and more. Then we received Christian</p>

	<p>families from Korea and learned how to teach E.S.L. The position of resource teacher was only 10% at first, but now it's up to 100%. There was never a stigma attached to "working with the resource teacher". The opposite was true. The resource students were often the envy of the class.</p> <p>We have strived for excellence in education and wanted to keep up with the changes in teaching styles as well as learning styles. We have been able to provide a high standard of education with qualified, nurturing teachers. In general the students came from stable, loving, Christian families with supportive parents and this helped tremendously in maintaining a high standard. We were able to hire teachers specializing in art, music and French. When computers came on the scene we delved into that area of education as well.</p> <p>Creating a climate of nurturing and kindness in the school was important to me. I loathed discord and preferred peace. I wanted to replace violence, swearing, fighting, and bullying with harmony, peace and emotional safety. I wanted children who were new to our school to feel welcome, comfortable and safe.</p>
<p>Is there a student project that stood out and that you can recall?</p>	<p>Yes. We had a science fair and a senior student constructed a mechanical hand. It was such an intricate beautiful piece of work. His project went to the All Ontario Christian Schools Science Fair at Redeemer College.</p> <p>Another science fair exhibit that I remember is one in which a boy showed his white mice. It was a hit with the kids. One of the mice escaped however. Weeks later a "squeak, squeak" sound was heard behind a book case. The teacher moved the bookcase and behind it was the boy's pet with a nest of little white mice. They were reunited. That was a happy ending.</p>
<p>What is one of the highlights that has stood out in your mind?</p>	<p>In the early part of my principal-ship we had a student who had difficulty with learning the basic subjects, reading, writing and arithmetic. He needed to repeat grade 1. He received one on one time with the resource teacher for a few years. Then, years later when he was in Grade 7, I met him in his room during his spare time and noticed that he was engrossed in a thick novel which was grade 8 level or higher. I was interested and amazed, not only because he had learned how to read well, but that he loved reading. I thought, "Wouldn't it be great if this boy could move</p>

	<p>into grade 8 across the hall and graduate with the students of his own age? I called his parents and they were in favour. He went on to high school, got a job and started his own business. That was a happy time for me.</p> <p>I also remember a sad time. That was when Jeremy Hensen, a kindergarten boy, was killed in a bicycle/car collision near his home. I don't cry often but that is when I cried.</p>
<p>What challenges have you experienced at BCS and what did you learn?</p>	<p>The first challenge was when I became Principal. I felt responsible for everything; not just the everyday learning, but also the special activities such as assemblies, (Thanksgiving, Remembrance Day, Christmas), field trips, sports activities, track and field day, the spring program, and graduation exercises, etc. I tried my best to do all those things.</p> <p>I asked many questions of fellow principals at the principals' meetings. I picked up various ideas at principal's courses, conferences and the O.C.SA.A. [Ont.Chr.School Administrators Assoc.] Board meetings. I also valued the advice of our board members, staff, parents and students. But most of all I prayed a lot.</p> <p>I had to learn how to delegate without feeling guilty.</p> <p>I discovered that whenever a teacher was excited about a certain teaching style, learning activity, sport or a new idea I would listen. I then decided to harness the energy and let her/him try it out.</p> <p>One teacher asked if he would be allowed to organize track and field day events. I was thrilled to give him the green light. He did a wonderful job; and what a huge relief it was for me because it was not my forte.</p> <p>Another example was that our curriculum needed updating. I knew that a teacher was interested in curriculum so I offered him 10% of my administration time and asked if he would be interested. He collaborated with the staff and organized a new curriculum for the school.</p> <p>When our music program was lacking, a school evaluator from CSI heard our grades 5&6 class singing two part harmony. He suggested that I ask the teacher to start teaching recorder. She agreed and it also became a success.</p>

	<p>I knew very little about kindergarten and grade one. A primary teacher who was enthused about a new phonetic program approached me about it. We ordered the materials. She did a wonderful job. It was a success.</p> <p>A parent once came to me with some suggestions that she had picked up at a grad ceremony that she had attended elsewhere. I was happy with her ideas. The senior end teachers liked helping out with the graduation program so I thankfully passed on that job as well.</p> <p>As a principal, I had to learn to relate to students, parents, teachers, the janitor and a secretary but I also had to work with the board and the committees. Then there were high schools, bus drivers, salespeople, St. Peter’s School, the nurse, the safety patrol officer, prospective new parents, the photographer, and probably more.</p> <p>Another challenge was the low enrollment number of 65 students in 1979.</p> <p>I learned that if students love their teacher, the teacher will have the children in the palm of his/her hands and the students will learn and accept whatever is taught. I learned that happy students make happy parents and happy parents talk. I learned that the marketing approach called promotion by “word of mouth” was by far the cheapest and the best.</p> <p>One other challenge [that I hesitate to share] was dealing with the mistakes that I made, dealing with the fear of failure and the clinical depressions that would dog me at times. I thank the Lord that he helped me through it all via counsellors, friends, my wife and meds.</p>
<p>What advice do you have for parents?</p>	<p>If at all possible provide a loving, stable family atmosphere. Be sure to encourage your child all the time. Even if the child is not doing that well academically, please continue to speak positively and they will try harder to do their best. If you are negative in your remarks they will give up. Make sure they get lots of sleep and never let them skip breakfast. If at all possible support the teacher and avoid being a helicopter parent. Lead your children to Jesus. Pray with your children, before they go to bed, for their family but also for their classmates and teachers.</p>

<p>How have you witnessed God's presence at BCS?</p>	<p>I noticed it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - in the love and support that I received from Board members, parents, staff and students. - in the childlike faith of the children. - in the prayers; of the children in the classroom; of the staff at devotions and of the parents at meetings. - in the patience that children had for their classmates who were having difficult times with their work or their behaviour. - in the volunteers who were willing to serve in many areas. - when I saw remorse in a student who had wronged someone else. - when I walked through the halls and read the bulletin boards. - when I saw the teachers teaching the children. - when I heard the singing of psalms, hymns and scripture songs. - when I saw people comforting grieving parents. - when I saw happy children. - when I saw children reach a goal. - when I felt Jesus walking with me.
<p>What sets BCS apart from the public schools?</p>	<p>Our Monday mornings we have an assembly where we gather as a whole school. We sing songs of praise, led by a guitar playing, parent volunteer. We have devotions together and hear about God's reconciling love through Jesus.</p> <p>At BCS the teachers are mandated to teach the curriculum from a Christian perspective. The children learn about God's creation and how we with gratitude can serve God, love him, love others as ourselves and take care of God's creation. This doesn't mean that there aren't any problems or that there is no sin evident at Brantford Christian School. We however know that we can always go to the Lord and ask for forgiveness and help. We can talk to the kids about Jesus and pray with them.</p> <p>I can remember a comment from a personal support worker who came to BCS to work with a handicapped student. She said that she loved working at Brantford Christian School because she felt</p>

that there was such a different climate in the school and on the playground compared to other schools where she had worked.

I heard from someone last week that a supply teacher expressed the following remark, "When I walk into the school I right away notice a wholesome atmosphere of peace. The children are happy and relaxed." When I heard that I pumped the air with my fist and thought to myself "Yes! Thank you Lord!"

Chris, your vision for Brantford Christian School for the next 50 years?

Stay true to the text on the cornerstone which says, "Standing in awe of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Remember that Christ has something to say about every square inch of our lives. Jesus Christ conquers culture and uses us. Jesus brings light and love into our lives.

I hope that the collaborative approach of administration will continue at Brantford Christian School and that the climate of nurturing and encouragement will remain.

I hope that we will continue to honour and thank God for his blessings. If there is anything that we have done that is righteous the credit goes to God who worked through us with his Spirit.

I always felt that the administrator is not a CEO but is more of a team leader who considers the staff as a team of advisors. Governance through team effort gives the staff the feeling that they are respected for their input and that they are heard. After that the principal through prayer can make a wise decision.

There has been a change in discipline. When I first started teaching in 1969, corporal punishment was used. I used it twice. I disliked using this method of discipline and soon the strap was moved to the bottom drawer of my desk under a pile of papers. As principal I tried a different approach when disciplining. I resorted more to listening to the student. I often told them to think about the situation and have them calm down and then return. Sometimes we would pray. The student would be asked to work with whomever they hurt and then bring about reconciliation. There would be an apology and a consequence and forgiveness. The consequence was usually a community service, or maybe the perpetrator would have to do something positive for the victim. This approach to discipline was a gradual

	one. One that I learned over the years. It is called restorative justice.
--	---