

In this Issue

Leading Together	1
Learning Together	2
Built for Community	3
Blessed by Community	4

Living, Learning, and Leading Together

TDChristian Builds Community

by Sophie Vandenberg

*If you want to go fast, go alone.
If you want to go far, go together.*

– African proverb

Being in community is good. As Scripture puts it, “Two are better off than one, because together they can work more effectively. If one of them falls down, the other can help him up” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, GNT).

At the school’s opening assembly, Board member Will Postma addressed the staff, encouraging them to continue building community inside the classroom and beyond. “Make this a welcoming place for all students. As a staff, help each other do your very best. Build each other up. Care for each other. Help our new principal, William Groot, do the great job that he wants to do. Go forward together,” he said.

Inside this issue, you’ll read about some of the ways we strive to enact our commitment to community as we live, learn, and lead together: staff, students, parents, Board, and supporters.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

Physical Geography students work together to traverse a beaver dam in Algonquin Park.



Q&A

Leading Together:

Groot, Bentum, and Siebenga

There’s a new face in the principal’s office this fall at TDChristian: William Groot. William is not new to the school, however. His association with TD spans more than three decades as student, teacher, parent, and vice principal. Working closely with William during the leadership transition is Tim Bentum, who served as the school’s Vice Principal of Students for the past three years and brings considerable analytical and administrative gifts to the task. And joining this dynamic duo several days a month is recently retired TD principal Ren Siebenga, who will provide support on a variety of fronts.

While team leadership is nothing new to these three, their roles have been reconfigured for the 2011-2012 school year. Read on.

William Groot

Title: Interim Principal

What are your main roles and responsibilities this year?

Educational leadership and curriculum development (keeping in mind our vision to educate teens for service in the light of God’s Word). That includes learning reports, assemblies, staff hiring and supervision, scheduling,

Continued on page 2

See Q&A

Q&A

TD's dynamic leadership trio, (from left) Senior Fellow Ren Siebenga, Interim Principal William Groot and Vice Principal Tim Bentum.



the school inspection, overseeing school events (with Tim), enhancing our work with international students, reporting to the Board, and determining school direction with the Staff Leadership Team and through Board Executive and Admin meetings. And I am coaching two school teams.

What are you particularly looking forward to?

Working with the staff to help them pursue their passions in teaching; developing ways for students to improve their learning, especially through presenting and publishing their work; and connecting with Tim and Ren about how to keep moving TD forward educationally as a Christian high school.

Tim Bentum

Title: Vice Principal

What are your main roles and responsibilities this year?

School discipleship (discipline), admissions, transportation, the co-op program, health and safety, and a smattering of other things.

What are your hopes for the coming year?

I hope TD continues to be a place where students can grow in their faith, engage in learning that matters to them, build positive relationships, and impact our local and global community for God's Kingdom. I hope we can build on the foundation that has been laid to keep TD on the cutting edge of Christian education.

What are you particularly looking forward to?

Strengthening ties between the school and our wider community—

Christian elementary schools, churches, and other organizations and families who are passionate about Christian education. We want to seek out ways to partner with people for mutual development, so that TD's mission is advanced while also furthering the Kingdom of God in our wider community. And I'm really looking forward to working with William, building on the work of Ren in a brand-new era of TD's history.

Ren Siebenga

Title: Senior Fellow

What are your chief responsibilities this year?

To complete unfinished projects such as the purchase of the firehall adjacent to the school; to bring forward ideas and opportunities, connecting staff with like-minded educators, and providing workshops for TD Board and staff on emerging ideas in education and governance; and other tasks deemed appropriate by Board and staff leaders.

What are your observations of TD from your new vantage point this year?

I was at the school on September 1 and attended the opening night assembly that evening. I was struck by the vibrancy, expectation, readiness, and eagerness to "get on with it" among TD's staff. I left with a sense that the school is engaged and ready to move into the next chapter of education that the Lord has in mind for it. To that end, I look forward to supporting the staff, Board, and community in whatever ways I can over the coming year.

LEARNING



At TDChristian we do school in community, because learning happens best in relationship. Where there's trust, there can be challenge, rigour, and growth. Below you'll read about a few of the ways we work to build an educational community at TD.



• Teacher Alice Vanderkooy's homeroom meets in the library.

BUILDING COMMUNITY through Multigrade Homerooms

In each of TD's homerooms, which meet weekly this year, about 20 students from Grade 9 to 12 are assigned to a teacher who follows them through their entire high school tenure. *I love homeroom. It gives me a chance to see kids in their dailyness... Homeroom is like family: you don't choose your family members—you get them, and you learn to live together. Sometimes, years later, I run into former students who were in my homeroom and there's still that sense of connection.* - Fran Joesse, French teacher



• (from left) Science teachers David Robinson, Evelyn Dengerink, Rachael Weening, and Vivian Templeton work together.

BUILDING COMMUNITY through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs):

PLCs are groups of four or five teachers who meet weekly to help each other hone their craft. *The science-based PLC I'm part of brings together the four strands of science—earth and space, biology, chemistry, and physics—each taught by a specialist. My colleagues are another set of eyes who can honestly, lovingly critique my work as a teacher. Our PLC also looks for ways to bring together all the science students in one grade; I loved the extravaganza we held last year with all the Grade 9 science students. They each presented an aspect of what they had learned, and were then given feedback by their peers—much as we do in our PLCs. This is exceptionally valuable.* - David Robinson, Physics teacher



- Coming together as a community at assembly. Student Jenna Brasz performs.

BUILDING COMMUNITY through Assemblies:

Many Friday mornings, TD hosts an assembly attended by all students. Usually, students are the featured stars who sing songs they've learned or written, show videos they've created, model fashions they've designed, or do other things in front of their peers. *TD's assemblies are community at work; they bring kids together to see what other kids are doing. It's where community celebrates its own!* - William Groot, Interim Principal



- TD students on a recent service-learning trip in downtown Toronto.

BUILDING COMMUNITY through Service-Learning Trips:

Not only does TDChristian build community within the school walls; its students also have many opportunities to develop respect, appreciation, and empathy for communities beyond—both locally and internationally. *I accompanied some Grade 9 students on the annual service-learning trip to downtown Toronto during the first week of school. They met people of all types, including refugees, the homeless, and even some who had been recently released from prison. At St. Francis' Table, one of the places we worked, anyone can come in and get a meal for a dollar. Dignity is wrapped up in that dollar. We buttered bread, prepared salads, made pasta, served, and cleaned up. The students took their responsibility seriously; for us as staff it was great to see how they worked. On this overnight outing, students got to know each other, were stretched out of their comfort zone—and performed magnificently!* - Kevin Hayward, Music teacher



- One of last year's Environmental Block classes. This class and photo was featured in a Toronto Star article.

BUILDING COMMUNITY through Block Education:

Not only are TDChristian's Block classes good pedagogy, community is a natural outcome as students spend several hours a day together in hands-on, authentic-learning projects and activities. Connections and interaction happen organically in these unique classes integrating several different courses into a common area of study. TDChristian currently offers an Environmental Block, a Video Block, a French/History Block, and an International Block. *Block classes give students extra time and space to work continuously on projects for a half day—and connect with their teachers and peers. When Environmental Block students run the school's recycling and composting programs together, plant trees with their peers, go on half-day class trips, or spend three hours collaborating on a film, community happens naturally.* - Ben Freeman, Environmental Block teacher

Architecture that enhances community



Built-in benches create spaces for students to come together to work on homework.



The carpeted risers outside the music room are a wonderful spot for students to come together in community.



TDChristian's science classrooms feature lab stations that jut out like keys, to improve group collaboration during experiments.

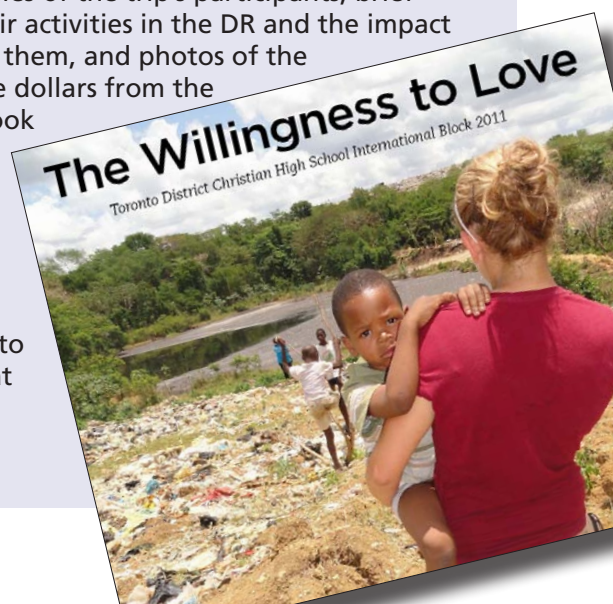


"TALKING their Walk"

INTERNATIONAL BLOCK Students Report on their Educational Adventure

Earlier this year 18 of our students, accompanied by teacher Rachael Weening, engaged in a semester-long journey called International Block. This educational adventure took them to the Dominican Republic for two months to serve and learn. A softcover publication, appropriately titled **THE WILLINGNESS TO LOVE**, was produced as a project by that class. If you'd like to hear our students "talk about their walk", the 80-page book is available for \$25.00. It includes profiles of the trip's participants, brief accounts of their activities in the DR and the impact the trip had on them, and photos of the experience. Five dollars from the sale of every book goes towards International Block 2011-2012. Contact bookorders@tdchristian.ca. Please arrange to pick books up at the school.

The Willingness to Love
Toronto District Christian High School International Block 2011



Blessed by COMMUNITY

All are Blessed!

by Jennie Das, OACS Director of Finance, Consultant, and former TDChristian VP of Finance & Admissions

Article 9 of TDChristian's Identity Statement reads, "We believe in and foster community. **We seek to reflect a commitment to community in all our relationships.** Parents, staff, and supporters from different cultural, social, and denominational backgrounds covenant together to carry out the shared task of educating children; our efforts are to be characterized by trust, cooperation, and service rather than self-interest or individualism... The weak and the strong work together, and in carrying one another's burdens, all are blessed."

How do we practise Article 9 financially at TDChristian? Do we have room for the economically disadvantaged, for diversity of culture and denominations? Or are we becoming a school for the rich? In some sense, our chequebook tells the story of our values and priorities. Do we go it alone, or share resources to carry out a common vision?

To be sure, many families make significant sacrifices to give their children a Christian education, the staff could earn better salaries elsewhere, and supporters may experience "donor fatigue" as governments cut spending and charities rely more heavily on gifts to stay afloat. But when we count the blessings we have received, we no longer think in terms of sacrifice. Parents rejoice in their children's growth and maturity, staff are thankful for their calling to Christian service, and supporters feel privileged to have been part of the "village" that helped raise the next generation to love and serve God and others.

In my 15 years in finance at TDChristian, first as VP of Finance and currently as Consultant, it has been my passion and privilege to help families afford Christian education. There have been many different situations, and no one-size-fits-all solution. Some parents catch a vision for Christian education only after earlier life choices have affected their ability to pay for it. Some have always been passionate about Christian schooling, but carry the weight of unusual long-term stresses that make it virtually impossible to gather the financial resources. Others may have been well-situated to pay at first, but unemployment, business downturns, illness, or marriage breakdown have entered the scene. In such cases, more than ever, it takes a community to bring the vision of Christian education to life.

TD has striven to be and to foster that community, following a consistent pattern in lean years and years of plenty. Our tuition is already structured to help those most likely to need it, since it is family-friendly and provides discounts to those also enrolling children in a Christian elementary school. Still, every year about 10% of our families have needed help in some way, either through a bursary (some tuition forgiven outright) or extra time to pay. In any given year, *bursaries* averaged 2.2% of the total unadjusted tuition amount. Other families received *more time to pay*—in effect, a loan—with credit for new "loans" generally covered by the payment of previous ones. Meanwhile, over the past 15 years, tuition revenue has more than tripled, reducing the proportion receivable from 10% to less than 3%. While I found this area of financial administration the most challenging in my work at TD, it also provided the greatest joy. Families experienced the blessing of community, and were invariably thankful.

In a well-managed support program, this blessing is enjoyed by all, whether they effectively receive financial help or give it. While the 10% needing help may increase class size by two students, the extra costs are minimal. Therefore *even the reduced tuition the family is able to pay keeps the tuition rate lower for all.* Meanwhile, the school is enriched by the resulting diversity, and by the valuable gifts each family contributes. Increased sensitivity to those with limited resources helps us to appreciate each dollar and continually evaluate our priorities. For both those who give and those who receive financially, there is a heightened sense of the preciousness of Christian education.

In my current role as Director of Finance of the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools, I see a variety of solutions to the affordability question. Generally, people within the Christian school community continue to affirm a program of support, especially as they become acquainted with families who need help.

In fact, this is part of our heritage in the Alliance and at TD specifically. In earlier years, when enrolling parents represented a relatively homogeneous group of recent immigrants, they were required to shoulder only 60% of the cost of educating their children. Families were all in similar economic situations and most needed help to afford Christian education. The supporting community—whole church congregations collectively, grandparents, the childless, those with children too young or too old for school—kicked in the other 40%. Times have changed, and the economic situations of those seeking enrolment have become quite diverse. Most of our parents now can afford to pay the full cost, and do: today in most Christian schools, tuition is calculated to cover basic operational costs. But typically there is also some type of bursary program, funded by those same sources, for families who need it. The supporting "village" continues to demonstrate the meaning of community.

TDChristian is graced with many regular supporters who understand the meaning of Article 9 deep in their bones. Please know how much your support encourages not only the families who benefit directly, but all of us who work daily at TD to educate teens for service in the light of God's Word. May those who have experienced the blessing go out and share it with others!

Chapter Notes

Alumni News td

Attention Alumni!

Please keep us posted regarding reunions, marriages, births, career moves, and any other important milestones. Simply e-mail alumni@tdchristian.ca. Don't worry if you're late in reporting – we're still interested!

• Births

- Johan and Felicia (Kooy, 04) Colenbrander welcomed their first child, Kaylen Marie, April 22, 2010.

• Contact

- Lucinda (Kemper, 92) Hoffman now lives in the US. She can be reached at 728 Fairway Lakes Rd, Greenwood, SC 29649, or by phone at 864-229-2341 or (cell) 864-992-3935. She'd love to hear from any erstwhile schoolmates!

Contract-making in COMMUNITY

by Bill Van Geest, former TD Board member and parent of four TD alumni



For many in the TD community, discussion around salaries, benefits, and responsibilities is limited to "How much are we getting—or giving?" We prefer to leave the more arcane details of contract-making to people with a special gift or interest. But failure to engage more voices in the process can lead to the detachment

of contract discussions from the broader school community and its values.

There was a time at TD when the months around contract discussions were marked by tension or outright conflict, and it became clear that a new approach was needed. So about ten years ago, some Board and staff members worked out a contract-making process grounded in TD's core values and community bonds. More perspectives were sought—from teachers, administrators, Board members, and community representatives. And it was agreed that salaries, benefits, and responsibilities would be decided not on competing interests, but on shared understandings and beliefs about the roles of all parts of the TD community in the joint endeavour of Christian education.

With reasonable success, this process has turned discussions about GAFE (TD's General Agreement For Employment) into a respectful and productive process with few tensions. In uncertain economic times, contract discussions often become more challenging; it is especially then that they most need to reflect the bonds of community and TD's core values. No matter what the times, effective contract-making must occur in community.

Upcoming Events 2011

October 3-7
**Gr. 10 French & History
Block Trip**
Gr. 12 Quebec Trip
Gr. 11 Service Trips
(Toronto & Hamilton)

October 13 (7:00 pm)
Parents' Night: Lifestyles

October 15 (9:00 am-
1:00 pm)
Fall Rummage Sale

November 2
Grade 8 Day
All Grade 8 students and
parents are invited.

TDChristian is in the social networking universe. Go to our website at tdchristian.ca to read our blog, or follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/tdchristian.

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