



EASTSIDE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

SCHOOL BOARD
NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2021

FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Mr. Jim Holstege

“Oh taste and see that the Lord is good...” (Psalm 34:8a)

Recently, I had opportunity to talk about prayer with the second graders and what petitions are appropriate to include in our prayers to God. We discussed God’s goodness, revealed in so many ways, including the wondrous majesty of His creation, His daily care of us, and especially this: the gift of His Son and the forgiveness of our sins.

As this school year draws to a close and we reflect on the past twelve months, one thing is certain: The Lord is good! Through the challenges and difficulties of these abnormal and rather strange times in which we live, He has blessed us with unity and peace; with patience and charity to guide us through. God is good indeed.

Looking back further than one year, in fact twelve years, we take this opportunity to recognize God’s goodness to Eastside Christian School through the dedicated labors of Mrs. Karen Ophoff, who retires at the end of this school year. Karen has been a blessing to many during her tenure as the school secretary, both students and teachers alike. She has willingly offered herself in innumerable ways, from “first responder” detail with a sick or injured student, to one-on-one tutoring help. She knows how to boost morale and turn a student’s tears into smiles with a hug! Her reliable and energetic attention to detail has ensured a smooth day-to-day running of our school. She has always made sure that a visitor’s first impression of Eastside is an enjoyable experience through a friendly greeting and by giving the school a fresh appearance. Many things have been taken care of without anyone’s awareness. They just get done somehow!

Karen said to me not that long ago as I began my role as Principal, “You are going to find out how much joy there is while working here.” We sat down recently to recount some of her joyful memories of the past. With big smiles, Karen told me about the Mother’s Day tea parties, Thanksgiving breakfasts, singing Christmas hymns at Fulton Manor, the butterflies at Frederick Meijer Gardens, the annual bike hikes, and ice-skating at Schimmel’s pond, the Griff’s Icehouse and Patterson Ice Rink. She recalled her happy memories of outside recess, reading month, helping young students with phonics, and playing the piano in the Kindergarten room.

Karen, on behalf of Eastside Christian School, past and present, Thank You! Yours was a labor of dedication. Yours was a labor of love. We pray that God’s blessings go with you as you begin a new phase of your life.





SCHOOL ASSOCIATION ANNUAL SECRETARY REPORT

Brian Baldwin

To begin this year's annual report, we quote from an article in the Fall Newsletter written by Principal Jim Holstege. "For good reason, we have taken as our theme this school year: God's Faithfulness. We move forward each day, instructing the children of God's covenant that blessed truth, using the words of Psalm 36:5 "Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds." The hallways ring with the sound of children's voices singing the refrain: "For His mercy doth endure, Ever faithful, ever sure!" Because of God's Faithfulness, we are safe, and we are strong. We have every reason to be happy! This is our twenty-fourth year as a Christian school on the east side of Grand Rapids. Through His preservation of us, both materially and spiritually, we continue to do the work of the good Christian school."

The Board enthusiastically echoes Jim's thoughts. With all the chaos and unrest in the world at large and even in our own community, we still confess that in a very real way God's mercy and faithfulness has been evident this school year.

COVID PANDEMIC

We were happy to resume in-person learning for the majority of our families, although with several pandemic-related adjustments. Mask-wearing, daily safety protocols, regular hand-washing, and more have been the new normal in order to comply with State and County guidelines. Also, specialized building sanitation by our new janitors Mike and Heather Pols, for which we express many thanks.

Investing in more technology was also a large component. All classrooms now have video cameras with live-streaming capabilities, so quarantined families are still able to participate in the daily classroom activities. Teachers also were provided high-end webcams for use at home; allowing for classroom instruction remotely if they themselves are under quarantine. Additionally, most of the students now have their own assigned Chromebook laptop instead of sharing amongst the entire student body.

This pandemic has presented extra challenges and work for our staff, and we greatly appreciate their cooperation. Parents too have been very understanding and accommodating. Thanks also to First PRC for allowing use of their building when it became necessary for certain events.

NEW FAMILIES

Eastside welcomed new families this year for Pre-K enrollment: Jeff and Crystal Talsma and their daughter Adeline plus also Jeff and Abby Thompson and their daughter Molly. We also welcomed Brad and Dorothy Duistermars, enrolling Margaux into the 2nd grade and Jane for 5th. Lastly, the Rev. Dan and Leah Holstege family joined us during their time here in the states, enrolling twins Kiley and Kirsten for 1st grade and Gabe in 3rd.

LONG-RANGE PLANNING

In the interest of long-range planning, a number of decisions were made last year to accommodate for actual and anticipated growth of the school. For starters, it was decided to realign the classroom configurations and assigned teachers. This realignment allowed us to rely on our existing teaching staff vs. hiring another full-time teacher.

However, this did present a greater need for classroom aides. To that end, Lori Pastoor has volunteered her assistance to the teachers and students. She will join our long-time volunteer aides Heidi VanBaren and Anne Miedema, for whom we are very grateful. Lori and Heidi split their time between classrooms, focusing on the 1st and 2nd grade and also wherever else assistance is needed. In addition to her volunteer work, Anne was also hired into a part time role.

As a result of these classroom and staffing realignments, we could utilize more efficiently our current building without having to do a major renovation project. Instead, the Library was converted to a flexible space that could be used as a classroom environment. More lockers and desks were also acquired to accommodate the growth in students.

TEACHERS AND STAFF

The Board is pleased to report that all our teaching staff have signed their contracts and plan to return next school year.

Mrs. Lydya Hulst continues with the Pre-K and Kindergarten teaching duties. We again have a full and busy classroom, an encouraging sign for the health of Eastside in the longer-term.

Mrs. Anita Haak capably leads the 1st grade class into the fundamentals of reading, math, and other skills. Due to the realignment she has also taken on the 2nd grade this year.

Mrs. Kristi Thompson, having been with Eastside since its earliest years, is now the 3rd and 4th grade teacher this year, a shift upwards from 2nd and 3rd grades.

Mr. Tyler DeVries is into his second full year, leading the 5th and 6th grade classroom. This year's realignment alleviated the 4th grade from his workload, allowing Tyler to focus more on the needs of the older students.

7th and 8th grade students are again privileged to have Mr. Andy Kuiper as their teacher, and thus there was less of an impact from the classroom realignments.

Mrs. Kim Kuiper has continued in her role as Art teacher, an enriching experience for our students to use and discover their creative talents.

Unfortunately, the pandemic mandates and lockdowns meant some of our programs and student activities could not take place as in years past. Despite this setback, our music staff continued to diligently teach and invest into our students. With the loosening guidelines for in-person attendance, we were able to have our all-school program in April. Thanks to Eric and Christa Phelps, Michelle Pipe, and Marilyn Adams for a very enjoyable evening of music and singing.

Mr. Jim Holstege has taken on his leadership position with much energy and enthusiasm. As both Principal and Director of Development, Jim has a lot on his plate and has very capably conducted himself in this vital role.

It would be impossible to name all the many contributions each of our teachers and staff make every day. The challenges of this past year have required a unique ability to adapt to changing circumstances, handle any number of unforeseen emergencies, and keep the school running smoothly each day. Their work doesn't begin or end in the classroom, and they are intimately

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3RD-4TH GRADES CLASS TRIP



Mrs. Thompson's class took an end-of-year field trip to the Meijer Gardens. After exploring the grounds and a sculpture tour, the students went to GR Township Park for a cookout, water balloon fight, and a kickball game. It was a hot day that felt like summer and was a great way to close out their year!



ASSOCIATION SECRETARY REPORT *continued.....*

involved in much of the educational decisions and functional management of the school. In addition to being educators, our staff and teachers frequently act as problem-solvers and highly-valued counselors to our students and families. We want to thank them again for the positive impact they each have on our school community.

SECRETARY POSITION

After many seasons capably serving as School Secretary, Karen Ophoff will be retiring at the end of this school year. Karen has been the friendly face of the school, fulfilling so many unseen tasks, and willing to help wherever needed in the classroom. The Board expresses our greatest appreciation for Karen's faithfulness in her work over these many years. In response, the Board announces that Debbie Baldwin has been hired as Lead Secretary and Lorelie Thompson as Assistant Secretary. We look forward to their serving in this capacity and the skillsets they each bring to the position.

FINANCES & PROMOTERS

Financially, the school is in a good position, having been blessed with the necessary resources for maintaining the school. We certainly appreciate the labors and sacrifices of our parents in order to meet their tuition requirements.

In addition, we express our gratitude to those who support the school through the annual Operating Fund Drive, a bedrock component of our annual budget.

The Foundation continues to provide monetary gifts to the school each year, both directly to the operating budget and indirectly by means of the tuition reimbursement program for our families.

Thanks also to the Promoters for another successful year of fundraising events that fill so many miscellaneous financial needs, and also provide opportunities for Eastside to engage with the larger church community.

SUMMATION

Finally, we must not overlook the fact of our peace and unity here at Eastside. As with years past, we see our community of supporters work together for a common purpose, contributing towards our stability and longevity. In God's providence, He has bestowed these gifts and blessings upon Eastside and countless more besides.

And Lord willing, we now look ahead towards celebrating our 25th year educating our covenant children. All our thanks must ultimately be directed to our Lord, and we rest in the confidence of His faithfulness.

With thanks to Him,

[The Board of Eastside Christian School](#)

[Brian Baldwin, Board Secretary](#)

EASTSIDE GRADUATES

Grant Hop and Josiah Dykstra will be graduating from Eastside this year on Thursday afternoon, June 3 D.V. Their class text is Philippians 3:13-14 - "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Congratulations to Grant and Josiah, and we wish them God's blessing as they move on to Covenant next year!





PROMOTERS SECRETARY REPORT

Debbie Baldwin

Despite the uncertainty that we faced at the beginning of the year, the Promoters had another successful year of fundraising. We had to forego Stop&Shop because of COVID restrictions, but the online auction was able to make up that money with a record year. Banket was handled differently this year; instead of one large sale, we held a smaller sale in the fall and added a second sale in the spring.

Over the course of the school year, we raised the following:

- Apple Sale | \$276
- Banket Sale | \$3,300
- Online Auction | \$21,176

The April Promoters meeting is always a rewarding meeting, as the school board and others bring their requests for ways that the society can help the school with their earnings from the year. We approved these projects and requests at the April meeting:

- Finance the All Belong Contract | \$6,500
- Chromebooks | \$4,000
- Charging Station for Chromebooks | \$700
- Paint the school hallways | \$4,900
- Replace kitchen countertops and cabinets in 5th-6th classroom | \$3,900
- Replace 15 tables | \$1,500
- Teacher classroom requests | \$400

At the end of the fundraising season, the Ways and Means committee evaluated our current fundraisers. Stop&Shop, while a beloved tradition, has been increasingly difficult to execute successfully. In the past years, we have found that many vendors are moving to an online-only model and do not want to commit to Saturday craft shows. Then COVID hit, and it served as a catalyst for even more vendors to change their business model to prioritize online sales at the expense of in-person fairs and craft shows. In the past few years, Stop&Shop was pulling in less money than years prior. So after much discussion, the Promoters voted to end Stop&Shop, but committed to replacing it with an event that would bring people to the school. At a special meeting in May, we decided to replace it with a Walk-A-Thon fundraiser. Eastside students will get pledges to walk laps on the school grounds, and while parents and supporters gather to watch the students, we will sell Stop&Shop's famous chicken salad croissant lunch and baked goods. We realize that Stop&Shop is not easy to replace, so there may be some trial and error for a few years until we find a successful substitute!

We are thankful for a successful year of fundraising, and are grateful to God for providing for our school in this way. In a year of uncertainty God was certainly faithful to our school!

JUNIOR HIGH CLASS TRIP

The 7th and 8th Graders took their end of the year class trip on May 20 and 21. On Thursday the group went to Camp Manitou-Lin, and tried their hand at archery and the high ropes course! The next day they toured the USS Silversides, a World War II submarine, and then went to an Escape Room.





WE TAKE SO MANY THINGS FOR GRANTED!

Mrs. Anita Haak

While Covid has been difficult for all of us, our 1st-2nd Grade teacher has found it especially challenging, as her husband lives in a nursing home and she was not allowed to see him in person for long periods of time. She agreed to write about her experience over the past year.

The year was moving along so nicely. Students were working hard. There had been only two days school cancelled – a power outage in September and a snow day in February. The weather was beautiful and spring-like.

However, the morning of Thursday, March 12, we were beginning to wonder if something was going to happen. We had been hearing of the “Coronavirus” – a flu-like sickness that began in China and was spreading all around the world. We heard colleges in Michigan were closing due to it. Sickness in our school, and perhaps concern about the coronavirus, caused some mothers to come in after school that day to disinfect and deep-clean. In the morning I talked with Mr. Kuiper and we both knew that “Calvin University had not closed.” But, other than this, it was a regular day of school. No one guessed that it would be the last regular day for the school year!

That afternoon Michigan Governor Whitmer announced that all

schools were to close the following Monday. This closing was supposed to be through April 6.

Eastside decided to cancel the half-day we were to have the next day so we could make plans as to what to do. We had a teachers’ meeting that morning and it was decided to make packets of work for the students. We agreed that we should just worry about the basic subjects. After the meeting I made packets for the following week.

The next week we had another very helpful meeting – staff with the school board and education committee of the board. Certain subjects were deemed essential core subjects and had to be worked through. Parents were advised as to what they could do to enhance their child’s learning. It was determined that cumulative grades for non-essential subjects would be based on what had been done up to that point in the year.

1ST-2ND GRADES CLASS TRIP



Next the executive order changed to schools closed until April 15 with the added caveat that teachers were not allowed to go to school. We took home as many materials as we could for working from home. First grade phonics and spelling workbooks were brought to the homes. The next week we were told teachers could go to school, but not parents, so, that Monday our principal and vice-principal delivered the work packets (you think they were glad we weren't a larger school?). During that week we were told teachers and parents could come to school and that eased the strain as far as getting things to the students. Subsequently, state officials told us schools were to be closed through the end of the year. By making packets, getting the necessary supplies to our students, and teaching some things virtually to our students, we managed to get through the rest of the school year.

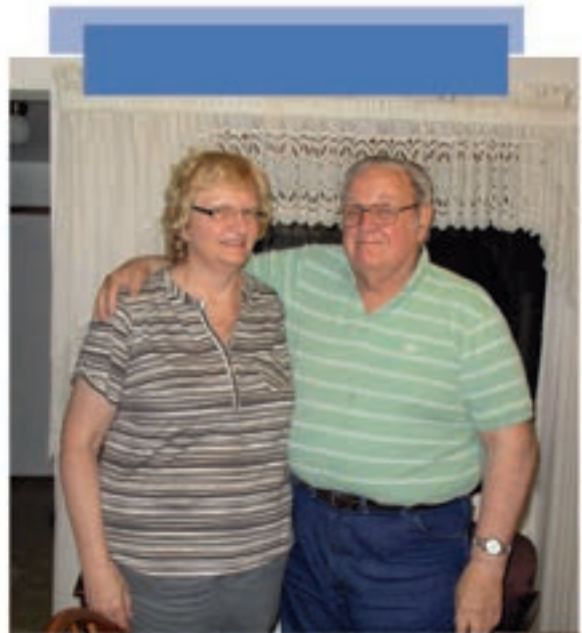
During these weeks the school board met several times and decided that our school year would end on May 22. They also decided that May 1 we would not have school (probably to give parents a break).

At the same time all this was going on I was dealing with not being able to eat supper with my husband everyday at the nursing home as I had done. Yes, the day after school closed, I received a call that the nursing home was closed to visitors and I would not be allowed in.

Shortly after that the nursing home set things up so that I virtually visited with my husband every night after supper. This helped because, although it could not adequately replace my nightly visits, I could see and talk with him. It was also frustrating, however, when I saw things that I couldn't help with or correct. Lots of emailing with the home occurred. Soon the home started facilitating window visits, but because an aide had to be there to hold the phone for him we had no privacy. In August the first outdoor visit occurred; but then, because of a doctor's appointment, my husband had to quarantine. In late September we had one more outside visit. After that, because of covid happening mainly among staff, outside visits were not allowed (it was getting too cold for them, anyway).

During all this time I tried to get designated as an essential caregiver, because then the home could let me in. There were several things that I had done for him that I felt they could not do for him. However, the home would not agree with me. They felt

they had to keep us out (except for compassionate, end-of-life circumstances) in the interest of keeping covid out. I agreed at first, but as time went on I began to disagree more and more. In addition to not seeing their families, residents were unable to eat together or enjoy recreational activities and programs. It became clear all over that residents were declining and dying not from covid but from being kept in isolation in their rooms!



Don and Anita in 2015

Then I learned of a lady in Florida that had taken a dishwashing job in her husband's home in order to be able to spend nights with him. (Prior to this, during the summer, I had asked if I could volunteer at the home, but they were not allowing volunteers in.) Around the beginning of July, this lady began a Facebook page called, "Caregivers for Compromise – because isolation kills, too!" I joined the page and it felt wonderful to be able to connect with others in the same situation.

About mid-July I learned that she had set up a page for each state of the United States to deal with the specifics in each state. Learning this, I went to the Michigan page and joined. There were only 2 members in it – the lady from Florida who set it up and one other. I joined and soon was asked if I would be an administrator. I found out what was involved, and, since it was summer and I felt that I had a few weeks to work hard on this, I agreed. It was a good thing to be a part of because many others joined and there

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WE TAKE SO MANY THINGS FOR GRANTED! *continued...*

have been many helpful posts. Latest government policies, links to relevant articles, ideas of who we could write to, etc., were posted. Several heart-breaking stories were posted, too. The home told me the only way to change things was to contact the governor and health departments. If they changed their policies, the home would be happy to let us in. Amazing to me at this time was how the average person I talked to was not even aware of what was happening in the nursing homes and long-term care facilities.

When school started again I found myself very busy with preparing and teaching 2 grades. In fact, I simply could not do it without two very capable aides (Mrs. Heidi Van Baren and Mrs. Lori Pastoor). I had taught multi-grade classes, but never with the curriculum we use and with so many students. In addition to that, however, this year has also been one of wondering what is going to happen next because of covid.

And we've had some covid problems. We've had families who had to quarantine at home. How to best teach their children was addressed. The school purchased webcams so that those students could listen in to classes. Homework was sent home and we've had to deal with the extra work of grading papers separately from the rest of the class. It was with great joy that all of my students were basically in class from after Christmas until the 2nd week of March. Then, because of covid in their families, some students have had to quarantine again.

Pray for us. Pray that we may have the strength and wisdom and zeal needed to keep going during these difficult times. I have developed a deep appreciation for the many years that I enjoyed where most of the year most of the students were in attendance, and at the worst a student might be out a week or so. Reflecting on it all I can't help but think, "We take so many things for granted!"

PRESCHOOL/KINDERGARTEN SHENANIGANS

To celebrate the end of Preschool, the Preschool and Kindergarten once again threw an Alphabet Parade for the rest of the Eastside students. Each student dressed up as a character that corresponded with a letter (ex. Aaron the Audacious Astronaut), and then walked through the gym throwing out candy to the cheers of the older students. This has become a favorite and much anticipated event in Mrs. Hulst's room! And every year you can count on a minimum of three princesses gracing the halls of Eastside.

