

1. Introducing John Calvin School

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1.1 Our Statement of Purpose

The **purpose**
of our Christian school
is to
assist parents
to educate their children

to develop their talents and potential

to acquire the knowledge,
skills
and
attitudes
for a life of
responsible stewardship
in God's Kingdom



1.2 Foreword from the Principal

We've reached another mile post. God is gracious! In June, 2005, we will have completed our **thirty-fifth** year of operation at John Calvin School. If an average of 20 students graduated during these years, then 700 students will have had the privilege to receive Reformed instruction at this school. Many of these graduates have served, or are presently serving on our school board, or one of its committees, or in other leadership functions in our community. Hundreds have been blessed as mothers and fathers; some of our first graduates are grand-parents!

Those who walk through the school or enjoy the playgrounds may find it hard to imagine how the school has changed over these many years. Looking back, we must all conclude that we have been very blessed since 1970, and the very humble beginnings of John Calvin School. Things thought to be almost impossible then, are a fact today. God has indeed blessed us in many respects!

As mentioned above, an anniversary also makes us realize that as time marches on, the former parents of this school have been largely replaced by the first generation of students in this school, who have graduated into adulthood and now share the responsibility of parenthood and board governance. They now have the task to promote Christian education in the same spirit as their parents did when the school was established. As new people become involved in our school, it becomes even more important that everyone is reminded about the purpose and structure of our school and school society. This **Parent Handbook** must serve this purpose.

Over the years our school has also received a greater profile with our community at large, and with the Ministry of Education. As a **Group 1** school we receive funding for all our qualifying students. This government funding also entails another aspect of accountability to the Ministry for what we do at school; the Ministry in turn, is accountable to the public. Not only do we receive an External Evaluation every **six** years, but every two years our school receives a **monitoring visit** from the Inspector. Also in the latter context, this Parent Handbook will help to describe who we are, and why we are here.

Most importantly, however, our **supporting parents** and **donors** must have a clear image of the school where their children are educated. What is our vision, or how does our Reformed world view impact on the culture at school, its curriculum? What kind of teachers teach our children? What are our responsibilities to the school and to each other in our Society?

I sincerely hope that this Parent Handbook will provide you with the information you need as parents in this learning community.

June 9, 2005
Mr. P.H. Torenvliet, principal



1.3 Our School's Name: John Calvin School

- A Canadian Reformed School

Though our school has a relatively short history (1970 to the present), nevertheless, the roots of our school community are embedded deeply in history. John Calvin (1509-1564) was one of the great church reformers of the 16th century. Like Luther, he subscribed to the three important tenets of the Reformation:

- 1.) The pre-eminence and supremacy of Holy Scripture (*sola Scriptura*),
- 2.) Justification by faith alone (*sola fide*),
- 3.) Salvation by grace alone (*sola gratia*).

Also similar to Martin Luther, Calvin taught that **all** believers have the office of priest, prophet and king. But he went much farther than his older contemporary. The French reformer stressed the importance of the **whole** Bible (*tota Scriptura*) and that the central focus of our whole life must be lived to the glory of God. Therefore all of life, our families, the church, the school, science and learning, and our daily work must all be permeated by this world view. As faithful Christians we are called to be “readable letters of our Saviour Jesus Christ.’ In this way we acknowledge God’s sovereignty over all of life, all of creation.

Most of the students at John Calvin School are descendants of Dutch immigrants who left The Netherlands after World War II. Through these Dutch Calvinists, the influence of Calvin’s work has come to us today in the reformed faith rooted in the sixteenth century Reformation.

In giving John Calvin’s name to our school, we not only honour the man who laboured so faithfully in God’s kingdom, but more importantly, we acknowledge that we still uphold the same faith which he proclaimed and defended.

Our school is a **Canadian Reformed School**; Canadian, because the staff and students are Canadians with their task and calling in this country; Reformed, because our faith is rooted in the reformed faith. As a Canadian Reformed School, we also have a special identity because our constituency is mostly from families in the Canadian Reformed Churches in our area. The parent/members of this school realize that there must be a very close confessional unity between the families, the churches and the school. Therefore this school subscribes to the same doctrinal basis as the Canadian Reformed Churches: **the infallible Scriptures and the Three Forms of Unity**, namely, the Belgic Confession (1559), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) and the Canons of Dort (1618).

1.3.1 Reformed Christian Education in the 21st Century

Society in the Western world has undergone many significant changes during the last fifty years; we have moved from the closing years of modernity as expressed in the scientific triumphalism of the Space Age and the Atomic Age to postmodernity. Scientists still marvel us with their discoveries in Space, and in the nano-world of molecules and atoms. They make us stand in awe of the incredible possibilities of computer electronics and cyberspace. Cell phones, palm pilots, super computers and a plethora of high-speed communications media jostle to capture our attention and investment. And though people can connect with others more quickly, more conveniently and in more ways than ever before, countless people in our Western society are plagued with loneliness and a listless malaise of purposelessness.

In 1900, 98% of Canadians were either Protestant or Roman Catholic, and approximately 80% attended weekly church services. In the 2001 census, 20% of Canadians reported that they attended weekly religious services.

A few more stats of religious data are also telling:

- ▶ if the trend continues, by the year 2023 people who are not affiliated with any church community, will out number those who are;
- ▶ one of the only **major** religious communities, the Pentecostal Assembly, is the only church that has had significant growth: 338 790 (1981) to 436 435 (1991);

- ▶ between 1981 and 1991, Wiccans and other neo-pagans showed the greatest percentage growth of any religious group - 21 080 members, an increase of 281%;
- ▶ native spirituality showed a 175% growth to 29 820 members.

Additionally, the strong influences of secularism, individualism and materialism have grown in almost all religious communities.

Most of the above data pre-date the terrorist attacks of 9/11. In its wake, some people were initially moved toward greater religiosity, but it is obvious that the 9/11 impact has rapidly lost its influence on North American Christianity. Ultimately, it is not **events** that shape our faith, but it is God's Word through the working of the Holy Spirit.

In the context of a Parent Handbook we do not want to dwell on too many details that profile the character of the culture in which we live and work. The above information is sufficient to show that the aggressive anti-Christian forces at work around us are a huge threat to our families. In fact, the family as we have traditionally known it is under siege, both morally and legally! The challenges that confront us as Christian parents and educators are phenomenal. Thanks be to God that we have a strong Christian community with its committed families, Reformed Christian schools and Reformed churches to help us maintain our Christian world view and lifestyle!

Being aware of the many threats to our faith is important, but it is equally important that we are ready and willing to roll up our sleeves to do the hard work of equipping ourselves and our children with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will continue to make our Reformed community salt of the earth, and a light on the lamp stand. Only by hard work, prayer and the indispensable blessing of God's Holy Spirit will God's Word transform our lives into a pleasing sacrifice of thankfulness to our God.

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1.4 Our Basis

The teachers and the parents of the students in this school accept the infallibility of Holy Scripture, and they adhere to the Three Forms of Unity, as mentioned earlier (1.3). All instruction in the school must be subjected to the above standards.

1.4.1 The Covenant

The place of the **covenant of grace** is central to reformed education because it clearly describes our faith relationship with God, our Creator, and to Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Our “Form for the Baptism of Infants” in our *Book of Praise* describes this covenantal relationship:

“First, we and our children are conceived and born in sin and therefore are by nature, children of wrath so that we cannot enter the kingdom of God, unless we are born again.”¹

We acknowledge that we and our children are unworthy in ourselves, and that therefore we must seek “*our salvation outside of ourselves*” in the redemption through Jesus Christ. Through Christ, God has again become our God and Father and therefore “*we are called and obliged by the Lord to a new obedience.*”²

This **new obedience** means that we strive to live a life of gratitude to God by living in accordance with the principles summarized by Christ in Matt. 22.37:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And you shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

This new obedience to which we are called permeates our whole life, our attitudes to God, our neighbour, creation. Therefore the parents have established the John Calvin School to have their children educated in the perspective of this covenantal world view. Additionally, this same world view must be shared with the teachers so that they can teach in a manner concomitant with the parents’ Biblical perspective.

¹ *Book of Praise*, Anglo-Genevan Psalter, p. 584.

² Ibid.

1.5 Our Mission of Stewardship

The following 5 sub-titles have been taken from the Intermediate Program document, *Mission of Stewardship* written in the summer of 1991 by 6 teachers from 3 of our schools in the Fraser Valley. Each of these sections profiles an important aspect of our school's philosophy.

1.5.1 Religion

Western civilization has generally interpreted religion as being something private, something limited to church life or to the Sunday. Consequently, some people are said to be religious; others are not.

We believe that human life in its entirety is religious. Religion is a way of life. Any way of life is a relationship with God. It is a positive relationship if people act in obedience to God's will; it is a negative relationship if people act in disobedience to God's will. This relationship, whether positive or negative, is ineradicable. Even the atheist who claims to have no religion expresses his belief in a "non-religion." His religion, his way of life, is a negative relationship with God. In his rejection of God he has made himself another god or gods. For every person is endowed with a *sensus divinitatis*³: every person is born with the desire to worship. Man's⁴ knowledge of God is not self-contrived;⁵ Man's response is either a 'yes' or 'no'. Everyone serves a god to direct his/her life's activities. Unless people are rejuvenated to serve God, they will serve themselves or anything else⁶.

Although people are not autonomous, they are responsible for their actions.

They do not merely react; they act. The heart is the root, the core of our human existence. Out of the heart come the issues of life. Everything we do is 'heart work'. The heart is the all-dominating centre of our existence.

The starting point of a Christian way of life is the regenerated heart of the believer, through which he is bound to the Word of God.⁷ This point of departure is a religious deed which determines our relationship to God. But this is also true for the non-Christian whose heart is closed to the Word of God. Therefore, the door to knowledge is not our head, but our heart.

1.5.2 Absolutes

The modern notion that the process by which students learn is more important than the content of their learning suggests that the final goal is not as significant as the way by which to reach that goal. This can only be so if the final goal, the content of what is learned is not absolute. Christian schools emphasize strongly that there are absolutes which are true, not because man finds them to be true but because God reveals them as such. The search for the truth does not set the sinner free, but the truth itself does. "If you will continue in my word you will be truly my disciple, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31,32). In their present condition neither teacher nor student will be able to attain all of the truth but only as much as God chooses to reveal. "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood" (1 Cor. 13:12). The balance between process and content oriented strategies may not confuse the student into thinking that the truth behind a concept depends on his making it meaningful and truthful. The Christian school does not promote

³ Romans 1 & 2

⁴ The masculine gender is used here in a generic sense. The feminine gender is usually included.

⁵ Rom. 1:18-20; Heb. 1:1, 2; 2 Peter 1: 21

⁶ Phil. 3.18, 19; Acts 14. 16, 17; L.D. 3, q. & a 8; Bel. Conf. Art. 2 & 17

⁷ Proverbs 4. 13; Canons of Dort III/IV, Art. 1

a false notion of tolerance which requires students to accept all points of view.

1.5.3 Learner - Focus

All learning and teaching centres on Christ in that it focuses on His work of redeeming all of Creation. Every concept that can be known, every skill that can be attained and every attitude that can be held is under the influence of sin. Thus everything a teacher can teach or a learner can learn, cries out for redemption in Christ. The teacher will be concerned that the student indeed learns about this. Out of this desire to teach effectively and to honour the student's uniqueness, he will take careful note of the way in which the individual students learn. In his teaching methodology he will be learner-focused, so that he employs methods and strategies that will best enable the students to learn. This does not mean that the child will be autonomous in the sense that **he** decides what and how he will learn. He will be encouraged to take greater responsibility for his own learning but the **teacher** remains responsible for the choice of learning content and the strategies used. It is important that even in the manner in which students acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes, they learn to be self-sacrificing, humble, and morally upright.

1.5.4 Active learning

Educational research has clearly demonstrated that "students learn from direct experiences". (B.C.I.P., 1990) Learning will become more meaningful if students are involved in planning, sharing information, organizing, and carrying out the learning situation.

Students must also learn to be accountable for their work, and therefore, the teacher should help the students set learning goals and help evaluate the success of their work.

Active learning can be implemented across the curriculum in a variety of ways. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that the **teacher** is responsible for the students' learning. Also, the use of student-focused activities must be in keeping with the nature and character of each subject on the curriculum.

1.5.5 Enabling and Facilitating

Since **knowledge is not personally constructed and truth is not relative**, a teacher has to carefully consider in which manner (s)he helps the student learn. (S)He not only provides the setting that motivates and facilitates the student's active learning, but (s)he also guides them to discoveries and experiences that will enhance their growth as responsible disciples. (S)He is not simply a passive 'guide on the side', but one who is actively involved unfolding what is culturally significant, and guiding into the principles of life. It is the teacher's responsibility to structure the classroom in such a way that mastery of procedural knowledge and skills does not come at the expense of content acquisition.

1.6 The Background and History of our School

1.6.1 Purpose

The Canadian Reformed School of Abbotsford has been constituted by members of the Canadian Reformed Church of Abbotsford, Yarrow, Chilliwack, and the American Reformed Church of Lynden, WA. These members wish to have their children educated according to the norms of the Bible. They believe that the promise that they have made to the LORD at the baptism of their children can be fulfilled best by also supporting and by sending their children to a Reformed school in which brothers-and sisters-in-faith teach and guide their children in harmony with what parents teach them at home, and with what they hear proclaimed in church each Sunday. The school has therefore been established to **assist the parents** in this task, **not** to replace the parent.

A close look at the mission statement articulated by the B.C. Ministry of Education will reveal that the development of “knowledge, skills and attitudes” are directed toward “a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy.”⁸ We firmly believe that all our endeavours and attitudes must be clearly focussed on seeking God’s glory in our service to Him and our neighbour. Therefore our Mission Statement says that “*purpose of our Christian school is to assist parents to educate their children to develop their talents and potential to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes for a **life of responsible stewardship in God’s kingdom.***”

1.6.2 History

The Society was instituted in 1964. When the present building became available in 1970, the Society began a school which taught students in grades one through seven. By 1973, John Calvin School had been expanded to include grades 8, 9, 10. In 1977, however, the Society struck an agreement with the Canadian Reformed School Society in Surrey to cooperate in the operation of a junior and senior high school, Credo Christian High School, which was established in Langley. Subsequently, parents from Sumas and Lynden WA also requested admission for their children. Students from the John Calvin School catchment area are bussed to Credo Christian High School in buses operated by the Abbotsford Society.

1.6.3 Covenantal Education: a Communal Task

In Africa it is said that it takes a whole village to educate the youth. Similarly, the Society is of the conviction that the education of the covenant youth is the responsibility of all of the members of the supporting church communities. For that reason the Society has also sought the support of people and families, old and young, who have no children at school. This is also the reason for the decision taken in 1972, that families who send their first child to school who have not supported a Christian school for at least three years before Grade One, (provided they have lived in a place where a Christian school was available), are to pay an initiation fee equivalent to three year’s membership. This is only a minimum, however; we actively seek the support of the **whole** membership of the supporting churches.

1.6.4 Children of Non-members

The Society operates the John Calvin School to serve the needs of the members of the supporting church communities. There may be parents who are not members of these churches who desire to send their children to our school. Such requests are dealt with individually, and require convincing evidence of principled reasons for that desire, not reasons of convenience.⁹

⁸ *Pimary Program*, B.C. Ministry of Education, 1989

⁹ See Constitution and By Laws of the Canadian Reformed School Society of Abbotsford: Enrollment (5.2.2.)