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Cornerstone Christian COURIER

Cornerstone Christian Academy: 1997-2012 *Lessons Learned Along the Way*

by April Kinzinger, Director of Development

October 12, 2003. It was a Sunday, and a very special day at Cornerstone. On this particular day, Cornerstone kids and their parents, teachers, administrators and board members came to the school to write verses on the new concrete floors before the carpet was to be installed. Almost 200 people were here that day, and verses were written in marker up and down the halls. I took pictures of every one of them. Many were favorite verses, some were even written in Greek and Korean. But I believe one verse in particular written that day captured the entire Cornerstone story. Third grader Drew Detloff (now a Cornerstone senior) picked Romans 8:31 and wrote in the east hallway as well as a third-grader could:

If God is for us, who can be against us?

Certainly we have experienced this verse! So much has happened since late 1996 when the decision was made to begin an independent Christian school in the Bloomington-Normal area. This was God's answer for a small group of people who had committed themselves to pray for such a work to begin. Their prayers were answered when Eastview Christian Church made plans to build a new facility on Airport Road and decided not to take their 20-year-old preschool with them. When Becky Shames was officially hired in January of 1997 to supervise the transition between Eastview Christian Pre-school and a yet unnamed independent Christian school, no one could have imagined that some 16 years later Cornerstone Christian Academy would be what it is today. While it's not always been an easy road, God has taught us so much. Here are some of the lessons we've learned along the way . . .

Lesson #1: No Prayer is Ever Too Big for God

Starting a school is a huge undertaking! By the time I began in April of 1997, we didn't even have a name for the school we envisioned. We thought about geographical names, Bible names and generic names. Nothing was quite right. But a verse from Isaiah 28 caught our attention:

*So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "See I lay a stone in Zion,
a tested stone, a precious cornerstone
for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed."*

Isaiah 28:16

We wanted students at this school to "have a sure foundation," so Cornerstone Christian Academy was born. But having a name for a school and not a location was a problem! Although Eastview continued to give us space for our small preschool until the summer of 1998, we did not have a clue where to go next. Every day we prayed that God would take us to the place of His choosing so that by the fall of 1998 we could open through the third grade.

We continued to look and pray for a building to move into, but nothing seemed suitable. After almost six months of searching, we knew that unless God found a building for us we would have to give up the plans for Cornerstone. It was time to get serious with God. So, on Thursday, October 9, 1997, Becky and I shut the door of her office at Eastview and got on our knees to pray. This time we prayed for everything we wanted in a building and everyone we had talked to about a building. We prayed for the parents of our students by name, and for our board members and teachers. We prayed for "green space" for our students to play during recess, and for every church we had visited. We told the Lord that unless He did this thing for us, our plans were in vain. It was all in His hands. It was a very big prayer indeed.

But no prayer is ever too big for our God.

Lessons Learned Along the Way—continued from front

On the following Sunday, October 12th, 1997, a man went up to Pastor Jeff VanGoethem who was our Board President at the time and stated that the Grace United Methodist Church had a small congregation, but a large building, and had Cornerstone ever considered this as a possible site? We had not, but the following week Becky and I checked it out. It would be a day I would not soon forget.

I had to look up the address of the church, since I wasn't familiar with it. In fact, we've said many times that you almost had to be lost to find it! But find it we did, and when we pulled around the corner from Clinton Street onto Bell Street there stood before us an almost 100-year-old church, and attached to that church a 3-story school building. Although built as a school in the late 50's, it never operated as one. And if that wasn't enough, across the street was a brand new city park with beautiful playground equipment and tons of "green space"! The people of Grace were very willing to lease some room in their building to us, but we soon found out that since it had never operated as a school, we would need to obtain 5 variances and a special use permit from the City of Bloomington to open there. We were told that the paperwork for the variances had to be applied for in just the right manner, because if any of them were denied there would be a year's wait before re-application could take place. The city also informed us that we needed a site plan of the building, something we found out would cost \$3,600. We didn't have \$36.00 much less \$3,600! But we continued to pray, and God answered in an amazing way. He caused the City of Bloomington to look on us as a hardship case, and they waived the official site plan for a draftsman's rendering. Ray Fisher, who in later years would become a CCA Board member, did the rendering for us at no cost!

Becky and I went to the Safety/Engineering office on February 5, 1998 to meet with a "Mr. Carter," who was suggested to us by the City Planner as someone who would walk us through the process of filing for our variances. We waited for Mr. Carter for what seemed to be a very long time, and the receptionist asked if we wanted to talk to another building and zoning officer. We said no, we would wait for Mr. Carter. After another twenty minutes, he was finally ready to see us. We were taken into his office, only to have him leave his desk for a moment to attend to other business. Becky remarked, "I sure hope we are seeing the right man." Upon saying that, his computer's screen saver flashed on the with rolling marquis message: *"This is the day the Lord has made—Rejoice in it!"* God had confirmed again that He was going before us.

On March 18, 1998, we went before the Zoning Board of Appeals for a hearing on our variances. We needed 4 of 6 votes in our favor for the variances to pass. We had been told that the City Planner's office was going to recommend that the Zoning Board deny us the variances for safety reasons having to do with the traffic flow in the neighborhood. It seemed as if everything was stacked against us! But people were praying and fasting for God's will to be done in that meeting. As Becky presented before the Board, it seemed as if a real spiritual battle was raging all around us. Despite those against us, God was for us. The City Planner came and made his recommendation. What we had been told all along did not happen. He recommended that we receive our variances and the final vote was taken. 4 to 2 in our favor.

Our prayers had not been too big for our God.

As students began to enroll for the fall of 1998, we needed so many things! We didn't have the first desk. We didn't own any student chairs. Blackboards, computers, copy machines, teacher desks, overhead projectors—we needed it all and had no money! But we began to pray for specific things that would make a school a school. It was then that we learned another great lesson . . .

Lesson #2: No Problem is Ever Too Challenging for God

One of the things Becky and I had been praying for was a sign for the front of the school. While driving to 806 E. Bell Street on May 12, 1998 to check out the painting and remodeling that was going on, a white "Prairie Signs" van pulled up next to us. I remarked to Becky that I'd been seeing a lot of those vans around town, and should probably call them about a sign for the school. The following day, as I sat at my desk at Eastview, I opened the yellow pages to the sign company ads. I prayed and told the Lord that I didn't have a real sense of who to call, but because there was so little money in the school checkbook, I would call a budget sign place. The man who answered the phone was very helpful and told me that most school signs were 2'x6' and that the one I had envisioned to place in front of Cornerstone was a cedar sign which cost about \$1,000.00. I gulped and told him we didn't have money like that and so he began to describe other types of signs that he could make for us. At the end of our conversation I thanked him and hung up the phone. I wasn't able to picture the other signs he had described for me, and wondered why there wasn't just a "sign showroom" where you could go and pick out a sign. No sooner did I have this thought than my eyes dropped down to a sign ad in the lower left hand corner of the still-opened yellow pages. At the bottom of the ad in very small italicized print it said, *"Come see our sign showroom."* The ad was for Prairie Signs. I jumped up and got Becky and said, "I know where our sign is!" And we proceeded to drive to Prairie Signs. When we arrived, a young man stuck his head out of an office door and asked if he could help us. He would turn out to be the owner of Prairie Signs. We told him we needed a sign. He asked the dreaded question—"What's your budget?" to which Becky answered, "We have no budget. We have no money. We're asking God for a sign." He said, "Well, God sometimes does that." Becky said, "God does it for us all the time!" I had no part in this conversation as I was busy surveying the "sign showroom" wall. As he joined me and began pointing out different types of signs portrayed on the wall, Becky noticed that he was wearing a "W.W.J.D." wristband (do you remember those?). What Would Jesus Do? She soon got my attention by first wildly pointing to her wrist and then to the man. When I saw the bracelet I knew. This man had our sign, he just didn't know it yet!

In the course of our conversation he asked if we wanted a one-sided sign or a two-sided sign. Assuming that a one-sided sign was cheaper, I told him that a one-sided sign would be just fine. It was then he remarked that he had a spoiled sign. It was spoiled on one side, but perfect on the other, and if we wanted it, we could have it. It was one of those cedar signs . . .

We marched to the very back of the warehouse and sure enough, up in a loft was a sign that was spoiled on one side, but perfectly good on the other. When it was finished for us, it stood in front of 806 E. Bell Street for 5 years before it made its way to our new building where it hung on a hallway wall.

Oh, and did I tell you? It was 2'x6'. **No problem is too challenging for our God.**

We were praying specifically for ten computers for our small computer lab. On June 11, 1998, we received a call from Unit 5, offering us exactly 10 computers! We still needed the monitors and keyboards, but we were still very excited. That excitement was nothing compared to what happened just two days later as the Shamesses and the Kinzingers along with one board member attended a "school sale" at Bloomington High School. If you've never attended a school sale, here's what they do: empty every warehouse in the district and take it all to one very large room and stack it! Then it's auctioned off to the highest bidder and what's left is disposed of. We attended the District 87 sale that Saturday morning and to our great delight saw stacks and stacks of desks and chairs, and tables full of "school stuff." Knowing the size of our students, we very carefully picked out 45 small wooden chairs and set them aside. When another man began looking at "our" chairs, we panicked and bought them for \$1 each. When the auction began, I remember seeing underneath a table what looked to me to be a large laminator with a roll of laminate on it. Machines this size generally cost about \$2,500.00. No doubt it is broken, I thought, but perhaps we could have it fixed. When the auctioneer came to that table he asked, "Who wants anything on this table for \$1?" The woman standing next to me wanted the laminator herself, but I spoke first and got it! When we took it back to the school and plugged it in, it worked perfectly. Up until recently, we used it on a daily basis. If you've read the latest story in October, then you know that God has already miraculously replaced it at no cost to us. But back to the school sale . . .

By the time we left the sale that Saturday morning, we had purchased 120 desks, 90 chairs, the laminator, computer monitors and keyboards, software, a complete phone system, two overhead projectors, teacher desks, tables, and study carrels. Our grand total—(remember the 45 chairs we paid \$1 each for) - our grand total was \$52.00.

The problem we found so challenging was really not a problem at all for our God. But it taught us yet another lesson . . .

Lesson #3: No Provision is Outside of God's Ability

As the summer of 1998 came to a close, it was time to order curriculum. We did not as yet have tuition money coming in, so with just under four weeks until school started, Becky picked up the phone and called the curriculum company and placed our very first order, believing that God would provide the thousands of dollars we did not yet have. Meanwhile, I was busy trying to learn "development." A donor we didn't know and weren't sure how he came to be on our mailing list had sent us first a \$100 check and then a \$500 check. This was huge! I told Becky we should take him to lunch to say "thank-you." Becky got on the phone and called him. He seemed unsure whether he wanted to come to lunch with us, but Becky told him we would love to meet his wife as well, so arrangements were made for our very first "donor" lunch. We had a wonderful time with this young couple who had no children of their own, but had blessed us as donors. We shared with them some of our "God Stories;" of how faithful God had been to us as we prepared to begin our elementary program.

The following week I received a call from them asking us for the address of the Bell Street school. They had a "treat" to send us. I hung up the phone and wondered what it might be, first thinking that it could be a vacuum cleaner since we didn't have one of those and had just installed some carpet in several rooms. But I doubted that they would send one through the mail so that thought was dismissed pretty quickly. We didn't have long to wait because the following Monday, August 3, 1998 we received their "treat." It was a check for \$25,000. You all should have been there that day in the parking lot at Bell Street! To say we were overwhelmed would be an understatement! But that wasn't the end of the story. You see, the following day the curriculum company called Becky and told her that they had never heard of Cornerstone Christian Academy in Bloomington and so would have to have the money for the books up front before they would ship them to us. The money we didn't have the day the books were ordered was now in the bank.

When Becky tells this story, she talks about how personal God was to her. If the curriculum company had told her the day she placed the order that the money would be needed up front, she would have been devastated. Instead, God allowed her to place the order knowing that the money would be coming at the precise time we would need it.

No provision is outside of His ability.

We know that God cares about the little things; He's involved in the details. One of the "little things" that we needed in the fall of 1999 was a white board for our music teacher. We knew we had one in a crate which we had been storing for a year since its donation, so we opened the crate to take a look. The whiteboard was framed in oak, but was very dirty. We cleaned it up and it soon looked like new. The only problem was that it needed to be moveable, so we thought we would have to buy one on a stand with wheels. I had the crate taken downstairs to the dumpster outside, but it was too large to fit into it so our men leaned it against the side of the dumpster. The dumpster was visible from Becky's office on the top floor, and she noticed later in the day that the crate had blown over and was now

laying broken on the asphalt. We went back down to right the crate again, and when we did, it fell apart to reveal a second section of the crate which contained beautiful oak legs on wheels.

Even the wind obeys God.

But I think my personal favorite story of God's provision is the bathroom story. In July of 1999 we made the decision to build out bathrooms on the top floor of the Bell Street building. The church offered us \$6,000 to do the work, but because we had always prayed to be a blessing to this small church that had taken us in, we refused it, telling them that we believed God cared even about bathrooms and we would trust Him to provide for them. So we began to pray for bathrooms, and God began His work. I called a bathroom place and talked to a saleswoman telling her I would like two 6' vanities with double sinks and that I didn't care what color they were. Did they have any scratch and dent? She checked and called me back. She told me, "No, we don't have any damaged vanities, but I've decided to pay for half of this myself." A tile store gave us floor tile at cost, and we had electricians and plumbers donate their time and supplies. Two families took their own mirrors down at home and brought them to the school so we could have mirrors in our bathrooms. When it came time to order hallway doors, I called Jerry from Woodford County Window & Door. We were finishing three additional classrooms by those bathrooms, so we needed a few custom doors made as well as bathroom doors. Jerry came to the school and measured, but it took slightly longer than he had anticipated, so he arrived at his next appointment a little late. When he told the homeowner (who happened to be a Cornerstone donor) that he had just come from Cornerstone where he had measured for doors, our donor called me and said, "This can't be a coincidence, just how much are those doors going to cost you?" I told the donor the quoted price. Within the week we received a check for the amount of the doors—and \$10,000 additional for the Student Assistance Fund!

My husband Dave was putting in a dropped ceiling and we needed 2000 square feet of ceiling tile. He asked me if I had contacted State Farm and asked them for ceiling tiles. I said I hadn't and was pretty sure they wouldn't give us any. But he persisted in telling me to go ahead and ask, so I wrote the letter to State Farm asking for ceiling tile as soon as possible, because school was scheduled to start in less than a month. While work continued on the bathrooms, I had no response to my letter. By August 2, 1999 the bathrooms had taken shape, but the ceilings had yet to be completed. That particular morning, Becky and I were getting ready to pray together when Dave came into the office and told us to be sure to pray that we would hear from State Farm that morning, because otherwise in the afternoon he would be going to Menard's to buy ceiling tile. So we prayed that morning to hear from State Farm, even though I knew they didn't give new ceiling tile away.

You can probably guess what happened. Yes, at 9:30 that morning I got a call from Mr. Tucker at State Farm. He said to me, "We don't ever give ceiling tile away [I knew that!], but if you come right now I will give you all you want." I was dumbfounded. Dave got into his truck and went to pick up all the ceiling tile we needed from State Farm, and the ceilings were finished. The bathrooms were ready.

Except for the stalls. What happened next taught me another huge lesson . . .

Lesson #4: No Plan is Ever Right Unless it's God's Alone

School began that month and everything was in place in our new bathrooms except for the stalls. We found quickly that no one really likes to use bathrooms without stalls! I decided by November of 1999 that God had almost finished the bathrooms we had prayed so hard for, but He now probably wanted me to complete the job. So I called a commercial bathroom company to get the pricing of some custom stalls. The company told me that we would first have to draw the bathrooms out on graph paper, submit the drawings along with a check for \$1,000 and they would create blueprints from the drawings. We would then have our installer (who would be my husband, Dave) check out the blueprints before the final bathroom stall order was submitted. Well, Becky spent the better part of a day in the bathrooms, drawing them on graph paper. We cut the check for \$1,000 (gulp!) and I took the drawings to the company. Our bathroom stall blueprints were ready the day before Thanksgiving, so I picked them up and took them home for Dave to look at, but it was Thanksgiving and a busy time, so the blueprints sat on the desk all that weekend. Monday came and I realized I had forgotten to have Dave check them out. Tuesday came and went, and then Wednesday. I was kicking myself for my forgetfulness, when on Wednesday afternoon the unthinkable happened.

A truck pulled up in our parking lot and unloaded bathroom stalls.

Unbelievable! But here's what happened. Eastview Christian Church was in the process of moving from their Towanda Avenue location to their new facility on Airport Road. The old building was to be torn down, but they allowed another church to come and take whatever was left that might still be useful. The men of this church took pews and other items and loaded them into their truck. Two men went into a downstairs bathroom and pulled out the bathroom stalls and loaded them. While driving back to their church one of the men asked the group why the stalls had been taken. The men responded saying that perhaps they could use them sometime, to which another man (a Cornerstone Dad) remarked that Cornerstone Christian Academy needed bathroom stalls! They turned the truck around and came and brought them to us. They were not the custom ones that I would have ordered, but Dave was able to cut them, weld them and bolt them together so that they fit perfectly. Later, when I would give tours of the school to visitors, I would always take them into the bathrooms and tell the story and the lesson I learned. God had known all along the plans and the timing He had for our bathroom stalls and kept me from making an expensive mistake! In fact, when I called the commercial bathroom company back and told them the story, they refunded our \$1,000.

God's plans are ever right, and always perfect.

In the fall of 2000 it became evident that we would have to move part(s) of the school to other locations. We soon expanded into the Faith United Methodist Church who took in our preschool program and Second Presbyterian Church who gladly housed our upper school. But we knew that we needed a building of our very own—a real school, with a gym and a large parking lot as well as ample classrooms for everyone to be under one roof. How would that happen? Where would we get the money to afford such a place? God was about to teach us another important lesson . . .

Lesson #5: God Alone is All-Powerful

Finding the perfect school location can be difficult! However, we had never put much stock into the “location, location, location!” adage because no one would have ever picked Bell Street in Bloomington as a proper place to begin a school. So when one of our board members just happened to be talking with a business man in our community asking him his opinion about where to relocate, nothing would have surprised us. The business man pulled a McLean County plat book from his desk, opened it, and pointed to a piece of property located 7 miles east of Towanda-Barnes Road which he owned. It seemed a little far, east of a small town named “Holder,” but we drove out there and had a look, praying for God’s will. We decided to fast and pray the following Monday-Wednesday.

On that Tuesday of our fast, something quite unexpected happened. The business man had approached a farmer who owned 78 acres 4 miles closer to Bloomington and asked him if he would be willing to sell it to him. The farmer was agreeable, and the deal was made. And on Nov. 1, 2001, we were given the property. We became landowners.

But owning land and having a building to put on that land are two different things. It would take an act of God to accomplish what in our eyes was so impossible. But the God who cares about signs, desks and chairs, and bathrooms also cares about buildings, and when we showed a drawing of the building we envisioned to be Cornerstone Christian Academy to a business man in Bloomington, he pulled out a check from his pocket and handed it to me. It was to give us a start on our building fund, he said. The check was for \$400,000.

God alone is all-powerful.

We learned a lot about the power of our great God in the months that followed. We met with grandparents who pledged \$3,000 per month. We met with other grandparents who pledged \$30,000 for our building. We even sat down in Dunkin’ Donuts with a couple who decided to forego building a new house of their own so that they could help us build a school. They pledged \$100,000, but gave much more.

The money came in big and small amounts, but with every check we received we thanked our powerful God.

The building went up and we readied ourselves to make the move to what we have called “the most beautiful land.” But God was not yet done showing His power to us. I remember this next story well . . .

During the building process, our Athletic Director John Schwartz would come into my office on a somewhat regular basis asking me about scoreboards for the new gym. Did we have some ordered? I told him that scoreboards were not in the budget, but I would make a call to Central Catholic who had just moved into their new building. Perhaps they would be getting rid of their scoreboards from their old building. So in August of 2003, I called their office and talked to the administrator there. Did they have scoreboards? No, she said, they’ve been promised to St. Mary’s, one of their elementary schools. I told her to keep Cornerstone in mind if there might be other items to dispose of. She said she would and we hung up. Meanwhile, John came on a weekly basis asking about scoreboards. I finally decided to look into ordering a small one from the Nevco Scoreboard Company. I downloaded their order form for their smallest scoreboard and gulped at the price tag. Well over \$3,600. I pushed it to the corner of my desk and resolved to pray and wait until the end of the week before placing the order. That was on Monday, October 1st. On that Wednesday, Mr. Lally, a volunteer from Central Catholic called me. He was in charge of disposing of items from their old building. He asked if we would like to come and take a look. He had some chalkboards, white boards, refrigerators, and oh yes, scoreboards. I said, “I thought those were going to St. Mary’s!” To which he answered, “No, they wanted the backboards.” Becky and I met him at the old building that very day. Up in their old gym were two scoreboards, one of which was the exact model I would have ordered the following day. The other one was larger and valued at over \$10,000. Both would be ours for \$900. The following Saturday was spent coordinating volunteers (all our male staff members!) who carefully took them down and brought them to our new building where the royal blue was miraculously transformed into Cornerstone green.

Yes, our God is all-powerful! But we also learned an additional lesson . . .

Lesson #6: God Alone is Faithful

God is faithful to complete what He starts. He is faithful to supply all that’s needed. Here’s the amazing part of the scoreboard story: I told Mr. Lally to thank the administrator at Central Catholic for remembering to give us a call when they had items to get rid of. He looked rather puzzled and said, “I didn’t get your name from anyone. I was sitting at my desk and thinking, ‘who else could I call about this stuff at school?’ And Cornerstone just popped into my head!”

The faithfulness and the power of God. We have been eyewitnesses to it all. I could go on and tell you about how God provided more desks and chairs just last year, how He has expanded our school to include a new high school addition; how He provided our wonderful bus, and how could we ever forget the playground? We have seen that God cares about grass seed, landscaping, and septic fields. He has pro-

vided kilns, copy machines, lawn mowers, keyboards and sound systems and every computer and printer in the building. He has brought us lockers and athletic equipment and even two more scoreboards which will someday hang in yet another gym. He has miraculously provided a soccer field, and a ball diamond. He has allowed us to see graduates from that very first class of elementary students. He has been faithful to bring us an outstanding faculty and wonderfully supportive families. He has been good to us, and so we've learned one more important lesson . . .

Lesson #7: God Alone Deserves All the Glory

When you come through the front door into our building, the first thing you see is the beautiful mural designed and painted by Julie Johnson. The verse is one of our favorites from Psalm 118 and it is intended to shout this lesson to all who read it:

***The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.
Psalm 118:23***

And if you take the time to go to the back hallway, you will see another beautiful mural also painted by Julie last summer. It's from Exodus 20:24:

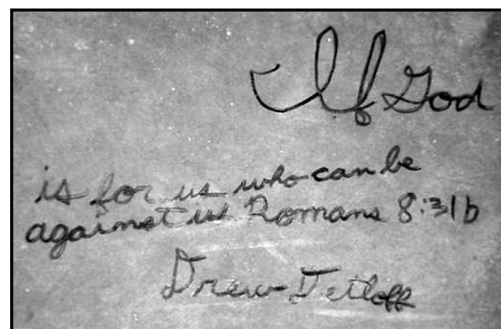
Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you.

God has done it all. He has indeed blessed us! There's nothing special about any one of us, but there is something so very special about Him. And so I come back to the verse first penned by the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul to the Romans, and later copied onto a concrete floor by a third grader. It is now our bold declaration of hope:

If God is for us, who can be against us?

He has indeed been for us. This time of year we think back, and we celebrate all He has accomplished. And because of everything we have seen and experienced, we come to Him in confident prayer that He will not stop His work here. That He will finish our new building. That He will continue to meet our financial needs. That He will not stop transforming our students' lives, and families, and yes, even us.

Certainly I will never be the same.



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"Impacting Culture for the Glory of God"

