

ONTARIO ALLIANCE OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS  
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CHOOSING CHRISTIAN EDUCATION EDITION

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Paul and Indica Ten Den are a new family at Ottawa Christian School.

## New Family Finds Ottawa Christian School a 'Perfect Match'

*School's spiritual emphasis, assistance with special needs clinches decision for family*

*By Michelle Strutzenberger*  
When Indica Ten Den and her husband Paul made the recent decision to send the first of their four children to Ottawa Christian School (OCS), she felt an overwhelming sense of peace.

*"They were willing to go out of their way to help out because they saw that (our son) is a child of God too."*

—Indica Ten Den, parent

In fact, Ten Den says she felt much the same as she did the day she attended a Christian church after being immersed in the Hindu religion for the first 18 years of her life.

"When I came out of that church, I just felt the presence of God so much I felt I could

fly. That's how peaceful it was, and that's how I felt when we made the decision about going to OCS," Ten Den tells *OACS News*.

"It was very clear, the burden lifted... and the peace of God was over both of us."

There were two big factors in the Ten Den's decision for OCS.

They wanted a place where their children would receive a strong foundation in the Christian faith. As they've conversed with principal Paul Triemstra and the teachers and learned more about what the school is all about, they've become convinced this is exactly what their children will receive at OCS.

In addition, because their oldest son has life-threatening dairy and nut allergies, the Ten Dens were looking for a school that could provide the necessary support.

Triemstra has made it clear OCS will do just that.

"They were willing to go out of their way to help out because they saw that (our son) is a child of God too, and it's just wonderful how they were willing to work with us," says Ten Den, noting she sees the school as a "perfect match" for the family.

She recalls feeling tears in her eyes after a comment from Triemstra about the school's mission.

He said the very first order of business for the school is to help ensure children are ready to meet God at the end of their lives.

"I was like, wow, that's exactly what I would want first," says Ten Den, noting that when she envisions the graduation of her children from OCS, she sees them,

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## Parents Give Their Children 'the Best' in Schooling

*School's openness to parental accountability will help ensure its strength, says Suzanne Clarke*

*By Michelle Strutzenberger*  
When Suzanne Clarke envisions her two boys graduating from Halton Hills Christian School in Georgetown she imagines she and her husband Jim will not only be filled with pride, but also a "real sense that we gave them the best."

She sees her sons displaying a deep confidence and

evidence that their years at the elementary school have provided them with tools to live and contribute to their full potential.

Clarke's two boys, who are now attending junior and senior kindergarten at Halton Hills, absolutely love their classes, and come home

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## Christian School Empowers and Sparks Passion in Students, says Mom

*'There is a caring value amongst the teachers'*

*By Jennifer Neutel*  
Mona Lancaster saw the difference Christian education can have when she witnessed her oldest daughter get inspired by a teacher for the first time.

The daughter enrolled at Toronto District Christian High School (TDChristian) in Woodbridge for her Grade 12 year, having previously

attended well-reputed public schools. She graduated in the spring, and is working up north as a youth leader and looking forward to going on a mission trip to Costa Rica.

The Lancaster's now have children enrolled in Grade 11 at TDChristian, and Grades 3 and 6 at Holland Marsh District Christian

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## Family 'Elated' with Daughter's First Experiences at King's

*'It is a pleasure to have a school like that available to our kids'*

*By Jennifer Neutel*  
Beverly Ingram and her husband made the decision to enrol their daughter at King's Christian Collegiate in Oakville within five minutes of walking into the school.

When entering the high school she recalls feeling like she was meeting people she had known her whole life.

"Everyone was friendly and

open and just so welcoming and you just got this safe feeling, and I think that's a huge element that the kids require," Ingram tells the *OACS News*.

Ingram says meeting the teachers the first night and knowing that they are at the school to help the students grow and learn was "a wonderful feeling."

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Contact a writer: jennifer@axiomnews.ca or michelle@axiomnews.ca, or call the newsroom at 800-294-0051.





## The Joy of Reading

The librarians of five OACS high schools have banded together to form a book club for students. In the spring, the club had an all-day literacy event at Smithville District Christian High School featuring a presentation by author Eric Walters (pictured at left).

## Caring Environment is Key

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bursting with excitement.

Clarke adds she would love to see that joy continued throughout their education.

The school's caring environment and strong commitment to working with each student as an individual are key elements that she believes will contribute to making this vision a reality, she says.

"You don't get a sense that it's about just getting through the day; it's not about their final mark. It's about them."

She also notes she appreciates the fact that Halton Hills is forward in its thinking, keeping in mind how technology in particular is shaping the future, and seeking to prepare students to thrive in this different sort of reality.

Clarke adds that she values the school's commitment to caring for the individual student and having a close, family atmosphere, even as it grows.

If anything will help keep the school on track with all of this, it's the accountability to the parents whose children attend the school, says Clarke.

"I think that's what missing in the other school systems — the accountability," she says, citing various examples of how Halton Hills leadership and staff, as well as the governance model, make it clear that parents are considered an integral part of the school operations.

She recalls asking that one

change be made with regards to her child's education and being told that if that's what she felt was best, the change would be accommodated because, as the principal told her, "you know your child better than we do."

"Every time I've asked for a meeting, I've been very welcomed," she says, also noting that it's been made clear she doesn't need to set up a time to visit the classroom or even let the teachers know she's coming.

"It's a true partnership between the parents and the school," she says, pointing out how parents are kept abreast of all aspects of school operations including financial concerns through two annual membership meetings, and given the opportunity to vote on key decisions.

"The information sharing is just so open, it's unbelievable," says Clarke, noting that neither she nor her husband attended Christian schools so this is new territory for them.

Reflecting back on the decision to send her children to Halton Hills last year, Clarke says she definitely felt it was the right decision — a feeling that continued for weeks every time she dropped them off.

Even now, and especially when issues arise that need to be addressed, her decision is re-confirmed, she says.

"This is what was meant to be."

# School Partners to Offer Job Training for People Who Have a Disability

Local Christian Horizons branch runs Redeemer Christian High School's cafeteria

By Michelle Strutzenberger

When Principal Chuck Schoenmaker visited the Redeemer Christian High School (RCHS) in Ottawa cafeteria one morning, a person working there, who is supported through Christian Horizons Ottawa Grow, asked him with a laugh why he was out of his office and didn't he have anything to do.

Schoenmaker laughs as he tells this story.

It's one example of how a new partnership between the Ottawa-based Christian Horizons branch and RCHS is generating good things, including laughter.

Christian Horizons works with people who have intellectual and/or physical disabilities, with this particular branch focusing on job preparedness and training.

As of September, Christian Horizons Ottawa Grow is running the RCHS cafeteria.

The idea for a partnership between the two was born out of the experiences of one student who has an intellectual disability, James McCallum, who worked at the school last year.

McCallum was connected

to the school through the efforts of Christian Horizons Employment Co-ordinator, Rob Westgarth.

McCallum had a great time working in the cafeteria three days a week, and the school community also enjoyed his presence.

That positive experience led to discussions about how the two organizations could work together. As a result, several Christian Horizons staff and people they support now visit the school daily to prepare one meal as well as snacks and drinks. They also serve the food over the lunch hour.

Schoenmaker says the success of the initiative is rooted in the leadership provided by Christian Horizons. The staff members who work in the kitchen take the lead in organizing what needs to happen and then delegate jobs to each person.

Program Manager Micah Elson says the arrangement enables Christian Horizons to expand the training and experience they already offer through other venues.

Schoenmaker says he believes the partnership offers

great benefits for both sides.

While the school is able to provide opportunities for



James McCallum (left) and Matt Bowles work in the cafeteria at Redeemer Christian High School.

meaningful work and social interaction; it is also gaining from the multi-faceted gifts Christian Horizons and the people it works with offer.

He points out that the school of about 160 students has always depended on volunteers to work in the cafeteria but has found it difficult to maintain the required level of volunteer commitment year after year.

"Having Christian Horizons come in and take over has been nothing short of a blessing," he says.

## Continuous Curriculum Benefits Children

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School in Newmarket.

Lancaster says she expects to see more of the empowerment she observed in her oldest daughter with her other children.

"As parents, it's a community that's raising your children, and if I can get that out of the Christian school that would be probably the greatest gift they'll give me," she says.

"Seeking an interest in my children enough to create a passion in them for something that they like and are good at — that would be a gift to us."

Lancaster says the Christian

schools aim to encourage students to move from being me-centred to others-centred.

She was homeschooling her youngest two children prior to enrolling them at Holland Marsh. She says she likes the gradual and continuous curriculum taught at the school.

"You can see they expand on everything every year and these kids are going to gain confidence and become more comfortable," she says, adding she did not see this type of learning in the public school materials she used while homeschooling.

She says the Christian school is providing a "moral

compass" for her children. The Bible classes are of special significance, she says, noting the children will see the benefits from the teachings later in life.

One of her children commented on how much more the teachers seem to care than they did at a previous school.

"There is a caring value amongst the teachers; I'm amazed at the energy they put into a day," says Lancaster.

She has suggested ideas to the principal, including to have intramural sports, which have been implemented.

"There seems to be a real mutual respect."

## Featured in the News?

If your school community has been featured in the media, send the story link to [info@axiomnews.ca](mailto:info@axiomnews.ca) to have it posted and shared on the OACS website.

## Exploring Solar Energy

Oshawa's Immanuel Christian School is investigating solar energy production for revenue through the Ontario Power Authority's Feed-in Tariff program.

## OACSF Website

The Ontario Association of Christian Schools Foundation, a charitable organization dedicated to advancing Christian education, launched a new website at [www.oacsfoundation.org](http://www.oacsfoundation.org).

# Family Chooses Christian Education Because of Biblical Worldview

*Having school and home values align is key, says mom*

By Jennifer Neutel

For Tara Hunter and her husband, choosing to send their daughters to a Christian school meant supporting and reinforcing the biblically based values that are central at their home.

The Hunters view school as an extension of home, and it is important to have a school environment that supports

as parents, to really work on the heart issues of our children so that they have a transformed life — not just an external look at things,” she says, noting she and her husband take the main responsibility of educating their children at home.

Because of the many hours children spend at school, it is important they are being

the biblical perspective flows into all subjects that are taught, which would not be the case in other schools, she says.

The Hunter’s two daughters entered Grade 4 and Grade 1 at Holland Marsh District Christian School in Newmarket this fall. They were previously enrolled at a different Christian school.

Hunter says she is excited to join the Holland Marsh school community and hopeful about seeing how her children will enjoy it.

She says she likes that the school has an environment that works with the family as a team. As a stay-at-home mom, she is looking forward to volunteering her gifts at the school.

Thinking into the future to her children’s graduation, Hunter says she will likely feel many different emotions, including happiness for their success and sadness for how quickly their school years have passed.

“I think I will also feel hopeful about the future that their education has equipped them for,” she says.



Mark and Tara Hunter enrolled their daughters Reagan and Lauryn at Holland Marsh District Christian School this fall.

teaching the Bible as truth, she tells the *OACS News*.

“Our goal was to raise children who really know Jesus and His love for them, so that they are equipped to share that hope with others,” says Hunter.

“I think we are called,

taught the same values as they are at home, she adds.

“We’re focused on bringing glory to God in our everyday lives because we have an eternal perspective,” she says.

Choosing a Christian school is important because

## ‘You Just Can’t Help But Want to Go There’

*Continued from p. 1*

As someone who works in the public school system, she says it is amazing to see the difference in the teachers, noting public school teachers are often overloaded with class sizes and seem to lose their directive with the children.

*“She just loves it, she comes home with a smile on her face every day.”*

— Beverly Ingram, parent

“The way the classes are organized and the way the school flows and the openness and light — it’s bright, it’s open, it’s fun — you just can’t help but want

to go there,” she says.

When the Ingrams made the decision to enrol their daughter, Miranda, into Grade 9 at King’s she says she felt calm.

“We were nervous about high school for Miranda. She had some issues with being a Christian in the public system and that made her self-confidence a little wary,” says Ingram. “Once we made the decision and told (Miranda) . . . you could see that the pressure had disappeared, knowing that she was going to be accepted for who she is,” she adds.

Ingram says so far they are “elated” with King’s. It used to

be somewhat difficult to get Miranda to go to school in the morning, but Ingram says she now wakes up two hours earlier and is out of the house in plenty of time for the bus.

“She just loves it, she comes home with a smile on her face every day and she’s met a whole slew of new friends,” says Ingram.

Ingram’s son is in Grade 5 and currently in the public system. The family is considering enrolling him at Oakville Christian School next year, and he is already looking forward to attending high school at King’s.

“It is a pleasure to have a school like that available to our kids,” says Ingram.

## Series Engaging New School Families in Sharing Their Stories

*Hope is that stories will help strengthen OACS schools*

By Michelle Strutzenberger

With the start of the 2010-2011 school year, the *OACS News* service launched a series featuring the stories of families who are new to member schools.

*“And today, the reality is that parents search out Christian schools for many more reasons than simply the Christian world and life view, and I think they’ll find that reflected in these articles.”*

— Ray Hendriks, Director of Advancement, OACS

A number of OACS member schools are experiencing growth and attracting new families, and the goal is to explore why this is happening.

Writers are engaging new families in a dialogue to reinforce and discover the reasons they opted to send their children to an independent Christian school.

The hope is that through these stories, the inspiration, hopes and expectations of new families will spread throughout the OACS community and beyond, ultimately generating positive results for the schools.

For instance, material gleaned from the stories and interview notes could be used to help other schools consider how they might become more successful.

The stories could also strengthen the commitment of current families to attending the schools,

offer a way to reach out to other prospective families and inspire supporters to renewed involvement through financial contributions, referrals or volunteering.

OACS Director of Advancement Ray Hendriks says he expects the series to highlight a diversity of reasons for school growth, something he sees as an exciting trend.

“I think a lot of schools still think that the only reason people enrol their kids in Christian schools is because they have a Christian world and life view,” says Hendriks.

“And today, the reality is that parents search out Christian schools for many more reasons than simply the Christian world and life view, and I think they’ll find that reflected in these articles.”

In addition to providing a clearer picture of the reasons for enrolment today, Hendriks says he would like to see the series encourage schools to “wrestle with their satisfaction with these reasons.”

There is value in member schools constantly examining their vision and mission, he says, and if these direct reports from parents provide additional support for them to do that, then that would be a positive result.

Hendriks adds his hope is that schools will realize the importance of sharing these stories both in their own communities and in the broader OACS context.

“The schools can help us and themselves by encouraging parents to make the reasons for enrolment known to the community,” he says.

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## Achieving Accreditation

Knox Christian School in Bowmanville was accredited by the Canadian Hallmarks Institute, joining a growing list of schools recognized for educational quality.

## Upcoming Conference

The International Transforming Education Conference will take place in July 2011 in Darwin, Australia, designed to invigorate and equip those involved in Christian education.

## Engaging Movements

Follow the growing trend of strength-based organizations and social businesses through reading daily stories and signing up for the Axiom Advocate e-news at [www.AxiomNews.ca](http://www.AxiomNews.ca).

# Principal Adapts Ideas Discovered Through News

*Christian schools are an 'incredible treasure' more people should know about*

By Lisa Bailey  
Willowdale Christian School (North York) Principal Justin De Moor says the *OACS News* program facilitates connections between schools.

*"I think it's a great way to have communication between the schools."*

— Justin De Moor, Principal, Willowdale Christian School

It's also a springboard for ideas, De Moor says. He's adapted ideas for fundraising and class projects discovered through the news service, which provides three news stories weekly on the OACS website.

"I think it's a great way to have communication between the schools," he says.

"I know OACS has been working hard, particularly in the last couple of years, to facilitate discussions at principals' meetings and that kind of thing is important. But I also think that sharing our news is important because those are things that don't normally come up at principals' meetings but are sure helpful."

De Moor also likes the fact that an increasing number of stories, produced by Axiom News for the OACS, carry a "big picture element" in that they examine current trends or feature a collection of schools doing something similar.

De Moor says he can learn about individual things from another principal with a simple phone call but "some of these trends among schools are something I really don't have a lot of time to do research on, so that's where it is helpful, looking more at the big picture and the OACS as a whole."

Accustomed to the interview process as a result of his previous marketing/communications role with Toronto District Christian High School, De Moor says he especially appreciates Axiom's emphasis on double checking names and other facts, welcoming feedback on stories, encouraging use of stories in newsletters and providing links.

De Moor also appreciates the ease with which Willowdale can be featured in the news and the prominence of names, as it instills a sense of pride, recognition and inspiration.

He notes that an *OACS News* story on a 2009 cancer fundraiser at the school has been posted to motivate this year's participants.

Asked what more he'd like to see from the news program, De Moor takes a cue from parents who've said they wish they'd known about his school sooner. He'd like to find a way to generate more traffic to the OACS website so, for example, people can read about local Christian schools.

"I think we've got an incredible treasure here with our Christian schools and I think a lot of people still don't know about it or they don't know the truth about it. So they may hear in passing things about this Christian school (group) or about a local school, but they're not coming in and checking it out," he says.

With serious consideration being given to embracing social media like Twitter and Facebook to help raise awareness of Christian schools, De Moor can see building links to the news program as a way to ensure strengths and positive messages are shared.

# Hamilton High School Director Succeeds with Local Press

*Personal connection, knowledge of what piques media interest key, says Meester*

By Michelle Strutzenberger  
Hamilton District Christian High (HDCH) in Ancaster Director of Recruitment and Advancement Harry Meester has experienced significant success in piquing the interest of local media recently, resulting in great coverage of a school activity, with the strong likelihood this won't be a one-time case.

Like many Christian schools, HDCH had found it difficult to attract mainstream media attention.

*"Keep the information flow going, and I think we need to put ourselves in the shoes of the media and look for things that they are looking for."*

— Harry Meester, Director of Recruitment and Advancement, HDCH

In fact, Meester says he had reached a point of frustration and had all but given up as most of the press releases the school sent to local media were routinely ignored.

This past spring, however, his attendance and presentation at the Hamilton Media Advisory Council meeting resulted in a noteworthy turnaround.

The council's mandate is to act as a conduit between the media and Hamilton's diverse communities. An annual meeting allows for people to make their case as to why the groups they represent should be featured in the news.

As the 16<sup>th</sup> of 18 presenters, Meester delivered a five-minute speech that engaged the audience through humour while driving home a couple

of key points about the importance of HDCH in the community fabric as well as the rich supply of stories it can provide.

Meester recalls that one point in particular drew notable audience interest.

"Think about it," he said. "At our school you've got 350 families shelling out 10 grand each for something they could get for free."

He also noted there are 3,000 children in the City of Hamilton that attend Christian schools every day.

"They're your neighbours, they're your friends, the people going down the street. You need to know more about them," he said, noting he ended the presentation with an open invitation for the press to meet with him and chat as well as visit the school to learn more.

After the meeting, representatives from the seven or eight local media channels present all approached him to learn more and, in many cases, make a commitment to ensure that they did better at responding to the school's request to be storied.

Since that time, one story in particular about the school's fundraising campaign for a local food bank received significant coverage both in print and online by the *Hamilton Spectator*.

Meester says the lessons he's learned through all of this is that it's important to have a personal connection to media personnel.

As a result of the council meeting, for instance, he was able to meet with many key people, put a face to a name and exchange cards.

"So I've developed a bit of social capital with these people, and that's important," says Meester, noting he recommends other schools check with their local media to see if their area has a media advisory council.

"I think it's important for us to recognize that it's not that the media is hostile to us," he adds, highlighting the sparse coverage can probably be largely attributed to lack of information about independent schools and that media outlets tend to be inundated with leads.

Being aware of what the mainstream media is looking for can also help, he says, pointing out they tend to prefer human interest, good news and positive, community-affirming stories.

"Keep the information flow going, and I think we need to put ourselves in the shoes of the media and look for things that they are looking for," he says.

Following up any coverage with a thank-you is also important, says Meester.

He adds schools can consider ensuring dynamic websites that provide an accurate picture of the current school reality to attract more media attention.

HDCH is exploring the inclusion of more livestreaming and a YouTube series, among other elements to make its site as informative and engaging as possible. Meester says the school's communications technology class will likely be recruited to help with this.

To learn more, contact Meester at 905-648-6655.

# Christian School Equips Children for World

*Continued from p. 1*  
as a result of what they've learned at OCS, home and church, ready to "witness to the real world about Christ" — so fulfilling a God-given purpose.

She adds she and her family feel blessed to be able to attend the school, and says they will be doing whatever they can to help spread the word about it.

To other families considering Christian education, Ten Den says they may encounter advice, as she and her husband did, that they could be doing their children an "injustice" by "sheltering" them in a Christian school.

The Ten Den response has been that children have plenty of opportunity for interacting with people of varying beliefs in other

contexts, such as through extra-curricular activities.

What's more important is that they are providing their children a solid foundation so that they are well prepared to stand strong in their Christian faith and also influence society for good, she notes.

"I say to parents; you're not sheltering, you're equipping them to go out there and face the real world," says Ten Den.

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