Part 2

Realizing the Vision
Prelude

Mountain City Christian School stands on the corner of Park Avenue and Mountain Street in Forest, a suburb of Mountain City. The school was founded in 1912 and for its first fifty-one years was located in the city. By the early 1960s it became clear that most of the supporting school community would soon have moved to Forest and other surrounding suburbs so in 1963 the school relocated.

Presently there are approximately six hundred students in kindergarten through grade twelve. Kindergarten and the first five grades are housed in the lower level of the original building that stands along Park Avenue. On the second floor are grades six through nine, which have recently come to be called “middle school.” During the 1970s, the original building became crowded and a building for the high school was constructed facing Mountain Street.

In the late 1970s there was a decline in school enrollment because people were having smaller families. In addition, in the mid-1980s a number of younger parents had moved back into the downtown area of Mountain City and after a few years had started a middle school campus, to the relief of those board members who had become weary of their push for change. To offset this decline in enrollment the school was making an effort to attract students from backgrounds other than that of the traditional supporters of the school. Enrollment is up again with 60 percent of the students being from four churches of the denomination that had originally started the school and the other 40 percent from a variety of denominational backgrounds.

These people of diverse backgrounds bring with them different ideas and expectations concerning Christian education and the school association meetings reflect those differences. Some of the board members remember with nostalgia the times when there seemed not to be so much turmoil; others see this as a new opportunity to examine and clarify the mission of the school and how it applies to the present day.

Central Station Christian School is in the heart of Mountain City in the old railroad station that was recently renovated. The parents who had moved back into the city quickly became aware of a need for Christian schooling not only for their children but also as a service to the inner city, where the children came from a wide range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. With some help from grants from businesses and at great personal expense they worked to implement their dream for what a Christian school should be. They decided to begin with a middle school partly because that was where most of their own children were; mostly, however, it was because they realized the strong influence school and peer relationships have on children as they move through their middle and high school years and are no longer quite so strongly influenced by their families’ values. Presently in its fourth year of operation, the school has seventy-five students in grades six through nine and the parents are hoping to add the high school grades year by year. The business community of the central city has contributed to the endowment fund that allows children of lower socioeconomic families to attend. They view the school as an important way of bringing life back into the center of the city of 150,000 inhabitants.

As Ken Heard pulled away from the curb in front of Central Station, his face wore a puzzled frown. Were the teachers in that small middle school correct when they claimed that the attitudes of students toward each other toward school life, and toward their own calling as students are influenced as strongly by the structure and curriculum of the school as they are by relationships
with the teachers and with each other? School structure and curriculum were pretty much the same in most of the schools with which he was familiar. If you changed either of them, would that really change student attitudes and behavior?

The board had gone along with the teachers' request that the renovation of the old railroad station include a large open activity area surrounded by small individual work cubicles just off the learning center, and he could see that the renovation provided an unusual and attractive educational setting. Rob Boonstra, the architect who served on the Central Station school board, had really caught the vision of the teachers when he designed the school. But arranging the curriculum so heavily around integral units and keeping the students actively involved with the museums and libraries of the city created a completely different learning environment than the one Ken was used to. He had been relieved that their design included a few classrooms such as those he was familiar with at Mountain City Christian, the larger suburban school for which he was also responsible.

As he drove through the tree-lined streets, past the old firehouse with its attractive boutiques and the gabled Warehouse Condominiums, Ken remembered how this area of the city had looked five years ago. The younger professional people who had moved back into the old city at the beginning of the restoration argued that Christian education was needed for their children as well as for the children of the lower-income families in the area adjacent to Station Park, across the street from the front entrance of the school. They decided to begin small, with a school for grades six through nine. The Mountain City board thought the plan was a good one and Ken was enjoying the experience of being involved in the development of a new school in spite of the time it took to travel between the two campuses.

In all fairness Ken had to admit that he had learned more about the possibilities of what Christian education could be during the four years of Central Station's existence than during all of the rest of the twenty-five years he had been involved with schools. Head teacher Karla Hubbard and the other three teachers on the staff were constantly discussing (rather heatedly at times) issues concerning how the structure and curriculum of the school related to their beliefs about schooling as expressed in their mission statement. All of them seemed convinced that the way instruction and learning took place was central to the task of the school but could not be separated from the larger structural issues.

Ken thought Central Station's staff was interesting. Ted Pakula, with his background in science, math, and computers, seemed to serve as the team conscience concerning ecology. Emmy Perez, although only in her second year of teaching, contributed much from a social studies perspective. Sam Freeland's expertise in music, art, and communications brought the community together in wonderful ways. And Karla Hubbard, as well as teaching herself, provided instructional leadership in addition to keeping the school running smoothly.

Since the beginning of his teaching career Ken had thought of a Christian school as being an orderly place where students were taught to have a Christian point of view, to act like Christians, and to be successful in the work that was assigned to them. He knew that was what the parents expected and he saw his task as principal of a parent-controlled school as one of making certain the parents were pleased with their children's schooling. He really believed that in a Christian school the teachers should teach from a Christian perspective and he made sure that at least once a year he had someone, usually a minister or a professor from a Christian college or a coordinator from a Christian school organization, talk to them about what that meant. Some of the teachers got a little tired of such philosophical speeches but he thought it was good for them. Still, Ken wondered whether more than this was needed. Simply talking about a Christian perspective didn't really seem to change anything unless the structures were in place to allow change to occur.

Ken recognized that in some respects the teachers at Central Station had a more difficult task when it came to pleasing parents because the students were from such diverse backgrounds. On the other hand, Karla and the others had insisted from the beginning that the school must be one where the emphasis was on parental involvement and direction rather than parental control. The
constitution was clear that teachers were hired to exercise their professional judgment within the guidelines established by the purpose of the school. Parents who chose to enroll their children in the school were required, with their school-age children, to be interviewed by a committee that consisted of a teacher and a board member. They had to attend sessions in which they discussed the meaning of the mission statement and were encouraged to ask questions about the purpose of the school. Prior to enrollment the students were expected to sign a statement describing the expectations the school had concerning their participation in the school community. All of these expectations had to be met by every school family, whether they paid the regular tuition or qualified for the reduced fees for lower-income families.

The idea of reduced tuition for lower-income families was important to Ken because he was concerned that Mountain City Christian was excluding families who could not pay for it. Christian schooling should be available for every family who wanted it rather than just for those who could afford it. A school that provided education for only middle- and higher-income families would have great difficulty teaching for responsive discipleship.

This engagement of parents in understanding the purposes of the school seemed to make a difference in the expectations the parents had of the school. Ken had attended the association meetings of Central Station and couldn’t help noticing that the atmosphere there was rather different from his own school where some of the parents interpreted "parent control" to mean that the parents could tell the teachers and principal what to do whenever they felt like it. In certain ways, the parents at Central Station seemed to view their teachers with greater respect than the parents at Mountain City Christian did.

Just last Wednesday Ken had listened to Karla and her staff explain to the parents why, to as great an extent as possible, the curriculum should be integrative and why efforts must be made to have the students interact with each other while they learned. Karla said that the integral curriculum begins with the belief that life is already full of meaning before we separate it into subject areas and that this fullness of meaning can only be found in Jesus Christ. An integral curriculum does not reject the academic disciplines; rather, it gives them a less dominant role in the content and structure of curriculum. The explanation had helped him as well as the parents see schooling in a new light.

Privately, Ken was surprised by the large turnout for the meeting and suspected it was because of the requirement that parents with children enrolled in the school must participate in specified activities, which included attendance at school goal setting meetings. He wondered how such a requirement would work at Mountain City Christian with its eighty-year tradition of being the school where most people of his denomination sent their children. Parent teacher conferences were very well attended but the school association meetings drew a poor crowd. The P.T.A. had disbanded because of lack of interest, although there still was a fund-raising committee that planned the Harvest Festival held every September. Some parents never darkened the door of the school and others came only when they had something to complain about. To require such parents to attend school meetings and to suggest that they would want to be actively involved with their children's learning, as Central Station did, would not meet with widespread approval, Ken was certain. Too many of them thought they had fulfilled their responsibility when they had paid the tuition.

At an earlier meeting Ted Pakula and Emmy Perez had described the concept of responsive discipleship. They said that the Christian school has the particular responsibility of fostering discipleship in greater depth and breadth and with more encompassing response than either the church or the home. The school provides a social-educational setting whose structures enable children and young people to respond to God's call in all aspects of life.

Responsive discipleship, as Ted and Emmy had explained it, covered every aspect of schooling. It is extremely important to a Christian school because the tendencies students develop during their school years to think and act in certain ways, to a great extent, determine how they will think and act as adults. Ted and Emmy described the goals of Central Station School as being to
help students and teachers learn to unwrap their gifts, share each other's burdens, and seek God's shalom. The students would respond to their calling as students by developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and willingness to take responsibility for their own learning as far as it was possible for them to do so.

They explained that students would learn to respond as disciples of Jesus Christ Wing and working in community by learning to unwrap the gifts God has given them. Students would learn to willingly take responsibility for each other's learning, care, and nurture and, together with the teachers, would try to build a community in which they rejoiced over each other's successes and carried each other's burdens, showing respect, compassion, and concern for one another. They would learn to respond as disciples who are obedient to the cultural mandate to care for all aspects of God's world, and the calling to seek God's justice and peace in all areas of life.

Emmy had explained that the students would be expected to live as responsive disciples while they are in school as well as learn what discipleship means for the future. She described the school as a place where students and teachers would build a community for seeking God's shalom. But she made it clear that an important part of the students' learning these aspects of responsive discipleship was in the way the parents and teachers would work together to reinforce these ideas and activities in the home and in the school.

She said that many parents think being involved in their children's' education meant going to school to help in the classrooms or on the playground. The staff at Central Station School understood that, given present-day society, such involvement could no longer be expected. However, she pointed out that whether or not both parents are employed outside the home, they know they have a role in their children's education. School learning is only one part of the great amount of learning children are constantly engaged in. Parents will want to provide a learning environment which will enrich and reinforce school-related learnings and will provide opportunities for new experiences.

That will mean knowing which themes and topics are being studied in school so they may at times be talked about around the dinner table. That will mean making certain the television set and radios are off so that the family will be engaged in reading for enjoyment and talking about what they have read. Sometimes it will mean doing service activities together as a family and talking about those who are in need. It will mean reinforcing the school's teachings concerning environmental issues by living in ways that protect the physical world. Sometimes it might mean helping their children with a particular subject-related activity. Emmy said the staff recognized that parents of students enrolled at Central Station School wanted to be involved in their children's learning and the teachers would make certain to keep them informed about the school so that such involvement could occur.

Ken had to admit that the staff at Central Station presented their ideas well but he was a realist and wondered to what extent the Central Station teachers could pull the whole thing off. It bothered him that Karla and the others seemed to think that their goals for Christian schooling ought to be the goals for every Christian school. It was all so much more difficult when the school was larger and had a long-standing tradition in the community. How would the Mountain City School teachers and education committee react to such ideas? Well, they would find out when they discussed the mission of the school at the staff orientation sessions which would start on August 15.

He turned onto the expressway and could see the empty building that had housed Barker Shoe Manufacturing Company before its move to the suburb of Forest. The parents of the six hundred students in the K-12 school in Forest owed Tom Barker a debt of gratitude for his years of financial support. In fact, Barker Shoes had provided a good-sized grant for the renovation of Central Station as well. As he entered Forest and headed for Mountain City Christian, he noticed with relief that the trip had taken only thirty minutes. He pulled into the school parking lot and looked around at the neat buildings that architect Rob Boonstra had called "billowing bland boxes of beige bricks." The elementary and high school buildings with the recently completed connecting
gym might not please Rob’s aesthetic sense but Ken felt a sense of pride about it all. He entered his office to get ready for the first orientation session,

Mountain City Christian School and Central Station Christian School do not actually exist, of course. But we have visited their counterparts in many different places in North America and talked with hundreds of teachers, administrators, parents, and students. Rather than explicitly describing practices in schools we have visited, we are using these two schools to show what is happening and what can happen in Christian schools. Mountain City and Central Station are not perfect schools, nor is either of them a place where change cannot occur. But change will occur differently in the two schools because each works in a different social context and is at a different stage in its development.

Mountain City has the advantage of a large supporting community but the disadvantage of some traditions that are not in keeping with a school in which students will learn to be responsive disciples. Central Station has the advantage of being young and open to developing its own stories and traditions reflective of its purpose for schooling today. However, it has the disadvantage of a narrow base of financial support and a small teaching staff that could easily become overburdened. We will show what happens as each school community and staff tries to understand what it means to educate for responsive discipleship.

3

How Do We Get from Vision to Mission?

What should be the purpose of a Christian, school? Who decides that purpose? How should the purpose be carried out? For what learnings should the school be held accountable? The way these questions are answered will provide a direction for the school. Without an answer to these questions the school is open to every wind of change that blows through the community.

Each interest group will have its own idea of how to answer these questions. Some parents and teachers will say that the chief purpose of the Christian school is that students will be as successful as possible in intellectual pursuits in a good moral environment. Others will see the school as a socializing agency where students are sheltered from worldly influences. Some will feel that the Christian school should be a place in which students are opened to new ideas and new ways of thinking. Others will think that Christian schooling is accomplished when students work their way through textbooks in a disciplined and orderly manner. There will also be people in the community who believe that the school should be a place where students are called to personal commitment to Christ and learn to witness to their faith. Consequently, each time there is a change in board members there may be changes in expectations concerning what a school ought to be.

Why Should a Christian School Have a Mission Statement?

Defining the purpose of a Christian school is not merely a matter of coming to consensus concerning what a particular group of people want as the direction for the school, nor is it a matter of negotiating a compromise between competing interest groups. The purpose of a Christian school has to be based on a scriptural vision of Christian education. Its purpose should be an affirmation in response to scriptural revelation, with its central themes of creation, the fall into sin, redemption in Christ, and the fulfillment of God's kingdom when Christ returns. A school cannot be everything to everyone. The people who support the school must understand where the school is going, why it is going there, and how it intends to get there. No two Christian schools, no matter how good, will be exactly alike; nor will either of them be all things to all
people. Each should reflect the needs and vision of the people in its own supporting community and each
should have its own statement of mission,

Most Christian schools started with a vision, a response to biblical revelation that included particular
beliefs about the purpose, direction, and practice of schooling. However, the vision with which schools
started has not always been written down. When that happens the vision is in danger of becoming clouded.

A school should have a statement that clearly reflects its vision, Without such a statement, serious
misunderstandings can arise over school board decisions.

Pastor: The deacons in our church agreed to sponsor some Southeast Asians. They went to the
school board with the money to enroll the children in our local Christian school but they were
turned down. The argument of the board was that these people were Buddhists and so were
unacceptable. The fact is that the Asians practiced no religion. The school refused to help
minister to the needs that only schools are equipped to meet.

A statement is needed to explain clearly what the school is for and what vision will guide its actions. Lee
Hollaar (1991,3) suggests that such a statement may serve as a map:

One must check the map regularly to see if one is still on course or to see if the map is still
current, supported by the latest reliable information. This map provides direction and informs
the development of curriculum materials such as course and unit outlines. It implies pedagogy,
the how of teaching. It suggests ways of evaluating classroom and school practices and
policies. It suggests appropriate governance models and practices. It suggests appropriate
leadership styles.

A mission statement encapsulates the core of that vision in two or three key points. A well-written
statement ought to describe what the parents and teachers of that school community believe about learning
and teaching. It should tell what the students will experience in the school and why they will have those
experiences. It should state what kind of community and environment will be established in that school and
why.

If an important purpose of the school is that students and teachers will live and learn to live in
community as responsive disciples of Jesus Christ, experiencing what it is to respond personally and
communally in all areas of life, then that must be clearly stated in the mission statement. If an important
purpose is that students will experience taking responsibility for their own learning and for each other's
learning, care, and nurture, that must be stated. If an important purpose is that students learn to be servants
of Jesus Christ, helping those who are in need, that must be a part of the mission statement. The school will
then be committed to identifying ways of thinking about curriculum, instruction, discipline, evaluation, and
even the structure of the school day and year, that are in conformity with this statement.

Mission Statement of Central Station Christian School

Central Station Christian Middle School, a denominationally and culturally diverse educational
community, seeks to provide a secure learning environment in which students and teachers can explore
and evaluate all of life under God. Recognizing a variety of student abilities, it aims to uncover and
develop the unique giftedness of each student so that he or she may become a follower of Jesus Christ
who is a faithful and creative servant of God and neighbor and steward of His world.

"One of the things we have tried to do at Central Station School," said Karla Hubbard in her
presentation of Station's mission statement, "is to keep the statement before the teachers, the
students, and the parents. We are trying to live in the spirit of Deuteronomy 6 in which we are told
that we are to impress God's commandments on our children and write them on the door frames of
our houses and on our gates."

"In that spirit we are trying to keep our mission in constant focus in the school. We have
commissioned a sculpture representing our mission for the entrance of the building. Our students
have made wonderful posters and banners representing phrases from the statement. You will find
it on our report cards and on our newsletters. We use it for a focus for all that we do."

There is research evidence that effective schools have principals and teachers who understand the
mission of the school and are able to articulate that mission because it is such an important part of their
thinking (Rutherford 1985). The ethos of the school is created, in part, by leaders who state in a variety of
ways that at this school we stand for these ideas, we are these kinds of people, and we will accomplish these
things. The mission statement is our way of thinking about and talking about ourselves.

Principal: I think we have a serious add-on problem in our school. There are all sorts of interesting
courses people would like to have us teach. For example, we should really teach an
interdisciplinary course like "Living in Hope." And some parents are asking us to have
advanced placement courses. It would be worthwhile to have all students know a good deal
about computers. Yet, we only have time and resources for some of these. How do we decide
how to use the resources that we have?

A well-written mission statement that is kept before the school community can protect the school from
the "add-on" problem. Very often a group of parents will bring to the principal an idea for the curriculum or
a way of doing things that seems interesting but will take instructional time to accomplish. Or an individual
teacher will be impressed by a method or a practice described at a conference and will propose that all the
teachers at that level of schooling try out the idea. The mission statement can help the principal and teachers
determine whether including that idea in the curriculum merits excluding some other aspect.

**Process for Developing a Mission Statement**

In thinking about how a mission statement might be written for a Christian school, it is necessary to
identify guiding principles that are in keeping with biblical norms. Some organizations have developed such
principles which schools might consider when writing their mission statement (Van Dyk 1985; Van

The Potter's House Christian Middle School has identified the following principles:
1. **Responsive disciples**: Each student is encouraged to enter into a personal relationship with a loving
   God who will help the student learn how to respond to him and to all aspects of his creation.
2. **Interrelatedness of all aspects of God's creation**: Each student is encouraged to understand how every
   element of God's creation is interrelated. The world in which a student lives is intricately connected with
   his or her personal development (spiritual, intellectual, social, physical, and emotional). Students are
   encouraged to see how, as Christians, their beliefs will help them establish life-long biblical principles in
   every area.
3. **Living in community**: Students are encouraged to develop relationships built upon trust, respect, and
   appreciation. We value the uniqueness, ethnic diversity, and cultural background of each student. We are
   a "family" at The Potter's House. Students learn to work together in cooperation, assuming responsibility
   not only for their own learning, but also for the accomplishments of others. Our family extends beyond
   peer relationships to loving relationships with staff, school families, and our local community.
Involving the Parents in Articulating the Mission Statement

Teacher: I'll tell you what happened at our school. The board decided that we had to have a mission statement. The principal was supposed to write it but he was really dreading the task. So he asked me if I would be willing to help. Together we came up with what we thought was a pretty good statement.

Interviewer: What happened to the statement after you wrote it? Did the board adopt it?
Teacher: I know the principal gave it to the school board but from what I heard, there wasn't much discussion about it. They must have adopted it, though, because last year I saw it in a handbook for new parents. But we never discussed it as a staff and, as far as I can tell, most of the staff doesn't know it exists unless they saw it in the handout.

What happens in cases like this is that those who have been assigned the task of writing the mission statement for a school often simply look around and ask, "What have we been doing in the past and what are we doing now?" The result of that exercise finds its way into the document and the past and present activities provide information concerning how the school will be guided in the future. This hardly provides the visionary direction needed for a Christian school.

It is essential that parents become actively involved in creating the mission statement if it is going to have an important place in the life of the school. God has given parents the ultimate responsibility for the nurture of their children. Christian schools came into being and continue to exist because of the deep commitment of parents to schooling that honors the lordship of Christ. Recognizing that parents share with teachers the task of educating students, it follows that parents must have a primary role in stating the mission and direction of the school.

How the involvement of parents will occur will vary because each school community is different. If a school has existed for a long time the community will need to rethink the vision. A new school community will want to set about articulating a vision. Either way, the board should appoint a committee consisting of two or three members of each group: parents, teachers, and board members. One process for accomplishing this work has been, outlined at the end of this chapter (question 3).

The mission statement committee had met for two hours each week during the last month. "I can't believe how much I have learned about what the goals for Christian schooling ought to be if they are in keeping with biblical guidelines," said Mark Wever, the father of a fourth grader. "I am truly grateful to the teachers on this committee for so carefully introducing the articles we were assigned. Having you people point out the central issues of each article before we read was helpful to those of us who generally read in areas other than education."

"I must admit that preparing for these discussions and listening to your points of view concerning what Christian parents expect of schools has helped renew my focus on the task at hand," answered Joan Fisher. "It would be great if every parent, teacher, and board member had the opportunity to participate in discussions like these."

Ken Heard nodded. "We will have to think of ways to make certain that happens. As we move forward in our discussion and writing we must involve the entire community, or at the very least we must make certain to keep everyone informed concerning each stage of our work."

"Perhaps we could try a strategy used in my company," board member Betsy Merrick proposed. "We presently have a committee of nine. Consider dividing into three groups for the purpose of involving the larger community in discussions. Each of our groups will consist of one parent, one board member, and one teacher. We have already decided on a series of tasks we must accomplish. Each small group might be assigned one or two tasks and it would be the goal of that group to think of a way of involving the larger community in completing that task."

"An interesting idea," said Ken. "But we will have to undertake each task with as efficient a use of time as is possible. Otherwise we run the risk of exhausting the community with meetings."
Nick Muff it looked up. “That’s true. I also think it’s important that, to as great an extent as possible, our group involvement always includes teachers, parents, and board members rather than separating them into categories. There is a natural overlap in the groups, anyway, because teachers and board members often either have been or will be parents. But our discussion plans must demonstrate that our entire community is working together on this project.”

“Do you mean that for the teacher group, also?” asked Joan. “We were planning to ask them to work on goal statements,”

“I still think they should be an important source for ideas for goal statements but when they work together I would like to have parents and board members participate. The school is the responsibility of all of us.”

After the parents, working with the teachers and principal, have identified the biblical guidelines providing direction for the school, those involved in writing the mission statement will need to gather more specific information. Questions should be asked concerning the history of the school, such as: How did this school come to be? What motivated people to start this school? To what extent was this school started because of unhappiness with what was happening in the community schools? What was the original vision when this school was started? Do we believe that vision was appropriate?

The committee will want to gather information concerning its school community and the surrounding community: What kinds of people make up our school community? What are our students like? What kinds of interactions have our students had with the people of the community? What community resources are there that might be helpful in the education of our students? What services will be available for our students from the government-supported community schools?

The committee will seek information concerning the present conditions of the school: What do we consider to be the strengths of our school? What weaknesses are we able to identify? What attempts have been made in the past to capitalize on the strengths and to remedy the weaknesses?

While not all of this information will become part of the mission statement nor of the objectives, it is important to have a clear picture of the kind of school that already exists.

**Involving the Teachers in Articulating the Mission Statement**

After listening to a presentation by the teachers and Education Committee of Central Station concerning how they had developed a mission statement, the board members of Mountain City concluded that going through this process would be good for their own school. They appointed a committee of two board members, two teachers, and two parents to lead the community through the process. Next they divided into working teams with each team consisting of a board member, a teacher, and a parent. They then decided on the tasks each team would complete and agreed on a date for completion. They spent some time discussing how the teams would go about working at their tasks.

Joan Fisher’s team had the task of involving the teachers in articulating the mission statement. She was to conduct the meeting with the teachers, and the other team members had promised to invite a few parents and board members and also to lend support in any way possible.

The day of the meeting arrived and Joan was well prepared. “I would like to begin by reminding you of why our committee was assigned this task. For a long time we have had a constitution that pretty much tells how the school will be organized. It describes the qualifications of the principal and the teachers, and tells who has what responsibilities. It tells what will be required of parents who send their children to this school.”

However, the board and some of the teachers felt that we needed a statement concerning our reason for being. The staff at Central Station School has worked hard at developing its own mission statement and the teachers there said that the process was very worthwhile. We need such a statement because there are parents who come to us and say they are looking for a school
for their children and ask what we are about. We also need a statement that will provide direction for us so that we are not pulled around all the time by arguments concerning what our school ought to be doing." With that introduction, Joan began her report on the work of the committee.

"Because the committee recognizes that the articulation of a vision for a school is the work of representatives of all parts of the school community, they really would like to know what the teachers think the purpose of this school should be," Joan continued. "In preparation for our work today, you were asked to read the article sent to you. We are going to use that paper as a focal point in our discussion concerning the mission of this school and the result of our work today will be given to the committee."

"That sounds like a huge waste of time," said Glenn Prince, as he stood up and looked around the room, "I don't know about the rest of you but I've got too much on my plate as it is. I understand that Christian Schools International has just published a statement. I suggest that we adopt that one and get on with our work. Or otherwise, why not call around and try to get mission statements from other schools and use one of those?"

Ken Heard spoke from the back of the room. "At a later point in their work the committee will surely want to study that document and will also look at statements from other schools. However the committee members feel strongly that the process of reflecting on these matters will be beneficial to all of us, especially to those of us involved in the day-to-day activities of school life."

"To help us with our task we have asked Joe Morris to lead us through the activities of the day," Joan continued. "You all know Joe well. He is from the Education Department of Bethlehem College. Joe, we are in your hands."

Joe had been listening to the dialogue up to this point and, although he was aware that there was some tension in the group, he decided to ignore that fact and get to work. He began with a brief introduction concerning why a Christian school community should commit itself to creating a mission statement. When he had finished his introductory remarks he asked everyone to write three to five statements answering the question, "What are some of the issues facing your school?" For fifteen minutes the only sound in the room was the rustling of paper.

When most of the teachers had completed the task, Joe said, "At this point I would like you to form groups of three. It would be better if each group has one elementary school teacher and one from the high school, with the middle school teachers spread throughout the groups as much as possible. The task of each group will be to share the individual ideas. Don't discard any of them if some of you have similar ideas you may combine them, if everyone agrees." The chairs scraped and creaked as the teachers redistributed themselves around the tables.

Joe watched the groups carefully and when he saw that most of them had completed their task he said, "Now I would like to have each group join with one other group so that we have groups of six. Again, your task is the same. Share your ideas but don't discard any. At this point, list the issues on a large sheet of chart paper. You may combine those that are similar."

The work continued and Joe was grateful that the tension of the earlier discussion seemed to have disappeared. He admired Ken Heard's ability to participate in the discussion of one group while keeping an eye on the way things were going in other parts of the room. Joe had led workshops such as this for schools in which principals either chose not to participate or else they did so while ignoring the working of the other groups. Ken had a wonderful way of showing that he thought the work they were doing was extremely important and Joe was grateful for this. He knew that the success of a day such as this depended greatly on the attitude and participation of the principal.

When the groups of six appeared to have completed their work, Joe had them form groups of twelve and repeat the process. After about ten minutes, he called everyone back together. He then presented to them a framework for articulating a vision for Christian schooling. He explained why it was important that they begin with trying to understand what they and others on their staff think are the issues facing Christian schooling today. He then invited the groups to explain the issues listed on their chart paper.
As they broke for lunch, Joe could hear the continuing discussion of the issues that had been listed. Kate Ladder, one of the secretaries, collected the chart papers; she had promised Joe that she would have typed copies of each group's list for use in the afternoon session.

**Issues Facing Mountain City Christian School**

Group one:
1. If we say that our students must learn to unwrap the gifts of responsive discipleship, what does that mean in very specific terms?
2. Should we be more interdenominational than we are? How do we need to change to make that possible? What could be the results?
3. What does it mean to say we are a community of learners?
4. What specific biblical interpretation do we as a school promote? Do we think of ourselves as creationists? Do we interpret Scripture in a literal way? in an allegorical way? Does that say anything about how we might think about the use of fantasy literature?
5. Are our daily tasks and activities really biblical? How can we strengthen our students' faith commitment?
6. Are there ways of assessing learning that are in keeping with our vision?
7. How do we promote fruit of the Spirit (compassion, forgiveness, self-sacrifice, etc.) in the midst of success and prosperity?

Group two:
1. Parents have so many different expectations of the school and not all agree with each other. How do we meet everyone's expectations when the expectations differ so much?
2. Does Scripture continue to be our first and primary source? What place does it have in our schools?
3. Do we place enough emphasis on our students' relationship to Jesus Christ? Do we care enough about spirituality?
4. What does it mean to "integrate faith and learning"? If it means that we teach with a "creation-fall-redemption motif," how can we do so effectively?
5. How do we equip our students to use the Bible to grapple with issues in the community and in the world?

Group three:
1. Are we providing quality education for all? At the advanced level, at the general level, and at the basic level?
2. What does it mean to design and model Christian curriculum? Is there a Christian way to think?
3. The rising cost of Christian schooling is encouraging two-income families. Is that eroding nurturing in the home?
4. What are specific ways we can help our students learn to share each other's joys and burdens? Do our current discipline policies help or hinder this?
5. Does the secularization of the community obscure the vision of the school?

Group four:
1. How do we prepare students for living in the world?
2. Shall we organize more student outreach as Christian teams to help in service projects both in our city and in the Third World?
3. What does it mean to seek God's shalom in a community of learners?
4. Our school follows a factory model of education. What effect does that have on the students?
5. Does decreased parental involvement in schooling mean less interest in the school?
6. The teaching staff does not have adequate time for reflection. How can we be reflective practitioners?

Joe began the afternoon session with a brief presentation on the importance of building a core of shared values in a school community. "Our basic question for this afternoon is, 'What guides our work here at Mountain City Christian?' In order to answer that I would like to have each of you begin by listing from three to five statements that complete the stems I will show you."

Joe turned on the overhead projector.
"Mountain City Christian School should be a place where…"
"The steps we should take to achieve that purpose are…"

After fifteen minutes Joe said, "Will you now again organize yourselves into groups of three making certain that your group contains one elementary teacher and one secondary teacher and also making certain that you are not working with anyone from your original morning group. Your discussions will be better that way. Your task is first of all to share and celebrate each other's ideas. After that, come to a consensus concerning five statements that present your group's vision for Mountain City Christian;"

After some scuffling around and refilling of coffee cups the groups settled down to work. Joe knew that coming to a consensus was a difficult task for any group of teachers but he was delighted with the willing spirit that seemed to pervade the room. He was also pleased to see that Glenn Prince was taking a leadership role in his group.

The groups worked until it was time for a short break. They seemed eager to get on with things in spite of the fact that they had worked hard all day. After the break, Joe asked each group to present its goals.

**Goals for Mountain City Christian School**

Group one:
Mountain City Christian School should be a place where:

1. students can learn to live as Christians both in the Christian community and in the secular community;
2. students can understand the "whys" and "hows" that make the world what it is today and can learn to understand what their own place is in that dynamic world;
3. students are respected by their peers and by the entire staff;
4. students feel they belong, thus developing a sense of belonging to a larger Christian community;
5. students can explore creation and thus develop into mature adults.
Group two:
Mountain City Christian School should be a place where:

1. students learn a value system that will provide a framework for Christian living;
2. students learn life skills that will allow them to function in society in a meaningful way;
3. students come to know what it is to have a personal relationship with Christ and serve him joyfully;
4. students learn to unwrap the different gifts God has given them.

Group three:
Mountain City Christian School should be a place where:

1. students have experiences that allow them to make an active response to God;
2. academic excellence is promoted (What other kinds of excellence should be promoted in school?);
3. students and staff grow in their understanding of responsive discipleship;
4. students and staff experience Christian fellowship;
5. personal self-esteem is encouraged and promoted in obedience to God's calling;
6. students and teachers see God's shalom.

Group four:
Mountain City Christian School should be a place where:

1. students learn that Jesus is Lord of all of life;
2. students learn to be and become disciples of Jesus Christ inside and outside the school;
3. the Bible illuminates the stuff of life and where students learn to discern, evaluate, and learn from a Christian perspective in all subject areas;
4. students learn to share each other's joys and burdens.

Group five:
Mountain City Christian School should be a place where:

1. students come to recognize their personal talents, acknowledging them as gifts from God which they must develop, and including intellectual and aesthetic skills as well as other gifts;
2. students are encouraged to care for, serve, and respect others;
3. students learn what it means to make daily decisions in ways that reflect responsive discipleship.

Group six:
Mountain City Christian School should be a place where:

1. Christ is the center of education;
2. goals and values are clearly defined;
3. Christians of different persuasions feel welcome;
4. discipline guides students into the truth.

After the presentations, Joe gave them the task of combining similar statements. When the lists had been reordered as much as possible it was time to rank the goals in order of their importance. "When you move back into your groups," said Joe, "make a list of the sixteen goals that are left. Using a total of sixteen pennies, assign pennies to each goal in order of importance. You do not have to assign pennies to every goal but you may not assign the same number to any
two goals. " After the number of pennies assigned to each goal had been added together the
group discussed the priorities that had been set. After they had made a few adjustments, the
general feeling was that they had accomplished a great deal. Joe then led them through a
discussion of the final goals they had set.

Joan brought the meeting to a close. "I know that some of you are wondering where all of this
is leading," she said, "The mission statement committee will review the goals we present to them.
The faculty members who are part of the committee will be there to answer any questions
concerning our work. This information will become part of the puzzle that the committee is putting
together in order to come up with a statement that will reflect the vision of Mountain City Christian
School. Joe, we could have gone through these steps without you, but having someone from
outside our group and particularly someone with your expertise helped us work our way through
the task. Thank you for coming."

**Describing the Dream of Your School**

Next, each school community must answer the question, "What ought Christian schooling be?" This
might be done by having a meeting of representatives from the teaching staff, parents, and board members.
This committee could brainstorm answers to the question, "In light of what we know concerning how
responsive disciples must live, what kind of school ought our Christian school be?" and "What are the truly
important aspects of Christian schooling?"

Gathering the information and describing the dream will take time and energy and will be the work of a
series of meetings. But once the discussion has taken place, the committee will have the background for
stating the vision for its Christian school.

**Writing the Statement**

Articulating a statement that will work for the students, parents, staff, and community and for the glory
of God can be accomplished in a single day if the background information has been gathered and if there
have already been discussions of dreams and possibilities for a particular Christian school. At this point the
committee might want to examine mission statements that other Christian school groups have written.
Though schools differ, there are certain purposes and goals that all Christian schools share. These goals,
along with the purposes that make each school distinctive, must appear with the mission statement.

The school's mission statement should be brief, with a tightly structured core of beliefs and values
concerning students living and learning to live as responsive disciples of Jesus Christ. It should declare that
the school will prepare students to understand the interrelatedness of the universe. It should state that
students will be helped to understand. God's will for all areas of the creation and for their lives and will learn
to act in accordance with that understanding.

The mission statement has a symbolic value, providing a sense of significance and importance
concerning the work of the school. It should capture the spirit of the community of believers setting forth on
a journey together. It should include descriptive phrases that can be used frequently so that the vision will be
woven into the fabric of the everyday operation of the school.

**Stating the Objectives That Explain the Mission Statement**

A carefully constructed mission statement does not provide details concerning how the purpose will be
carried out. That is a matter for the statement of objectives, which will follow the mission statement. The
objectives are a means of clarifying the mission statement. Each objective must be clearly defined in terms
of what it means for specific areas of the school, such as school-as-community, pedagogy, curriculum,
evaluation, student life, and administration. The Potter's House Christian Middle School again provides an example:

In developing responsive disciples of Jesus Christ, in showing the interrelatedness of God's creation, and in encouraging a sense of community, each student will be helped to develop both personally and in relationship to God, others, and his creation.

Personal growth will be aided by

1. developing an understanding of self, a sense of self-worth in Christ, and the ability to accept talents and limitations gracefully;
2. developing an understanding of their emerging adolescence and an ability to make morally responsible choices, understanding that choices have long-term consequences;
3. developing intellectual discipline and persistence; learning to see error, as well as success, as a part of the learning process; valuing the learning process by developing an intelligence that is active, inquiring, objective, open, flexible, critical, and decisive;
4. developing leadership potential through cooperative learning, student government, elementary tutoring, family worship, and a variety of community service projects;
5. developing creative capacity and the ability to enjoy a sense of freedom of expression through art, music, drama, and literature, thereby gaining aesthetic awareness through participation, appreciation, and evaluation.

Growth in relationship to God, others, and his creation will be aided by

1. developing the ability given by God to respond to him in reverence, wonder, joy, and affirmation with all of their being;
2. developing an understanding of and respect for others, and a sense of cooperation and tolerance; learning to accept and appreciate individual differences;
3. developing a social consciousness, a world view, and a sense of citizenship through various forms of community involvement;
4. developing an appreciation of God's awesome creation through responsive stewardship to the changing environment of our community and the world.

**Comparing the Mission Statement and Objectives with What Is Presently Happening**

After the mission statement has been written and the objectives have been listed and clarified, it is time to present them to the board as a whole. The committee representatives should be prepared to describe the procedure they used in coming to the final product.

When the board has discussed, modified, and approved the statement and objectives it is time for the committee to present them to the supporting community. Together, the members of the community will want to step back and compare the new plan for schooling with what is presently happening in the school. It is important that the parents, teachers, and board members work together in making this assessment. There are a number of ways in which this involvement can occur.
Memo from Ken Heard in the parents' newsletter:

Many of you know that we have been working hard at writing our mission statement. It has now been approved by the board for circulation to the society. We are eager to share it with you for your reactions so that we may know what changes should still be made. The board has decided that the best way to discuss the statement is to have small groups of parents meet with one board member and one teacher. The purpose of the meeting will be to review the mission statement and then to discuss the ways in which the school presently fulfills its mission and areas that need improvement.

All parents’ names have been randomly selected and assigned to a particular meeting place and time. Your time and place appear on the flyer attached to this newsletter. If it is impossible for you to attend a meeting on the evening for which you have been scheduled, please call the school office and we will arrange for a time that fits your schedule. It is very important that all parents attend. This is the Lord’s school but he has entrusted its oversight to you.

There may be a gap between many aspects of the existing situation in your school and your intentions for the future. Determine where these gaps are and list all the things that must be done in order to move from where you are now to where you will be when the vision has become a reality.

When the list has been made, determine your priorities. No school community can work at the same time on all of the changes that need to be made. Decide the order in which the changes must take place. Determine who has the responsibility for working on that particular piece of the whole. Spend some time in brainstorming ways each individual or committee might go about completing the assigned task. And, if possible, establish a time when you hope to have each change completed.

Groups or individuals who have been given an assignment could then create a plan for implementation and establish a time when they expect to have completed each aspect of the plan. The plan should be presented and approved by the committee that is overseeing the entire project.

**Keeping the Mission Before the Staff, the Parents, and the Community**

Unless the mission statement is woven into the fabric of the everyday happenings in the school, it will be little more than a worthless piece of paper. Every teacher and student must know the purpose of the school and it is the task of the principal to keep that purpose constantly before them. In the most effective schools, teachers speak clearly and easily concerning the mission of the school because they were involved in describing and shaping it. In the most effective schools, students are willing to discuss how everyday activities fit with the purpose of the school because their parents and teachers have involved them in discussions concerning it.

**Interviewer:** Is there ever a danger that the mission statement will become something of a slogan or cliché?

**Principal:** Of course that could happen. But it seems to me a far greater danger that the basic concepts of the mission statement will be forgotten or lost in the daily routine. Even if the kids make teasing comments about “servanthood” or “discipleship” or “building shalom,” at least they will know that is what we are about and that we take our task seriously.

**Interviewer:** Now that you have your mission statement and objectives in place, will they be the guiding force for all time?

**Principal:** To the extent that a mission statement reflects biblical guidelines and the vision a community has for schooling, the mission statement will provide direction, However, while
God’s truths will be our guide for all time, what those truths mean for our lives must be a matter of ongoing discussion. Therefore, we have already planned that five years from now we will do this same kind of review of our purpose and goals.

**Interviewer:** Have you thought of changes you would like to make in the procedure you use when you are ready for your next study of the mission and objectives?

**Principal:** The process we have gone through has worked well for us. However, the next time we go through this procedure we plan to involve the students in our discussion. Exactly how we will work that out, I don't know. But we know it is important that students help us reflect on what our vision of a community for learning means for planning what happens in our school.

A school where teachers and students work together to learn what it is to be responsive disciples of Jesus Christ will be a school that is guided by a vision. The vision will be one of all the different parts of the school together creating an ethos of community in which students and teachers unfold the gifts God has given to them, share each other's joys and burdens, and seek God's shalom in order that they may live lives of worshipful kingdom service. Such a vision, clearly defined, will provide a mirror by which the school community may examine itself to see whether it is living and working according to its own stated purposes in keeping with God's plan.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. What is the vision that guides your school? Does your school have a mission statement? Are all teachers able to articulate that statement? Are they able to explain what each aspect of the mission statement means for curriculum and instruction in their classrooms?

2. Do you think children of parents who are not Christians should be allowed to attend your school? Why or why not? To what extent should the school emphasize the need for personal conversion? for reaching out to persons who are not Christians? for being involved in ministering to the poor or disadvantaged?

3. Using the steps that appear in table 2, plan a series of meetings by which your committee will develop a mission statement and a plan for implementation.

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**Recommended Reading**

   Emphasizes the importance of the mission statement.

   Excellent starting points for articulating a vision for Christian schools.

3. West, S. 1993. *Educational values for school leadership.* Though the context is British, the argument and strategies for principals, boards, and parents together articulating a coherent value stance is directly applicable to Christian schools.