

Joint Organization Communique #3

Monday, January 18, 2016

“Behold I make all things new ...”

Notes by Dan Beerens of Dan Beerens Educational Consulting, Inc.

In December, the group exploring reorganization of Edifide, OCSAA, and OACS asked me if I was willing to help facilitate conversations and I was very happy to agree to do so. It has been my joy to be a part of the Christian education conversation over the years through participation in Edifide conventions and professional development with OACS and OCSAA. I have found many soulmates in the process of taking seriously the question—“what does the Lord require of you?”² as it relates to offering our very best as educators together in Christian education. I have great respect for what has been accomplished in Ontario Christian education and want nothing more than to see it move forward in strength.

At our group meeting in January, I shared some thoughts about love from Scot McKnight’s excellent new book, *A Fellowship of Differents: Showing the World God’s Design for Life Together*. God has shown us through Jesus Christ a new model of love, a deep and rugged commitment that involves three critical elements—he is with us (presence), for us (advocacy) and unto (direction) us. In other words, as McKnight explains:

*“Again, to love a person means we are committed to being **with** them, to our presence with them. To love a person also means they know that we are **for** them; they need to know our hand is on them and behind them. And to love a person means that together in our mutual indwelling we strive **unto** kingdom realities, or Christlikeness, or holiness, or love, or full maturity in Christ.”*

If a new organization is to be modeling Christ’s love to each other and the world, how could it combine presence, advocacy, and direction? How can differences be honored and transformed by God’s grace into a cohesive fellowship? Can a “fellowship of differents” become a picture of beauty that speaks a strong message to the world about our unity in Christ?

As I approached preparing for the group meeting, I reached out to long-time friends to help me understand the Ontario Christian education context more fully. One of the first questions I wondered about was the ability of a group of people already inside institutions² no matter how committed they are² to reinvent themselves. Was this to simply be a merger or something brand new? What data had already been collected from teachers, principals, and school boards? What were current perceptions of services rendered and needs experienced?

In summary, from my conversations I have discovered a cautious optimism that something new and better can emerge—the timing seems right and the current executive directors possess not only strength and experience, but great servant hearts and the desire to see Christian education in Ontario flourish. I read and heard repeated comments about all three organizations being the best they have ever been in recent years, operating from positions of strength, with each organization having in place a strong leader who has shown courage and strength, that each organization has torn down walls, and that Christlikeness has been modeled. There is positive sentiment around the concept that the best time to make a change is when it can be done proactively and there is positive anticipation around what has already happened in dialogue.



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As I digested and reflected on the data others and I have collected, I saw three key pieces emerge as concerns:

- **Identity**—Is our worldview understood and embraced? Is it inclusive and does it lead to being even more missional in our approach? Is there a clear understanding of our brand by others?
- **Sustainability**—Will we stay in operation? What must we be doing in the areas of marketing, advancement, financial models, and alternative funding sources?
- **Direction**—What will be our relevance to the world moving forward? How will students and parents continue to be engaged in the learning process? What is our compelling vision?

In a recent survey of school board and principal leadership completed by OACS, the following themes emerged:

- **Strengths**—vision, advice, and access to services
- **Weaknesses**—advocacy, marketing
- **Opportunities**—marketing, funding, professional development
- **Threats**—potential losses: schools, identity, and services

Three areas have emerged as high priorities no matter what happens:

- The need for separate and substantial HR services for teachers and administrators and for those services to be assured in whatever configuration results.
- The need for advocacy at levels beyond the organization.
- The need for clear and strong worldview understanding.

In previous work, the group identified potential areas of needs and called them Pillars (of Service)—they included Learning, Leadership, Sustainability, Innovation, and Public Advocacy and Innovation/Communication. Those were shared with you in Communique #2 that was sent out in December. At this past meeting, we listed what services each organization provided and noted areas of overlap and aspects that needed to remain distinctive. This exercise proved helpful to our own understanding of what might be possible if we were to recommend moving to a new organization.

The key answer we are wrestling with at the moment seems to be the answer to these two words: *Better Together?* There are at least four possible answers to this question:

1. No—we should stay separate organizations.
2. Yes—limited change; we should continue to collaborate and seek further ways to do that.
3. Yes—merge the organizations.
4. Yes—create an entirely new organization.

As a group we are pondering these possibilities and invite you into this discussion. Do we remove the question mark and replace it with an exclamation mark? If so, what would/could that mean for all of us? If yes, what assurances, such as Human Relations services, need to be put in place? What needs to be honoured and what contributions should be incorporated from each group?

One of the most cogent comments I heard in a phone conversation with a friend in Ontario was: “The proposed Pillars need to be in place for structure, but not to build new walls.” Is it possible to take the best of the best of what we currently have and be better together?

Please enter the dialogue with us; feel free to contact any of the committee members listed below. We will meet again in February and would like to hear your voice.

Edifide – Diane Stronks, Jessica Bandstra, Maureen Jarvis
OCSAA – Ren Siebenga, Ken VanMinnen, Joyce Koornneef
OACS – Jules de Jager, Fred Verwoerd, Bill vanStaalduinen
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On behalf of the committee,

Dan Beerens