ECHOES

The joy of being a Christian high school principal

BY TED HARRIS, ADMINISTRATOR



good many Α conversations have 1 with people include the auestion, "So, you're still principal at Smithville Christian High School?" I suppose the longer you do something, the more you have to structure in moments of reflection about why you do what you do.

As I write, I am sitting in the back of a classroom watching a group of highly productive Grade 11 students go about their course work. As I watch them work, I can't help but be delighted with them, and I cannot imagine a better job than working with young people and those who instruct them. I am "in charge" of these students, taking the place of a colleague who has an appointment that has him out of school for a couple of

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To be sure, our culture can be messy, and the influences our young people face have changed shape dramatically from previous generations; but our young people have so much to offer the schools, churches, communities, and culture of which they will be a part. I know this because I see the impact they have on our community right now, and because we serve a God who will never let them go and who has created them with great purpose in mind (Ephesians 2:10). They are all unique, but what we see in them is a commitment to Christ, a love for people, and a desire to serve that will make a difference wherever God leads them.

They are normal kids. They stick with their work for most of the

hours. The students aren't putting on a show for me: while there is something about having the principal in the room that brings some accountability, they would be this way for almost anyone. When class began I shared with them a passage from Colossians 1, which informs our routine with the knowledge that all things hold together in Jesus Christ. I challenged the students with the idea that all their courses, their school work, their families, and their lives are held together in Christ. I asked them to be alert to all the threads of redemption they can notice throughout their day. I challenged them to notice how their studies connect to an ascended king without whose reign it would all make little sense. They smiled and nodded as all well-behaved adolescents will. But here's the thing: they get it. Before I say it, they get it. We sometimes imagine adolescents rolling their eyes or even

being distracted on their phones while we talk about such things, but it's not like that. Every young person (just like every adult) has a unique faith journey, but through all the doubt, distraction and upheaval that adolescence can bring, the students in our school model so much faith and hope. The words spoken by a stand-in teacher/principal are already part of their vocabulary, and there is so much evidence of its impact on their lives.

Our school's core purpose is to train students to live as responsible disciples of Jesus Christ. Like our core values (Belong, Believe, Succeed), it is hard to measure how well we accomplish this purpose, but being around our students and connecting with alumni months or years after they graduate still has me as excited as I've ever been about the work we do and the work you support.





class. They chat a bit more as the class ends and, of course, they ask if they can leave before the bell or grab their phones out of the basket before class is over. But as class ends (being the principal, I did make them stay until the bell) and I watch them walk out of room 206 into the rest of their day and eventually the rest of their lives, I am convinced that the students with whom I just spent 81 minutes will become the responsible disciples of Jesus we talk about. I know this because in so many ways they already are.

Please continue to pray for our school as we continue to work with the awesome students we are blessed to spend our davs with.

Promoting mental health

May was mental health awareness month.

Evidence shows that 20 to 25% of the

population will experience a mental illness in

their lifetime. That means in our school of 250

students and 25 staff there are approximately

55 to 70 people who are, or will be, affected.

The Canadian Mental Health Association takes

a holistic approach to mental health: "We are

all human beings, and each of us has a physical

body. We also all have a mind, and we all have

emotions. In the same way that we all have a

state of physical health, we all have a state of

mental health. Mental health is more than the

absence of mental illness."

BY LINDA BOOY-KORVEMAKER STUDENT SERVICES

#breakthes

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

We are all vulnerable. We need to be talking and learning.

My hope for our Christian school community is that anyone who at any time struggles with mental illness is treated with the same respect, care, and concern as a person who struggles with any other health challenge. I wish I could say that is what I see, but the reality is we

are not there yet. As we encourage learning and research in physical health, we must also encourage learning in mental health. We are not simply a body – we also have minds – that is how God created us.



In the last two years, Student Services has worked with staff. arranging experts to teach us about mental health. Staff have participated in six mental health sessions - all of them led by experts in the mental

health field. Our most recent sessions, in April and May, were led by Christopher Conley, a social worker, behavioural therapist, and clinician from Hamilton Health Sciences. Conley shared some myths about mental illness and what we can do to encourage health and healing in the classroom. He also used role playing to demonstrate how teachers can help students problem solve. The overall message was that validation de-escalates mental illness and encourages mental health. Invalidation is ignoring, criticizing, comparing, minimizing, or bright-siding. Validation involves finding the kernel of truth in an action, emotion or cognition and putting words on what is valid, non-judgementally and out loud. Validation brings hope and healing.

The Bible shows us that this is what Jesus did in his ministry. God does not shun or hide from those who suffer, but rather

AVOID INVALIDATION

- Don't Ignore
- Don't Dismiss
- Don't Criticize
- Don't Compare
- Don't Minimize
- Don't "Bright-side"

ECHOES JUNE '19

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Christopher Conley presenting on mental health awareness to Smithville High School teachers during a recent staff research and development session.



meets broken-hearted people where they are at. Jesus reminds us that "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Jesus sees the Roman centurion, the adulterous woman, Zacchaeus the tax collector, and the Samaritan woman and then gives words of hope and healing – that is validation.

I love my job despite the fact that it is challenging and painful at times. As I walk alongside those who are hurting, I am blessed by their courage and vulnerability. I am reminded that this is exactly what we are all called to do as Christ-followers: to love God and to love our neighbours as ourselves. God is moving and performing miracles every day. Sometimes these miracles are through medication, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and Christian school communities.

HOW TO VALIDATE

You will bring hope and healing if you:

- Find the kernel of truth in an emotion, action, or thought
- Put words on what is valid
- Speak of what is valid
- Be non-judgemental

Taking care of each other, taking care of ourselves

BY MARLENE BERGSMA

When Mackenzie Bezuven fell and broke her collarbone, she was prescribed medication to help her cope with the pain.

And when she found herself struggling with anxiety and unhealthy coping mechanisms, she was also prescribed medication to help her cope.

If you are struggling with mental illness, "you need to treat your mental illness as you treat would a broken bone," Mackenzie told students at a recent Smithville Christian High School chapel. "We need to take care of ourselves and sometimes we need help to do so."

Mackenzie said she wanted to tell her story at chapel because it's important to start conversations and to end the stigma around mental illness. One in four people will struggle with mental illness and that means many of us are or will be affected, she said.

Her desire to please others and not disappoint them put pressure on her and led to an obsessive activity that was not helpful, she said. Her parents noticed her distress and asked her to visit a counsellor. Once she learned to understand her way of thinking and learned more healthy coping mechanisms, things got better. She was also prescribed medication that serves "as a stabilizer."

Christians can fear that mental illness is evidence of a lack of faith, but that's not true. Mackenzie said. Her faith in God has kept her going and continues to be part of her healing. "Mental illness sucks," she said. "But that doesn't make it something I need to be ashamed of." Just as God did not turn his face away from Elijah when he was in distress and felt like giving up (see 1 Kings 19) so God has not abandoned her. You can feel very lonely and isolated, "but God doesn't leave us in our struggles, physical or mental."

Mackenzie said her anxiety made it hard to do simple things like get up in the morning, eat, or sleep. But recognizing the problem and getting help are making things much better for her.

She encouraged her fellow students to pay attention to symptoms in their lives and not suffer in silence or assume they will go away. "Talk to a parent or an adult you can trust," she urged. Thoughts of self-harm or suicide are "lies that shouldn't be believed," she said. "We are gold in the eyes of the Father. Taking care of ourselves needs to be a priority."

And she offered advice to friends of those who struggle.

Ask them, "Hey, when you are not doing too well, is there something I can do to help you?" she advised. "You don't need to fix them, just love them."

Just as God does not abandon us, we need to be present for our friends, she said. "Be kind to one another. Embrace each other. Empathize with each other. And remember to take care of what God gave you."









"Be kind to one another. Embrace each other."

God's good work at Smithville Christian BY REBECCA DYKSTRA



At a recent Sabbath prayer retreat. Smithville Christian teachers were asked to reflect on the "good work begun" in us and in our school. The conversation was based on Phil. 1:6: "being confident of this, that he who began a good

work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ."

Since September, I have been so blessed to see God's work at Smithville Christian. Before my time here, I worked at seven different schools, and I have never seen what I have seen here. There is something different at Smithville Christian, and, as an educator, it is so refreshing.

I see a genuine focus on Christian values, kindness, and stewardship. The emphasis on community, belonging, believing and success is how school should be everywhere. This school encourages acceptance and compassion in a way that you don't find often.





There is no question that God's good work has begun at Smithville Christian. He's using all of us to share his message with others and that is a beautiful thing.

Mrs. Dykstra served as a long-term supply teacher this year at Smithville Christian. In September, she will be taking up a position at Covenant Christian School.



As a newcomer, I've seen God's good work shine through students, families and staff. I've seen how the good work has flowed out into the larger Niagara community. For many of you, Smithville Christian is what you're used to, and you may not realize just how distinctive it is. Believe me, this school has heart and soul. What I have witnessed here is extraordinary.

The board, administration and staff have been extremely welcoming and supportive to me, and for that I'm so grateful. Teachers work tirelessly everywhere, but this staff is exceptional.

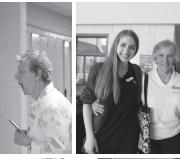
The students at Smithville Christian are terrific. They sing together at chapel and say hello in the hallways. They're positive, respectful and ambitious.

In the summer I prayed for God to give me direction in my career. He opened new doors for me when I found this school. They say God puts you where he needs you to be, and I had no idea this time last year that I would be here.

Grandparents & Friends Day 2019



























We are



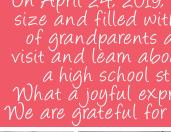


































On April 24, 2019, our school doubled in size and filled with love when hundreds of grandparents and friends came to visit and learn about what it's like being a high school student these days. What a joyful expression of community! grateful for your love and support



Incoming STORM! Athletics highlights

BY FRED BREUKELMAN, ATHLETICS DIRECTOR

The vibrant co-curricular athletics program at Smithville Christian High School is one of the ways in we build community, create engagement, and celebrate God's good gifts of health, strength, skill, and teamwork. We don't only play to win, but when we do, we are joyful. Here are some highlights of the past athletics season.

Spring Season is not yet complete – our spring teams and Track & Field athletes also hope to compete strong to get to OFSAA! Our Girls Soccer team hopes to medal for the second year in a row!

→ **Fun fact:** each time our Girls Soccer team has gone to OFSAA they have medalled!

07/08 - Gold, 08/09 - Antique Bronze 10/11 - Silver 11/12 - Gold 7/18 - Bronze

OCSSAA- Ontario Christian Secondary School Athletic Association

OFSAA – Ontario Federation of School Athletics Associations

SOSSA – Southern Ontario Secondary School Athletics Boys Cross Country OCSSAA Champions

 Cross Country

 four athletes represented at OFSAA – Owen Munnings, Tyler Woodland, Monica deBoer and Jared Attema

• Junior Boys Volleyball Heritage Classic Champions

- Senior Boys Volleyball OCSSAA Champions
 St. Francis Classic Champions
- Senior Girls Volleyball Earl Haig Champions, SOSSA Champions, OFSAA Antique Bronze Medalists, Co-ed Volleyball Port Colborne High Invitational Champions

 Badminton OCSSAA Champions 10 YEARS IN A ROW!

 Badminton
 Eric van den Boogaard and Olivia Vermeer –
 OFSAA 'C' Flight Silver Medalists

• Girls Soccer OCSSAA Champions Niagara Cup Champions



In addition to the dedicated staff sponsors of the various sports, we are also blessed by the time and talent of a number of outstanding community coaches, including:

Sylvia Antonides: Cross Country and Track & Field

> Tawnia Hultink: Senior Girls Basketball

Tim DeVries, Rob Greenham and Adam VandenDool: Senior Boys Volleyball

> Jen Feddema-Gerryts: Junior Girls Volleyball

> > Jason Hultink: Girls Soccer

Jason Van Herwynen: Boys Soccer

We are also grateful for the many parents and fans who support our athletes with food, rides, clean uniforms, prayers, love, and loud cheering. **#GoSTORM!**















Creating community at Smithville Christian High School

BY ESTHER KOK, STUDENT COUNCIL MEDIA CREATOR

My name is Esther Kok, and I am on Smithville Christian High School's Student Council for a second term. Last year, I was the "student culture specialist," and this year I am the "media creator." I create posters for events, make videos, and manage Student Council's Instagram account. Student Council is a part of many different communities: a community within ourselves, a community within our school, and a community around Canada and the world.

COMMUNITY WITHIN STUDENT COUNCIL

Last May, our current Student Council was elected by the students. Since then, we have become a well-knit unit. At our fall retreat we got to know each other and determined roles. Every person has a role to play, and every role is important. We function well in our roles. 1 Cor. 12: 18-20 says, "God has placed each part in the body just as he wanted it to be. If

all the parts were the same, how could there be a body? As it is, there are many parts. But there is only one body." As a community of eight, we have planned and organized events, worked with each other to make a great year for the student body. We do have pressures. We are under deadlines, budgets, and above all else, student influence. For example, earlier in the year, we were planning a third, more casual dance. Students initially said it was a good idea, but the attitude for this changed, and we had to cancel the dance due to lack of interest. It was a difficult decision, but it was a good decision that we made together, and we dealt with the feedback together as a team.

COMMUNITY WITHIN THE SCHOOL

Our Student Council plans many event for the students: the winter dance, Christmas activities, fall bonfire, welcome week, Country & Western Day, and the Spring Banquet. We put a lot of work into these events. We meet every Tuesday and Thursday to plan, organize, and reflect. Each event involves making calls, booking photographers, organizing budgets, or making



announcements, and we always analyze environments and reflect on completed events. Everything is done to keep the student body in mind - we are their voice in the school. For example, we are currently moving forward with plans to build a student solarium in the centre courtyard of our school. This will be the only space in our school completely dedicated to giving the students a techfree space of their own where they can relax and build community. This will prompt students to put away their devices and talk to and play games with one another. Some of the events are specifically designed to build community within the student body. The dances are really big community builders, allowing students to dance together. December's Battle of the Airbands was also a big community builder. We were all sitting on the floor of the lounge, watching groups of people dance and sing. Laughing together is one of the best group activities I can think of. Our job as a Student Council is to build community within the students, and bring us closer as a school, and we do this by providing students with events and activities for us to have the opportunity and be together.

COMMUNITY WITHIN CANADA AND THE WORLD

As Christians we are "called to be witnesses of Christ's Kingdom to the ends of the earth," which is why Student Council donates to others in need. Once a month, we organize a Cash for Change day. Each student can choose to pay five dollars to dress out of uniform on that day, and the money collected goes to a charity. We are building community and blessing others. One of the fundraising events we organize is the 30-Hour Famine with World Vision. The money we raise goes to our community across the globe, helping alleviate world hunger. Student Council is encouraging students to build community within the school, but we also build community on a global level when we use our blessings to bless others.

Student Council has been one of the best experiences of my high school career. I enjoy learning how to plan and execute events. Being a leader in the student community is challenging and amazing. Student Council is a great example of how we're meant to work together.



Above, some of the school-wide events planned and hosted by Student Council leaders. Below, members of the 2018-2019 Smithville Christian High School Student Council, from left: Micaela Felvus, Jeremy DeBoer, Steven Ghaly, Patrick Ghaly, Mark Sharobim, Nathan Gerryts, and Esther Kok.



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Welcome to new teacher, **Erin Neufeld**

In a previous issue of Echoes, we introduced you to new teachers for 2018-2019 Beth Tadeson and Derrick DeKlerk.

Today we introduce you to Drama, English, Music, and Math teacher Erin Neufeld, who also is a staff sponsor for Praise Team and was involved with set decoration, stage managing, ushering and make-up for this year's play, Arsenic and Old Lace.

We asked Mrs. Neufeld to tell us a bit about herself.

I went to Canadian Bible College and the University of Regina where I studied music and physical education. Then I worked for a couple of years as an actor, living in various cities in North America. I returned to university, transferring to the University of Winnipeg where I earned a BA in theatre and music. followed by a B.Ed. with a major in theatre and a minor in English. I married Tyler Neufeld in 2002, as I was finishing my education degree.

I worked as a teacher for one year before staying home for the next 10 years with our three little ones. I returned to teaching four years ago, working at a small Christian School in Killarney.



Drama, English and Music teacher, Erin Neufeld, centre, with some members of her family, including her parents, Shanon and Larry Weselake, left, who visited from Manitoba, and her three children, from left, Arwyn, Vienna, and Titus.



Manitoba. My husband's career change was the catalyst for us coming to Niagara and my new job at Smithville Christian.

I have three children who attend Covenant Christian School. They are: Arwyn (6), Vienna (10), and Titus (12). My husband, Tyler, works at Creekside Greenhouses in Jordan. We moved off our Manitoba family farm last summer and became Ontario residents.

I like anything creative: writing, painting, making music, and cooking weird recipes. I also like being outside and doing things in nature, and laughing with friends and family.

I love the atmosphere at Smithville Christian, I love the students. I love the teachers. I love doing life with the people in this building and connecting our lives and hearts towards common goals. I enjoy the freedom to pray with students and having faith-focused discussions while learning academics. It has been a great first year!





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We draw Christian schools and donors together to expand the influence of Christ in our culture.

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