

# Herald



The Board and Staff Newsletter ~ December, 2017

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God's Love

Mr. Brian Kuiper, Administrator

*"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God."  
1 John 3:1a*

As we enter the holiday season, may we spend time reflecting on the love that our Savior had for us. In the week past, we celebrated Thanksgiving – a day of gratitude for all of the blessings that He has given us. We were reminded to be thankful in all things. Together on the night of the All-School Program, we praised God for all of the “great” events in the life of our Savior. What a blessing to worship with songs of prophecy, birth, death, resurrection, and ascension. However, to me the highlight of the evening was the ability we have to look forward. He Will Return! Of this we are assured, and we believe by faith.

All of this gratitude is necessary because He first loved us. He made the way possible for us to be right with Him. He adopted us in Christ to be sons and daughters. And, He works in us daily by His Spirit to want to live for Him.

May the strongest and most visible evidence of this be in our love for Him and in our love for one another. The apostle continues with these words, “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” 1 John 3:18. I’m thankful for the evidences of love that I see and hear in your children daily. As you are, I’m saddened when there is a lack of love. Pray with me that we may see every day deeds of love and kindness dominate the lives of His children. And, may the children and young people see it in us as well.

**Chapels:** So far this year, among many excellent chapels, we have heard specifically about brothers and sisters in Myanmar and India. What a blessing it is for our students to hear that the church is universal and to experience this from those who have seen that church in other lands.

**Conferences:** Teachers were able to meet with 88% of parents at the recently held conference sessions. While the benefit is the discussion in person of individual children, the teachers are also grateful for that level of support shown by parents. When we speak together about the needs of each child, the whole school benefits and grows.

**Report cards:** Recently the second set of yearly progress reports went home. Please look at them with your child and discuss how they are progressing in their learning. There are positive indications of learning in all cases when we look past a simple letter grade. I’m hoping that was evident based on comments made beyond the letter grade on your child’s report as well.

**Society meeting:** I was encouraged by the turnout at the special society meeting held to approve a concept of school expansion. It is hard to believe that we are at that point again! All glory and praise to God who blesses us with committed parents and supporters. Christian education comes with a great cost – but no number can be put on its value.

**Calendar:** In this issue is the 2018-2019 school year calendar as approved by the school board in November. One thing we always try to do is create a calendar that is similar to that of CCHS for families who have students at both schools. Naturally, differences in some areas still exist. Our grade schools rotate graduation nights – and that also impacts some calendars. So, while this calendar has a 2 week Christmas Break, this is not an indication

that the Board is committed to a 2 week break in the future. It is simply the way that this year's calendar went.

I'm praying that the Lord will fill your homes with joy and gladness during this holiday season. May that joy come from knowing the love of the Father, and from the demonstrations of that love to His people!

### **Federation Committee Report – Mr. Paul Vink, Committee Chairman**

The annual fall Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian Schools meeting was held November 2, 2017 at Adams Christian School. As written in the constitution of this society, "The purpose of this organization in general is to deal with those matters pertaining to Protestant Reformed School Societies in common." This committee usually only meets once per year, and it includes members from each of our Schools either in person or by way of video conference. This meeting setup allows for all of the member schools to participate in the meeting where everyone's input is important. One of the highlights of this year's meeting was that an additional School was added to the Federation. The Protestant Reformed School of Wingham brought a request for membership which was unanimously approved.

The other highlight of this meeting was the report of the Teacher Training Committee (TTC). This committee reports to the TED committee of the Federation. This committee is comprised of Rick Noorman as Managing Director, Joel Langerak as President, Kyle Bruinooge (Teacher member), Nathan Vis (Heritage Chr. High Dyer) and Brendan Looyenga, who are members at large, and Duane Huisken (Redlands) who is the technology consultant. This committee is currently in the research phase of their work. The four goals that they have outlined are the following:

1. Develop a mentoring program that will pair a young teacher with an experienced teacher as a mentor.
2. Use the History and Principles class as a vital part of the training program.

3. Develop course material that will assist all teachers to grow in their ability to know and to apply a confessional Reformed worldview to the subjects that they teach.
4. Use the PRCS.org website as the base for the work of the TTC as well as the launching point for many of the teacher activities.

These goals will definitely help the Federation which states in its Constitution a specific aim of, "Seeking ways and means for a more thorough training of teachers and prospective teachers in Christian principles."

We can be very thankful for the work of our TED committee. This committee does the real work of the Federation. Rick Mingerink, Pete Adams, Mike VanderVeen, Joel Langerak, Bob Cammenga, Nate VanOverloop, Phil VanBaren, and newly elected Brad Dykstra make up the TED committee. These men work diligently for our Schools behind the scenes.

Remember to pray for our schools. We have been richly blessed with the ability to have our covenant seed instructed in our own Christian Schools. Also remember to pray for our teachers and the continued need that we have for more teachers as our Christian Schools continue to grow.

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6

### **Technology Committee Report – Mr. Jon Bult, Committee Chairman**

This year has been another good year for the Technology Committee. Our Technology Service Director, Greg Johnson from IT Systems LLC, has been working hard to implement new technology to provide better control of our systems and improve some of the processes that occur when using technology.

A Google Chromebook management service from GoGuardian was implemented to manage and monitor the school's deployment of 104 Chromebooks. Chromebooks are small laptop computers used as a part of the educational process at HCS. The GoGuardian service has several functions to make these computers safe for students and helpful for teachers.

One of the safety functions is the ability to filter web content. A configuration policy has been set up so that the Chromebooks are prevented from accessing material that does not comply with the mission of our school. If there is an attempt to access restricted content, the school Administrator receives an alert of the attempt and can address it.

Teachers may also use GoGuardian to control their classroom by locking the students' Chromebooks to display only content currently

under discussion. Once the instruction is over and students are allowed to proceed with their lesson work on unlocked Chromebooks, the teacher is able to remotely monitor each student's screen and temporarily restrict access to games and other applications in order to maintain focus on completing the lesson.

One of the improved processes for this year is a change in the way that students logon to the Chromebooks. It can be difficult for younger students to type in a username and password. This required a teacher to spend time walking around to each computer to logon. This year, a new authentication mechanism has been implemented to allow logon to the Chromebooks with a badge. The badge is simply held up to the camera on the Chromebook and the student is automatically logged on.

We are thankful for the ability and resources to be able to implement this technology at HCS. We pray that God may be glorified through our use of this technology to assist in training our covenant children.

## **Foundation Board Report – Mr. John VanUffelen, Board Representative**

As we approach the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Heritage Christian School Foundation, we are reminded of God's faithfulness in providing us a school filled with a growing student body and talented and dedicated teachers and support staff. It is a joyful experience to witness this blessing firsthand, as many of our grandparents and great grandparents did recently on Grandparent's Day.

The continued existence of Heritage Christian School relies upon the parents, grandparents and great grandparents, and supporters who love Protestant Reformed Education. Parents with children in school pay large portions of their incomes in tuition, and many others contribute financial support by gifting through collections in the churches and through the various drives. All these financial resources are needed to support an annual budget that now exceeds \$2,500,000.

The Foundation offers two additional and unique opportunities to support Heritage Christian School. The first is participating in the

fundraisers that traditionally include a summer golf outing and the Thanksgiving weekend's "Evening of Praise" event. Both are very successful fundraisers. The Foundation Board thanks those who plan and arrange these events and those who participate in and support them.

The second unique way to support our school is gifting to the Foundation through estate planning. The Foundation is increasing efforts to explain and promote estate planning as a gifting opportunity through regular mailings and offering the services of Barnabas Foundation available at no charge. The Board is now seeking men willing to personally contact others to share and encourage them to consider leaving a legacy of giving to the covenant education at Heritage Christian in their estate planning. Gifts to the Foundation keep giving each year through investment returns for the support of our children and children's children. The gift itself stays with the Foundation in perpetuity. Please consider the Heritage Christian Foundation in your estate planning!

### **If You Could Spend A Day In My Shoes... – Miss Joyce Holstege**

Recently, someone asked me how long I've been teaching. Upon hearing that I'm in my 23<sup>rd</sup> year, he asked, "So what changes have you seen in the last 20 years?" Where would I begin? There have been so many changes. At Heritage alone, there have been numerous changes: major renovations to the building, the move to Beaverdam and then to the current building, new administration (not to mention board changes), teaching staff that has come and gone and come back again, curriculum changes, and educational model changes to mention a few. Personally, I have taught 3 different grades, in 3 different buildings, in 7 different classrooms, with two different principals, a variety of colleagues, and I haven't kept track of how many students. (...and there are many teachers at Heritage who have experienced far more than I have.)

There have been many changes, but through all of this, I can truly say that I have changed. I started teaching after spending sixteen years in the business world. (Go ahead, do the math, I don't care.) I started with the idealistic idea that I wanted to reach out to children, especially the underdogs. I wanted to do something important and make a difference. I prayed that I could be a good influence and a good example. While these ideas were and still are important, I have learned and still am learning so much about what is truly important in rearing godly children. The children and the families of the children in my classrooms have had a humbling influence on me and have taught me so much about priorities. Over the years, I've learned that it's not as important to make a good impression extrinsically, as it is to mold and shape these impressionable children intrinsically toward godly living.

It's hard to explain how the years have changed me and my thinking, but maybe if you could spend a day in my shoes, you would gain a better understanding.

If you could spend a day in my shoes, you would understand why I don't worry about having every art project displayed in the most creative, impressive way, (although crooked pictures still send me over the edge a little); and why I do make sure every child's best effort is displayed.

If you could spend a day in my shoes, you might notice that not every class starts exactly on time, and not every lesson goes

exactly as I have it written in the planbook; but you would see time for stories and sharing. You would see time for students and teacher to interact and get to know one another. You would see time for discussion about topics that are important to them at that time.

If you could spend a day in my shoes, you might see that I no longer think that my lessons have to be the most creative, my worksheets the cutest, and my presentations perfect; but you would still see kids engaged, interacting, having fun, and learning.

If you could spend a day in my shoes, you would notice that my bulletin boards are not always beautiful works of art, but that everything on the bulletin boards is there for a purpose and that they are now used as teaching walls.

If you could spend a day in my shoes, you would see why I'm overjoyed to see a child sound out his first words, and I don't get worked up about him giggling when he sounds out b-u-t.

If you could spend a day in my shoes, I hope you notice that I'm less concerned about the teaching of a concept and more concerned about the learning of a concept.

If you could spend a day in my shoes, you would see a shelf full of hymnals and songbooks, many well used; but if you looked at my Psalter, you would see it full of sticky note bookmarks, and many penciled in notes and thoughts to share with my babes.

If you could spend a day in my shoes, you would see why I'm thrilled when kiddos know the significance of a blood sacrifice and why I don't get upset at the sight of blood or any other body fluids.

If you could spend a day in my shoes, you would see why I get excited about getting all of the kindergarteners with their chairs into chapel on time without breaking into a colossal sweat; and you would see that I am no longer mortified that I am once again the last class to be seated.

If you could spend a day in my shoes, you might notice that not every row in the All School Program is arranged strategically by height, but that almost every child is happily singing praises to God.

If you could spend a day in my shoes, you would see that I am less concerned about the fact that so-and-so dropped his crayons on the floor (again) and more concerned that one of the students helps him out without being asked.

If you could spend a day in my shoes, you would see why I love to see kids playing together inside. I love their games of pretend and even join in (after all, plastic donuts and cupcakes have no calories); and why I don't mind having an inside recess every so often.

If you could spend a day in my shoes, you would see why I patiently wait for the first group of kids to independently get themselves dressed to go outside; and why I boot up, zip up, hood up, and mitten up the last group myself.

If you could walk a day in my shoes, you would understand why I say, "This is awesome!" when a little boy hands me a complete

sentence that he has written himself; and later, feel awful when I realize the note says "My cat ran away." Thus, his strange reaction to my excitement.

If you could spend a day in my shoes, you would know that I don't have all the answers, that I'm not afraid to admit it, and that I'm a little better at figuring out which answers are important to know and which are not.

If you could spend a day in my shoes, you may not see a perfect classroom, where every child is sitting attentively, working quietly, producing perfect work, and obedient in every way; but I hope you see a classroom where there is love for one another, an appreciation for all of our strengths and weaknesses, and a spirit of love for God, and of obedience and praise to God.

### **Finding Rest When God Doesn't Tell Us "Why" – Mrs. Jordan Pettit**

I have been going through the devotional *New Morning Mercies* by Paul Tripp, and I am reminded daily of God's grace and providence. In one of the devotionals he states, "If you trust only when you understand, you'll live with lots of doubt. God's wisdom is bigger than anything your mind can conceive." This is something I will humbly admit, I struggle with. I am someone who wants to know why, and I get frustrated when God does not tell me why. However, I must remember that God never promised in His word that His children would know "why" to every situation of life. In fact in His word He does not tell us everything that we want to know, but rather He tells us everything we do need to know. Some of the most important things He reveals to us in His word are His attributes and His promises to us. And even then we cannot fully comprehend how great of a God He is because of our sinful and finite minds. Paul Tripp adds to this and says, "You and I simply are not able to contain in our limited brains all of God's plans for us and all the reasons for those plans." As Christians we know this to be true and most have been taught it from an early age. We can easily say that we believe that God is in control and that we trust Him, however, the reality is that we have been created as rational human beings who strive to make sense of and give meaning to everything in our life and our world. That is where the problem lies. We know that God is not going to tell us why for many things in life and yet we still want to know why. And the truth is there are going to be many things in this world that we are not going to be able to comprehend or control. This is a lesson that I have learned firsthand this past year especially, and God used an awful disease like cancer to teach it to me.

Cancer. It is a word that no one wants to hear, and when it is brought up in conversation many cringe. For some the reality of cancer is much more real and close to home than it is for others. Growing up I remember hearing about cancer and hearing about others in my church who were affected by it. I knew from a young age that cancer was not a good thing, as I had an aunt on my father's side pass away at a young age from ovarian cancer. However, the true reality of cancer never hit me until the past few years. It started with the diagnosis of cancer for a close friend's brother. It then hit again with news of a close family friend being

diagnosed with breast cancer, and then her father-in-law, who my family was also close with, getting diagnosed with cancer. And then shortly after, I received the news that my husband's grandmother had been diagnosed with cancer as well. I remember thinking at the time that the pain and fear that came with cancer could not get worse. Yet through the sufferings of those around me one thing remained constant; God and His unfailing love. After experiencing the joy that can come with the news of remission and also experiencing the gut-wrenching pain of losing a loved one to cancer I thought God had given me and my loved ones our fair share of "cancer pain." I thought to myself that while I was thankful for the lessons learned from God through this time I was ready for a break from having loved ones affected by cancer. However, as He often does, God had other plans and deeper truths that I needed to learn.

In this past year I have felt the pain, and witnessed the harsh reality of cancer in ways that I never would have thought I would have to. The week of Thanksgiving last year I got a phone call from my mother telling me that she had just been diagnosed with cancer. I remember immediately bursting into tears, and the temptation to be angry with God easily slipped into my mind. I thought "God, haven't enough people I love been affected by cancer? Why are you doing this? Why my mom? Why now?" I was still feeling the raw effects that death from cancer can bring as about three weeks prior to this my husband's grandmother had passed away from her battle with breast cancer. I cried out to God saying, "God, I cannot lose someone else that I love to this awful disease." But I soon learned that while there is a very real pain and fear that comes with cancer, there is an even greater joy, love, and comfort that comes with being drawn so closely to God through a trial like this. We have such an amazing God who loves us and cares for us. When I think back to my mom's cancer journey the words, "Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness! Morning by morning new mercies I see. All I have needed Thy hand hath provided. Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!" come to mind. The reality of it was that God was faithful even in a time when I did not know why things were happening. Each morning God knew

what I needed and what my loved ones needed even when I did not know or understand why things were happening.

Through my mom's cancer experience I learned a lot, and shamefully I reached a point where I thought I had learned everything there was to learn about having someone close to me go through cancer. A few months after my mother finished chemo treatments, I was humbly reminded that I am not in control and that God is. I also learned the hard way just how little I actually knew about leaning on God and His promises. Just after school was finished I learned that one of my students had been diagnosed with leukemia and another had just lost his grandma to cancer. My heart broke again and immediately I began asking God "Why?" Why did a ten year old boy who was energetic, fun, and loving have to be diagnosed with such an awful disease? Why did some people get to experience the joy of a loved one "beating cancer" while others had to suffer the pain and loss of losing a loved one to cancer? It just did not seem fair. But through it all I was learning that trusting in God and relying on Him was a constant process and a battle between what I knew to be true and what I wanted to know. I knew that I had to rely on God but the "why" questions just kept coming and slowly I felt myself at a place of unrest and resentment. I was in a place I am sure many of those reading this article have

been at some point or another in life. I saw those I cared about suffering and I wanted to fix it for them. I wanted to know why God was letting it happen, and why He would not take the pain and sorrow that His children were facing away. I was looking for peace and rest in my own understanding of what was going on.

So where does peace and rest and trust come from in all of this? As Christians we rest in the fact that in His Word God has told us all the things that we absolutely need to know. Nothing more, nothing less. And when we are able to rest in the complete perfection of God's wisdom and his amazing character we find rest. We rest not because of what we know and understand, but we rest because the One who knows it all is the definition of what is wise and what is good and He has promised that everything, both small and large, happens in accordance with His plan. He also promises that no matter what happens in this life, He will never leave or forsake us. Whether it be in the midst of cancer treatments, at the end of treatments and the stages of remission, or at the grave of a loved one who has passed away from cancer, God is faithful and He is good. We rest in the fact that we do not have to face the trials of this life alone, for we have on our side the almighty and everlasting God who holds the universe in His hands.

### **The Reformation's Restoration of a Right View of Repentance – Mr. Jason Holstege**

With the 500th anniversary of Oct. 31, 1517, having come and gone, I present you with some thoughts that I shared with our junior-high students at our Monday morning devotions the day before the anniversary. I asked the students what they thought was the idea of the first few of Martin Luther's 95 theses. Now before you respond with a "That's easy!" you must realize that the students were a bit hesitant answering the question, and that's probably because it seems overly obvious. Everyone "knows" that the 95 theses refer to indulgences, those paper certificates that people bought and sold under the motive of obtaining pardon for sins committed.

It grieved Luther to see that the worldly and ungodly living he observed in his people was often the result of a wrong view of what indulgences could do for them. Many people continued in their sins after they bought an indulgence for that sin. Recognizing the disastrous effects that the abuse of indulgences had on the manners and lives of the people, as well as on the scandal this brought to the name "Christian," Luther set forth 95 propositions concerning indulgences. He posted them in a public place, indicating that he wished to debate them with his fellow university professors, a practice that was not new for Luther; prior to this, he had already written 99 theses against Pelagianism, and would later set forth more theses on other topics he wished to debate.

As for those first few of the 95 theses, nothing was written in them of indulgences. Rather, Luther set forth what is meant when we express repentance, writing in the first thesis, "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" (Matt.4:17), he willed that the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." He understood that true repentance was necessary for the child of God, but it was important to further explain what this meant. Therefore in the third thesis he writes that this "does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh."

While the errors or abuses of indulgences might not tempt us today, our sinful pride does, especially when we do not sorrow over and turn from the sins we've committed against others. It is for this reason that part of training our children in the "fear of the Lord" should include instruction in heartfelt confession of specific sins, first to God, but then in turn to those we've sinned against. The following are some principles that we as parents and teachers can put into practice with our children with respect to our repentance of sins (as adapted from *Resolving Everyday Conflict*, by Ken Sande):

1. **Address** all those we've sinned against – in our classroom, that goes right down the line from God to the teacher to the student who has been sinned against.
2. Specifically **admit** the sin – we should give the details of what we've done to those whom we've offended and explain how we've offended them.
3. **Accept** the consequences – when we've brought hurt on others, we must go to them and work to repair the damage that was done.
4. Seek to **alter** our behavior – the attitudes we convey and the words that come from our mouths need to be different now. Wholesome, peaceful thoughts and desires for the good of the neighbor should dominate our lives, especially in the area with which we are struggling.
5. And explicitly **ask** for forgiveness from those we've offended.

It is a blessing for us and our children to know that "any truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without indulgence letters" (thesis 36). God be praised for raising up men like Martin Luther to restore "the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God" as "the true treasure of the church" (thesis 62).

## Teaching Children To Pray – Mrs. Mary VanOverloop

As teachers, we make lesson plans to match goals set out by the curriculum. Our school board has added that we write our “I can” statements to give us and our students clear and understandable goals. We have made our “I Can” statements for reading, math, history, Bible and more, but what about adding an even more applicable goal of teaching our students how to make a personal prayer to God.

When making goals, teachers take a broad goal such as “I can solve addition problems with sums to twenty”, and then break this broad goal into smaller lessons. The same can be applied to teaching children to form their own prayer to God. The broad goal would be “I can create my own prayer to show my thankfulness to God.” From this point, the parts of a prayer can be directly taught to help young children have a basic structure to add their personal petitions.

In our first-grade class for devotions we use the book *Leading Little Ones to God* by Miriam Schoolland (available in our Reformed Book Outlet). This book has short devotions that I use as springboards to teach the elements of prayer. I must add that as with all books, one might need to edit parts that do not match the Bible. I have to make changes in this book when it occasionally leans to the Arminian side. However, overall the book is reformed and the doctrinal content is commendable.

The first element of our prayer is why we come to God in prayer and how we begin a prayer with praise to our God. Here I give a direct phrase for the student to say when addressing God. “Dear Father in heaven we pray to Thee because.....” From this the students can add their own personal words to address why they pray to God. Several parts in *Leading Little Ones to God* help with this. These include: “Looking for God”, “God is Very Great”, “All That God Does is Good” and “When We Pray to God”.

This gives a wonderful opportunity to discuss God as King and Lord, God as the one only God, and the Trinity along with great words like omnipresent and omniscient. Already the students are willing and ready to make a group prayer. I will start the prayer with my beginning phrase “Dear Father in heaven we pray to Thee because....” Then several students stand and add their own part while I complete the prayer after the last student.

We continue this format as we move on to other parts of prayer. We talk about that we pray for others using the phrase “We pray for...” Here comes the fun part for the students. They bring pictures of people or groups that we should pray for. These can be added to our prayer wall. Again, I begin the prayer and the students add their parts to our group prayer as they say “We pray for \_\_\_\_\_ because....” Again, this leads to many opportunities of discussion. For example, we do not pray for those who died, but rather the loved ones left behind on earth. We also have opportunities to learn about missions and much more.

The next section I try to match with the Thanksgiving holiday. Similar to the previous part of our prayer, the students bring pictures of things/people that they are thankful for. This section of the prayer begins with the phrase “We are thankful for.....” A variety of pictures always come, from Grandparents and family to pictures of creation. By this point the students are more than willing to say during their turn “We are thankful for....”

I combine the next two parts of our prayer. They are about our sin and need for a Savior along with the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. *Leading Little Ones to God* has many short devotions that lend themselves to this part of our prayer. “Sin Spoils the World”, “Confession of Sin” and “God Loves Us” are a few examples. Confession of sin and forgiveness works well because there are many times we have to deal with sin in our classroom. Using the devotion time to address this helps our children learn to talk about their sin, ask for forgiveness and forgive others. Sin and forgiveness leads right to the work of the Holy Spirit.

How we should live to show the Holy Spirit is living in our hearts is the final part where I have students come to the front and add to our group prayer. Here the students add to the phrase “Forgive our sins and help us to....” *Leading Little Ones to God* has a section called “How God’s Children Love and Grow”. Here we have many opportunities to add words about obeying, respecting, giving, turning from sin, working and loving one another.

In conclusion, we are able to discuss what the phrase “For Jesus’ sake” means, which sums up everything we have learned about prayer. We can pray to God our Father because of the work of Christ on the cross. Then the meaning of “amen” – which does not mean the end. Rather that all of this “shall truly and certainly be; for my prayer is more assuredly heard of God than I feel in my heart that I desire these things of Him.” (Heidelberg Catechism answer 129)

In the end, we have met a worthy “I can” statement of making a personal prayer. Every student can now write or follow the formula to thank and pray to God for His greatness, pray for others, thank God for blessings, seek to let their light shine and to know their sin and ask for forgiveness.... for Jesus’ sake. No other goal gives me as a Christian school teacher more joy than to hear God’s little ones come to God in prayer with their own personal words.

Following are three examples of the prayers from the 1<sup>st</sup> grade students:

*Dear Father in heaven we pray to Thee because Thou art the Creator. Thou art omnipresent. Thou art omniscient. We pray for others. We pray for the Lannings. We pray for the people in Singapore. We pray for Braydan Bylsma. We thank Thee for churches. We thank Thee for families. We thank Thee for food. Forgive our sins and help us to be kind. Help us to be honest. Help us to be forgiving. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

*Dear Father in heaven we pray to Thee because you are the one true God, King over all the earth. We pray for others. We pray for Kamali and Tsiyon. We pray for Braydan Bylsma. We thank Thee for cousins and Grandpas and Grandmas. Forgive our sins and help us to be kind, helpful, caring, loving and obedient. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

*Dear Father in heaven we pray to Thee because Thou art omnipresent. Thou art our Lord and Savior. We pray for others. We pray for my cousin Stephanie as she had a baby who got baptized two days ago. We thank Thee for God's animals, dads and moms, Grandmas and Grandpas. Forgive our sins and help us to be kind and loving. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

### **“We Solve Problems” – Mrs. Kelly Ensink**

You may have seen students wearing colorful shirts with this phrase on it. Many of you may have also read about Math Pentathlon in the weekly newsletter, but may not know what it is. I am going to take this opportunity to tell you about it so you are eager to sign your kids up right away next year.

Math Pentathlon is a program that has four levels, teaching each level 5 games (hence the word **pentathlon**). At Heritage we only run three. There is a 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level, a 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade level, and a 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade level. While each level learns different games, the games build upon each other as students move to the next level.

Math Pentathlon is not just for kids who excel in Math, nor is it just for kids who need extra help in Math. It is for everyone to learn math skills and critical thinking, learn to work with a partner, and most of all, to have fun. The games focus on different disciplines of mathematics. Some games work on making equations out of the numbers rolled on the dice, or with fractions. Others focus on planning ahead and using strategy. Still others focus on visual-spatial skills and seeing the geometry of how shapes fit together. It is always interesting to see which game each child excels at. There have been students that don't know their math facts very well, but have a great understanding of geometry and planning ahead. All of these skills will equip students to indeed solve problems in many different areas of their lives.

Math Pentathlon meets on Thursdays after school from November through early March. At the end of the season, there is a Game Day with Hudsonville Christian School, and this year for the first time, Adams Christian School. Heritage students play these games with students from the other schools. It is not about the competition and winning. The focus is on having fun, connecting with students from another Christian school, and making use of the strategies learned at practice. It has always been a fun way to end the season.

Math Pentathlon is a program that needs many volunteers in order for students to get the most out of it. During practice, coaches are needed at each table of four to help the students as they learn the game. Without enough coaches, the students don't stay engaged with the game and begin getting distracted by others around them. For our end of the year Game Day, we need even more so we have a coach for every two students, since they will play one on one that day.

A big thank you to all of you who have coached in the past and have helped this program be successful. Thank you to Steve Bylsma, Scott Ensink, Jason Holstege and Michelle Drnek for leading the three different levels. There will be opportunity to join in the leadership of this program next year. Please consider helping out and contact Scott Ensink with any questions.

### **The 40 Book Reading Challenge – Mr. Dan VanDyke**

If you're anything like me, you know the struggle to get kids off the screens at home and doing constructive activities. Chores often take minimal time and effort, and the cries of "I'm bored" are soon heard. After attending a fabulous Teachers' Convention sectional on reading, specifically a 40-book reading challenge, I decided that this would be a significant step in the right direction. Especially as people of The Word, we must train our children not to fall to the lure of the constantly glowing pixels. In order to grow in wisdom and understanding, we must be avid readers.

I began by telling the students that we were going to stop doing book reports. That was the best news I'd delivered in a long time, so they were already excited. After I outlined the plan, I was truly surprised at the positive feedback I got from most of them almost immediately. In fact I was planning on only doing this with my 7<sup>th</sup> grade students, but as I was talking about it with the 8<sup>th</sup> graders, many of them cried, "No fair; we want to do that too." And so, after reading quickly through "The Book Whisperer" by Donalyn Miller on this plan, I made the tally sheets, and we were off. The trickiest part still remains carving out 15 minutes every day to spend reading, but my colleagues have helped me in this as well. We're finding creative ways to manage our class time so that this can work. I learned, for example, that sometimes my morning devotions rambled a bit longer than necessary, so we found 5 minutes there. Getting down to our morning lessons immediately gained us another 5-10 minutes. And now the students are learning to find other moments to read as well. Most of them are finding minutes at home that they didn't realize they had. I know for myself that I am rediscovering time to read and enjoying myself immensely in the process.

Three weeks into our reading challenge, I am amazed at how much reading these kids are completing and enjoying, for the most part.

These 100 students have read over 450 books already! To check if they've read them, I listen to a short oral summary of every single book they read, and then I sign off that book on their tally sheet. I soon found that I simply didn't have enough time to meet with all of those students and their books, so I put some of that technology to good use. Now the kids can either talk to me directly, or record themselves on an old smartphone of mine or on an old video camera that the school purchased years ago. The smartphone works the best because the kids are very comfortable using it.

Of course, the value of voracious reading is well researched both formally and through casual observation. Readers usually do very well in their schoolwork. They are also more knowledgeable about historical events and the world around them. They are able to think more critically and evaluate not only what they read but other ethical issues as well. The simple act of reading also improves reading proficiency. Again, research has shown that reading practice is the best reading instruction we can give them as they mature. In addition to the reading skills, many of them are also learning librarian skills as they put contact paper on book covers and organize the books in my room by genre.

Teachers who are reading this, I'd love to make this reading challenge a school-wide plan. I think the benefits are virtually self-evident. Parents, I encourage you to join your children in this reading challenge or one similar. Following your example would motivate them greatly. Finally, I would love to hear from any of you who would like to donate books that these kids might enjoy. Paperback books especially can take a beating with so many hands on them. This is a GOOD thing, but it means that we will need to stay on the lookout for quality reading selections. Happy reading, everyone.

## Names, Names, Names – Mrs. Deb Bleyenber

Whenever we want to get to know someone, we begin by learning their name. You and I have names given to us by our parents; names that identify us and are used when talking to or about us. But no matter how unique a name our parents thought they came up with when we were born, chances are that someone else in this world probably shares the same name!

Recently, I began something new for devotions in our classroom. After talking a lot about names, my second graders and I are now learning about specific names of God as used in Scripture. We first tried to wrap our minds around the fact that unlike our names, God's names do not just identify Him; God IS His name! Your parents could have named you a completely different name, but you would have still been the same person – same body and same soul, just a different name. But God IS His name!

By studying names like “God (Elohim),” the Great Creator of Gen. 1:1 and “Jehovah (Yahweh),” the self-existent and unchanging God of Exodus 3:13-15, my second graders and I are developing a deeper sense for God's greatness and power. We are also understanding in a better way why it is so sinful to take God's name in vain. May God continue to bless our study as we get to know more about the God Who created and cares for us! Following are sentences written by 2A students about why their personal names are special. Enjoy!

- **Sydney Ann Brummel**

My first name is Sydney. My parents picked this name because they thought it was cute. My mom called me “Syd.” My soccer coach called me “Syd the kid.” My middle name is Ann. My Grandma's middle name is Ann too!

- **Natalie Renee Bylsma**

My mom and dad named me Natalie because they really liked that name. My middle name is named after my Aunt Chris who died from cancer. My family started calling me Nat as a nickname because it was faster to say. I like being called Nat.

- **Ethan Timothy denHartog**

Ethan means strong. My middle name is after my uncle Timothy. My first name was picked because my parents liked it. Ethan is mentioned 3 times in the Hebrew Bible. In the English Bible there are 2 books that I am named after I Timothy and II Timothy.

- **Emma Joy DeVries**

My name is special because it means an unusual word: whole. I was named after my grandmother. Whole doesn't just mean the whole earth. It means whole FAMILY. My grandmother's name is Joy. Sometimes, my family calls me Mems for a nickname. My friend Ben he used to call me mema.

- **Breydan Michael Doezema**

because I was a boy my mom thought my name should start with a B. I like my middle name because it means who is like God? mom called me B. but Uncle Jeff called me Bedog so that's my nickname.

- **Ava Lynn Dykstra**

My mom and dad liked my first name. My second name I am named after my mom and my grandma.

- **Samuel Isaac Dykstra**

My name is special because my Mom and Dad liked it. Samuel means God hears, and Isaac means laughter. Both my names are in the Bible.

- **Andrew Stefan Engelsma**

My first name is special because mom liked the name Andrew and Drew. My middle name is special because I am named after my uncle Stefan.

- **Janelle Mary Feenstra**

My Dad and Mom picked my name because they liked the way it sounded with Mary. They wanted my middle name because it was our Grandpa's name. My older brother Cody was also named after our Grandpa.

- **Jayson Arie Hanemaayer**

Arie is my Great Grandpa Van Mansom's first name. My first name means healer. My mom and dad like my name when it was spelled with a y.

- **Gavin Michael Heyboer**

My first name is special because my parents thought it was cute. My middle name is special because it is really popular. Also, because it was my Grandpa's name. How I got my nickname is when I gaged on my food. Then I got my nickname Gaggmaster.

- **Elijah Mark Horvat**

My name means “My God is YAHWEH.” YAHWAH means “I am.” My middle name is after my two grandpas. I like my name because it was a name from the Bible times. Elijah was a good prophet who Loved God. Because Eli it is a sort version of my name.

- **Morgan Elizabeth Karsemeyer**

Morgan means lives by the sea and bright sea. Elizabeth means oath of God and from Hebrew Elisheba, and God is satisfaction. My nickname is blue eyes because my Grandpa Karsemeyer picked that nickname because I have blue eyes.

- **Josie Christine Kuperus**

My Mom and Dad pick Josie. Christine was after my Gramma craker and Dads sister Aunt Christine. Josie means Jehova will bless. Christine means follower of Christ.

- **Devin Ray Machiele**

My mom and Dad just picked my first name because they liked it. My middle name is special because it was my Papa's middle name. He was my Dad's grandpa. His name was Raymond Sterken. My nickname used to be Boots because I liked to wear boots all the time.

- **Carter Jon Potjer**

I am named Carter because my parents liked that name and happened to drive on Carter Street in California when they were talking about names. My middle name is the same name as Dad's.

- **Ella Grace VanOverloop**

My mom and dad really liked the name Ella. My sister's middle name is Joy. Mom and dad were given another little girl, so they named her Ella Grace. Ella means “light” and Grace means “undeserved blessings.”

- **Madison Joy VanOverloop**

The Name Madison Means gift of God and strong fighter. Name Joy means delight or great happiness. My Mom and dad just liked the Name. I am Not Named after someone. My nickname is madog. My crazy dad just called me that one day and it stuck.

- **Cole Justin Visser**

My first name is special because my uncle called my mom Cole. My middle name is special because my Dad's name is Justin. My Dad wanted my name to be Shain.

- **Brendan John Wigger**

My mom suggested Brandon but my dad wanted Brendan because he was a famous hockey player. Name Brendan Shanahan. The reason it is John is because both of my parents had one Grandpa Named John. And my mom's brother's middle Name is John. My mom's dad's middle Name is John. When I was a baby my mom and dad called me puppy. because I used to crawl around chasing balls. And I was really cute.

## **Make Time to READ! – Mrs. Sarah Kortus**

With Christmas vacation just around the corner, there will be lots of time to read!

I love to read, and I enjoy teaching and encouraging my students to read (and love it) too! Some of my students still wonder *why* they “have” to read. Most of them know that I’ll give them many reasons why they should not **have** to read but **want** to read.

Reading allows you to travel around the world, while curled up in a chair in your living room. It allows you to attempt to understand foreign cultures and learn about the history of various wars. It also allows you to travel through time, solve mysteries, and make your way through fantastical worlds. Reading teaches a wealth of information about whatever you want to learn.

Keep reading! Parents read to your children and children read to your parents! Make sure you spend some time reading by yourself too. Also encourage those around you to read, maybe a good book you’ve read, or a classic. There are many lists of Top 25 Books for children and for adults. Ask your family or friends if they have any good books that they’ve recently read and would recommend to you.

Here are a few books that my third grade students really enjoyed reading or having read to them:

- Scout by Piet Prins (A series of historical fiction books)  
“It’s about 3 boys and their dog, Scout, who help the U.S. military.”  
–Landon Kuperus
- The Mayflower Treasure Hunt by Ron Roy (A-Z Mysteries)  
“Dink, Josh and Ruth Rose were trying to find a necklace from a Pilgrim. A burglar on the Mayflower had hid all the jewels in a rock somewhere.” –Trenton Holstege
- I Survived the Revolutionary War by Lauren Tarshis (historical fiction)  
“It’s about a slave who runs away from his owner, and he gets caught by some rebels. When America won the war, the slave went to live in a free state.” –Owen Boverhof
- Mia by Laurence Yep (realistic fiction)

“It’s about a girl who ice skates. She has to train and learn lots of new skills and then she ends up skating in the championship.” – Joelle Clossen

- A Dog’s Purpose by Ann M. Martin (fantasy)  
“It’s about a dog who died. He keeps coming back to life to find his first owner that he had.” –Daniel Ondersma
- Geronimo Stilton by Geronimo Stilton (fantasy)  
“Thea, Trap, and Benjamin were trying to find an emerald eye. Geronimo was going back home on a plane, and he found the place where the emerald was supposed to be.” You’ll have to read the rest to see if they found it. – Natalie VanUffelen
- Indian in the Cupboard by Lynne Reid Banks (fantasy)  
“It’s about a boy and a small Indian figure that came to life. His grandfather gave him this Indian toy, Little Bear, who suddenly came to life in a cupboard.” – Maraya VanOverloop
- James and the Giant Peach by Roald Dahl (fantasy)  
“It’s about a lot of animals and a boy, and they find a giant peach on a tree that never grew any peaches. The boy lived with lots of insects inside this giant peach and they traveled around the world.”  
– Maggie Lubbers
- Charlie and the Chocolate Factory by Roald Dahl (fantasy)  
“Every year on his birthday Charlie gets a chocolate bar. He is really poor and lives with his grandma and grandpa. He finds a dollar bill and goes to the candy shop to buy a chocolate bar and brings it home. He opened the candy bar and he found a golden ticket. The golden ticket meant you got to go to the chocolate factory and you had a lifetime supply of chocolate.” – Brady Holstege
- Number the Stars by Lois Lowry (historical fiction)  
Annemarie is a young girl growing up in Denmark during World War II. She has a best friend, Ellen, who is a Jew. The Nazi soldiers are beginning to relocate all the Jews. Annemarie must find a way to help her friend escape from the Nazi soldiers. Is she brave enough to help? Read the book to find out. –Mrs. Kortus

## **Thirty Years of Memories – Mr. Greg Holstege**

Recently someone asked me as I was getting ready to coach the 7th grade boys’ basketball team back in October how long I had been coaching sports teams. I had been asked many times how many years I had been teaching, but this was really the first time someone asked me how many years I had been coaching. I had to do some calculating and realized that I had been doing this for the last 30 years. Wow! I realized I had been doing this for quite awhile and made me reflect a bit on the time I got to spend with hundreds of our young people in both high school and in junior high. The more I thought about it the more I realized how special that time has been that God allowed me to work with both the boys and girls teams that I was privileged to coach. It allowed me to reflect on some of the memories that came back to me about the seasons I

had with I had with my players. Please let me to share some of these with you.

It was the summer of 1987 that a notice was put out by Covenant Christian High School that there was a need for a girls’ JV basketball coach for their 1987 fall season. (Yes, they did play girls’ basketball in the state of Michigan in the fall until 2007). I saw it published but really did not think too much about it as I was currently working long hours during the summer days and getting ready for my sophomore year at Hope College.

As the summer days moved on, I continued to notice that no one had applied for the position and began thinking if I should help out at Covenant and begin coaching there. It was my dream to become

a coach but figured it would not happen until I got a job teaching somewhere in a few years when college was done. After some soul-searching for a few days, I finally got the courage to call my former principal and then varsity coach, Agatha Lubbers, and talk about the position and ask her if she felt a college sophomore, who had only played basketball but never coached it, could do the job. It was not long after that I applied for the position, and the rest is history. I thank Miss Lubbers for giving me that chance to coach with her.

I have to admit that I was a bit nervous coaching girls to start out my career, but my fears were quickly swept away by the fact the teams I started coaching knew the game of basketball and quickly picked up what I was coaching them. That talented group of girls not only were excellent in basketball but taught me a lot as well. One of the things I often get asked about is there a difference between coaching boys and girls. In some ways I would say "yes" and in some ways I would say "no". Both groups can be very competitive and work very hard, but the one thing I have noticed over the years is that boys tend to hold on to the reasons why they lost and don't move on to the next game as quickly as girls who may be disappointed in losing but within 5 minutes after talking about it with them after the game they were talking about what they were going to do that night or other topics completely separate from basketball.

Over the years I have had opportunity to coach various sports at the junior high and high school level. Besides doing JV girls for 4 years, I had the opportunity to coach JV boys with Kevin VanEngen at Covenant for 7 years back in the 1990's when we got to experience some great tournament runs. A lot of memories flooding back from those days as the recent run of the Covenant boys varsity to the state finals took place. Some of the players had fathers who played for me previously, and I have to admit it was really something to see the next generation of players who I got to coach in junior high at Heritage or Hope do what their fathers had done.

God has given me the opportunity to coach a variety of sports over the past 30 years. During that time I have had the opportunity to be the junior high basketball coach at Hope Protestant Reformed School for boys and girls for a few years before I started teaching. I got to be the boys' soccer coach for about 10 years when I took over for Deane Wassink when I started teaching in 1991. As nervous as I was coaching the JV girls, I was even more nervous trying to coach soccer to the 7th through 9th graders at Heritage. Why, you might ask? Because I had never played the game before and my extent of soccer knowledge was watching a couple of Pele games on ABC's Wide World of Sports on a couple of Saturday afternoons. All I knew was you had to kick the ball through the goal post past the goalie. Rules? Soccer had rules? Offsides? Penalty Kicks? All this was a foreign language to me. I have to give a special thanks to those guys who had to put up with me as their soccer coach since they were teaching me more than I was coaching them.

I ordered a couple of soccer drill books and some rules manuals just to get a sense of the sport. It was helpful that Covenant had started a soccer team that I could go and watch them to get some ideas to incorporate into my practices. That is the one thing that I implore all "wannabe" or new coaches is to get out and watch other teams' practices as much as possible to get ideas and some knowledge how to run practices. It is amazing what one can glean from observing others who coach. I sat in on Hope College's

basketball camp for junior high boys this past summer to observe drills that I could share with my team. It was well worth the time to not only learn new drills but also see them in action. Whether you are a girls or boys coach, ask the high school coaches to observe their practices for a day or two. It will be meaningful to you.

For 20 years I got to coach baseball at Heritage and made some good friends who were veteran coaches at the other Christian schools. I was able to work with ball players who had years of Little League experience to others who were playing their first season of organized ball. It is always a joy to see players improve as a season goes on as they take the instruction they have been given and do their best to implement it in their play. Baseball is also one sport where you seem to see things or see plays that you would not dream of seeing. Some examples would be watching one of your players doing cartwheels while scoring down the third baseline, a player getting knocked unconscious playing catch BEFORE the game starts and an ambulance has to come, or having a well-know local weather meteorologist come storming onto the baseball field to tell the umpire while it was raining that we needed to cancel the game due to lightning even though it had not done so in our area yet.

But even my time at baseball coaching needed to come to an end due to Heritage allowing the junior high girls to start a girls soccer team. I became their coach 6 years ago and for 4 years I was doing both baseball and girls soccer during the spring seasons so that the girls soccer team could get off and running. One may wonder how that was possible to manage two teams. I assure you it was not easy as a far time was concerned but since my daughters and many of their friends were involved in soccer and were now of the age to play at Heritage, it was a no brainer to spend time with my daughters in coaching them. A special thanks to our athletic director, Doug DeBoer, for arranging the schedules to make it work to have games for baseball and soccer on different days. (By the way, parents, please make an effort to say thanks for all of Doug's work as our AD. Having to coordinate schedules, find new coaches, line ball fields/soccer fields, get referees, etc... requires a lot of time and effort every year!) However, once girls soccer in our league became an official league sport, then the scheduling was taken out of our AD's hands and I gave up coaching baseball to Matt Kuiper who was willing to take that over.

There also have been a lot of changes that have taken place in the years I have coached. Playing seasons have changed for most sports at one time or another such as the previous mentioned volleyball and basketball seasons. The A-O-K league that Heritage is a part of includes a number of new schools added recently to bring membership to 14 local Christian schools. The number of participants involved with our junior teams is at an all time high with some of our sports having two teams. This year our 7th grade and 8th grade boys basketball teams each have two teams and our boys soccer teams this year were able to have an 8th grade and a 7th grade for the first time in school history. Some of our girls teams have also had opportunity to have two teams. As the bigger classes continue to roll into the junior high, we may see even more participation.

I love the policy that our school has in that nobody gets cut from any junior high sport as it gives some of our players the opportunity to play one more year of sports (8th grade) before they get to high school. Where many other schools cut some of their student/athletes in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, our 8<sup>th</sup> graders get that chance to be part of a team, to be part of something special, that wins and

losses cannot quantify. It is something that I hope is never lost in our sports programs. Sports can help fill that void in a young man or young woman's life where they may be experiencing trials at home where a parent has been taken to glory or fathers/mothers may not be in their lives for other reasons.

Finally, I would like to thank you, the parents, and my former and current players, for putting up with me during the times I get excited and get into the game that is playing. I always played with a passion as a player and carry that emotion with me as a coach. Yes, I like to win, and like to see my players win, but I also like to see my players do as well as they can and whatever happens in the win/loss column happens. It is more important for me to have our players play hard and play letting our light shine out on the athletic field. That defines to me a successful season.

That is why I finish with imploring the parents to come out and watch your children play. We do have great attendance by many of our parents and grandparents and I thank you for that. I also know it is hard for many of our fathers to make early games due to work. Please try to make every effort you can to get to a game...your son or daughter will always remember those moments.

That is why I recently have been trying to have a year-end party with the dads and sons by going to a local college game in soccer or basketball game to share some time with fellow dads and their sons. Lastly, a big "THANK YOU" to all the parents who have helped out in driving, bringing snacks, and helping out at the score table running the clock or doing the scorebook. I realize it is not the easiest thing to do while your child is playing but we, as coaches, truly appreciate your help.

### **Make It Stick - Mr. Rick Gritters**

At the recent PRTI Teachers' Convention hosted by Adams Christian School, I led a sectional on Thursday afternoon entitled, 'Make It Stick'. I repeated the sectional on Friday morning for those attendees who were not able to be at Thursday's session. Several witty colleagues jokingly assured me that I was repeating the session for those who did not retain the information well from the original sectional on Thursday, and needed to hear it again! In either case, the idea for my sectional arose from a book I read entitled, *Make It Stick - The Science of Successful Learning*. I was introduced to the book at a week long summer class I attended at Hope College sponsored by the Midwest Brain and Learning Institute. The following article captures many of the thoughts and ideas of that book which I shared during my sectional.

Do you agree with the following statements? 1. Good teaching happens when lessons are tailored to the different learning styles of the students. 2. Effective teaching strategies are ones that make learning easier and faster for students. 3. Re-reading a text or passage and massed practice (or repeated practice) of a particular skill are two productive study strategies for students and athletes.

Cognitive psychology is the basic science of understanding how the mind works, and conducting empirical research into how people perceive, think, and remember. This book, *The Science of Successful Learning*, draws on recent discoveries in cognitive psychology as well as developmental psychology and neuroscience (the study of the brain and the nervous system and how they relate to behavior and learning) and shows how the above statements are not as true as you may think.

Don't feel too bad if you agreed with any of those three statements. I think most people would. But realize that recent research based on careful scientific, evidence-based studies has given us new insights into how we learn. The 3rd statement is how I remember studying and being taught to study while I was in school in the 1970's and 1980's. The 2nd statement may be more believable because we assume that if learning is easy or fast it must be good. And the 1st statement is something we've been hearing from the universities and education conferences and training seminars more recently in the 2000's and into today. But it's a dangerous

assumption to think that just because we learned that way when we were young, or just because it's fast or easy, or just because that's what they're currently teaching at Calvin or Grand Valley, it must be good.

So what can we do to teach our students and young people how to learn better, how to make learning stronger and more durable, how to study or learn in such a way so that they retain information longer, and get things into long term memory? Here are four proven, good techniques or study habits that will help our students learn and remember.

**1. Retrieval Practice** - *This means to practice over and over calling whatever it is you want to learn or remember back up from your memory. It is also called the 'testing effect'. Normally, we think of tests and quizzes as a way of measuring how much someone has learned and as a way of assigning a grade. But the simple act of repeatedly retrieving knowledge from memory, repeatedly recalling or attempting to recall information you've been exposed to (even if you're not completely successful) has the effect of making that knowledge easier to call up or remember in the future. Believe it or not, this isn't a new idea. Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher and scientist, as well as Francis Bacon, the English philosopher and scientist wrote about this. Many of us also teach our kids catechism this way. And now more recent studies in the lab and in real world settings confirm this.*

*This retrieval practice is far better than simply being re-exposed to or re-reading the material. After a student reads the day's bible lesson notes (once) at home that night, it's far more effective for him to quiz himself or have someone quiz him on what he's read instead of continuing to re-read the notes over and over. The learner must practice retrieving it from memory, NOT practice re-reading and becoming familiar with the notes. It may be easier for all parties involved to have the learner just re-read or re-study the notes or the pages in the book. But easier is not better. In fact, the opposite has been proven to be true. When the studying and reviewing and retrieval is more difficult and requires more effort, it is learned better. In other words, the learning and remembering will be more lasting and durable.*

What might this mean for the classroom? It might mean several small quizzes throughout the six-weeks, or throughout the chapter or unit instead of just one large test or exam at the end. The simple act of quizzing (the attempted retrieval) helps learn the material because the brain is forced to recall information. There is an effort on the part of the brain. And anytime the brain exerts effort, the learning is more durable and lasting. It could also mean a simple 5 minute review (with feedback) to begin the class or lesson. And this quick snapshot review doesn't even need to be graded. Or it could mean asking parents and students to self-quiz at home instead of simply reading through the notes or lesson. The important point is that it's far more effective to force yourself to try to recall the information than to simply keep re-reading it!

For fun, google 'Penny Test' for a simple study (noted in the book) that shows repeated exposure to something does not mean you will naturally remember or learn something. Email me at [rgriters@hchr.org](mailto:rgriters@hchr.org) and let me know how you fare!

## **2. Space out your practice!**

Space out your practice of a particular skill or lesson. In other words, allow for some time between your practice or review sessions. Research shows that practicing any skills, whether they be mental or physical, is far more effective when it's broken into separate periods of training that are spaced out. This is true for two reasons. Number one, it allows a little forgetting to set in, and this requires more effort for the brain to retrieve it, and that effort is good. That effort makes the learning more lasting. Number two, the space also allows the brain time to consolidate some of the new learning into long term memory which is where we are trying to get the information to in the first place.

This spaced practice is in comparison to, and much better than, repeating over and over one particular skill, concept, or drill for a long time. The book calls this massed practice, and likens it to cramming for exams the night before the final. This cramming or repeated drilling over and over will feel productive, and will also lead you to know information quicker or learn a skill faster. In other words, you will notice or see improvement, and this in turn will motivate you and reinforce your efforts to keep studying that way. But the information you are learning or the skill you are practicing will be much more easily and quickly forgotten. This concept of spaced practice is repeated over and over by the authors with other concepts and pages between! They set the book up in the way that people will learn it better.

Now you may be wondering, as I was, how long of a space must there be between practice sessions, study periods or retrieval attempts. There is no hard or fast rule. However, two things are mentioned in this regard. First, the period between must not be so long that you essentially forget everything you've learned in that particular lesson, so that you then need to re-learn the material. But in contrast to this, there needs to be enough time so that the practice is not just a mindless repetition. Too little effort on the part of the brain does little or nothing for the learning that is taking place. Secondly, sleep allows the brain time for memory consolidation, so one day may be good space between practice sessions in some cases.

One very simple example of spacing is the careful use of flashcards. When using flashcards, you don't simply do the same flashcard over and over until you know it! You go on to the next card before returning to the ones you didn't know or have already attempted. And you shouldn't stop reviewing the cards you know, you should just do them less frequently. In fact, a good technique

when using flashcards is to make three different piles based on how well you know each card. One pile for those you know well, another pile for those you know somewhat but not good enough, and a third pile for those cards that need the most practice.

Twice now I have mentioned effort. This book devotes an entire chapter to what it calls, 'Desirable Difficulties'. The chapter explains that when the brain has to work harder and there are some mild difficulties involved, the learning is far stronger and more durable. Here is a quote: "...difficulties are desirable because they trigger encoding and retrieval processes that support learning, comprehension, and remembering....To be desirable, a difficulty must be something learners can overcome through increased effort.....When you recall learning from short term memory, as in rapid fire practice, little mental effort is required and little long term benefit accrues. But when you recall it after some time has elapsed and your grasp of it has become a little rusty, you have to make an effort to reconstruct it. This effortful retrieval both strengthens the memory but also makes the learning pliable again, leading to reconsolidation. Reconsolidation helps update your memories with new information and connect them to more recent learning."

## **3. Interleave or Mix your Practice**

Mix up the study or practice of two or more skills or subjects. Move from one concept to another before you master one completely. For example, when doing word problems in math, go back and forth between problems that involve subtraction and addition, instead of doing many addition related problems over and over until you think you can pick out every type of word problem that involves addition. Switch back and forth between the two. This technique will feel slower and students will find it confusing and difficult at first. But that's okay because easier is not better. Harder is often better for stronger learning. And it's exactly how this book is written. And I didn't like it at first, I struggled with it! The text moves from one topic to another, with each topic being repeated at different intervals throughout the book. But interleaved practice is more effective for two reasons. First, it will help students discriminate or see the difference between the two types of problems later. Focusing on one concept, and then another forces the brain to repeatedly retrieve the learned material from memory. And secondly, current research shows without a doubt that mastery and long term retention are much better if you interleave practice than if you mass it.

One recent experiment which helped show that mixing or interleaving practice is beneficial involved the men's baseball team at California State University San Luis Obispo. The team agreed to take extra batting practice twice a week, following two different practice regimens, to see which type of practice produced better results. Part of the team practiced in the standard way. They practiced hitting 45 pitches, evenly divided into three sets. Each set consisted of one type of pitch thrown fifteen times; the first set was fifteen fastballs, the second set fifteen curveballs, and the third set fifteen change-ups. This was a form of massed practice, repeating the same skill over and over. And as the batter saw more of that one type of pitch, he got gratifyingly better at anticipating the balls, timing his swings, and connecting. Learning seemed easy. The rest of the team was given a more difficult regimen: three types of pitches were randomly interspersed across the block of 45 throws. For each pitch, the batter had no idea what to expect. At the end of 45 swings, he was still struggling somewhat to connect with the ball. This group didn't seem to be developing the proficiency their

teammates were showing. The interleaving and spacing of different pitches made learning more arduous and feel slower.

These extra practice sessions continued twice weekly for six weeks. At the end, when the player's hitting was assessed, the two groups had clearly benefited differently from the extra practice, and not in the ways the players expected. The group who had practiced on randomly interspersed pitches displayed markedly better hitting relative to the those who practiced on one type of pitch thrown over and over. So even in the sports world involving physical skills as opposed to mental skills in the classroom, we see two familiar lessons. First, that some difficulties that require more effort and slow down apparent gains--like spacing, interleaving and mixing up practice--will feel less productive at the time but will more than compensate for that by making the learning stronger, precise and enduring. Second, our judgement of what learning strategies work best for us are often mistaken and counterintuitive.

#### **4. Vary the way you practice a particular skill or concept**

Varied practice or training has proven, in various studies, to be beneficial because different kinds of practice engage different parts of the brain. When the practice engages different parts of the brain, it becomes more cognitively challenging. And this more cognitively challenging, varied practice, (as opposed to the simpler, massed practice skills) although it takes longer and can be more frustrating at first, is more beneficial for getting information and skills into long term memory. One example of the benefit of varied practice came from a study of eight year olds who practiced tossing bean bags into buckets in P.E. class. Half of the kids tossed into a bucket three feet away. The other half mixed it up by tossing into buckets two and four feet away. After 12 weeks of this, they were all tested on tossing into a three foot bucket. The kids who did the best by far were those who'd practiced on two and four-foot buckets but never on three-foot buckets.

For the classroom, students could practice multiplication tables in different ways. They could self-test with flashcards, they could get into a group of three and compete with each other, they could do a timed test seeing how many problems they could complete in 2 minutes, or they could use a math app or online game involving multiplication facts and situations. This could apply to any subject or skill. What's important is that the learner not do the same thing each time he/she reviews or practices.

One other valuable piece of information I gained from reading this book (not necessarily related to the preceding four ideas, but something the authors kept coming back to throughout the text) is the concept of a student's learning style. There is an entire chapter devoted to learning styles and the fact that we teachers and parents place too much emphasis on them. The chapter is entitled, 'Get Beyond Learning Styles'. The idea that individuals have distinct learning styles has been around long enough to become part of the folklore of educational practice and an integral part of how people perceive themselves. (Folklore here meaning, widely held but unsubstantiated beliefs.) The underlying premise is that people receive and process information differently. For example, some learn better from visual materials, and others learn better from written text or auditory materials. Additionally, the theory holds that people who receive instruction in a manner that is not matched to their learning style are at a disadvantage for learning. The

problem with this is that it is just that, a theory. While it is true that everyone has learning preferences, there is no proof, research or scientific studies that show it's beneficial or advantageous if the mode of presentation and instructional method matches the student's preferred learning style. Many of us have been under that impression for years just because that's what we've been told or because that's the way we were taught or told how to teach.

There was a study done in 2008 by cognitive psychologists to test that very claim, if people actually learn better when the mode of presentation matches the particular style in which an individual is best able to learn. The researchers made two very important findings. One, they found very few studies that were even designed to test the claim that your preferred learning style should match up with the instructional style, and of the studies they did find, none of them validated the claim, and a few of them even contradicted the theory. Second, they found that it's far more important that the mode of instruction (how we teach or deliver the material) match the nature of the subject or content being taught. For example, visual instruction should be used for a subject like geometry or geography, and verbal instruction should be used for a topic like poetry. And when this happens, ALL students learn better regardless of their preferred learning style. So it makes more sense for teachers and parents to place more emphasis on instructional techniques, like the four outlined above, that have been validated by research and that benefit all learners regardless of learning style.

Finally, I have two of my own thoughts that I shared at my sectional as an introduction. Here, I use them as an end to my article. First, to be successful in the Lord's eyes which is what we want our students to be, kids need to be taught to work hard. They need to understand the importance of putting in the time with homework, test preparation, music lessons or basketball practice. We need to teach our students to not expect everything to be easy. A trend I've seen in my 24 years of teaching, and I've fallen into this myself, is that we often want to show students and children the easiest way or the quickest way to do something. Let's challenge our kids, make them work hard, and help them realize that hard work is what's expected of them in life! Colossians 3:23-24 states, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." Ecclesiastes 9:10 says, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

My other thought on successful learning is that students need to be taught self-discipline. We don't want them, as they get older, to do their homework or be ready for a test, or to get an early start on a long term project because we're continually harping on them or making them do it. We want them to understand that they do those things because it's their calling. I tell my class often, "It's not about me, it's about the Lord and your relationship to Him." And this doesn't happen overnight, it takes time and training to develop this in them. It's a weaning process, more for some students than others. But as they progress through the grades, it's so important to teach them to take responsibility for and be the one in charge of their own learning.

**Remaining 2017-2018 School Calendar**

**December 25, 2017 – January 2, 2018** – Christmas Break

**January 15 - 26, 2018** – MAP Testing

**January 31 and February 1, 2018** – Parent Teacher Conferences

**February 8, 2018** – 5<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Band and Choir Concert

**February 16, 2018** – Mid-winter Break

**February 22, 2018** – Fine Arts Night

**March 10, 2018** – Spring Children's Clothing and Toy Sale

**March 30 – April 6, 2018** – Spring Break

**May 3, 2018** – Kindergarten Roundup

**May 3, 2018** – 5<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Band and Choir Concert

**May 7 - 18, 2018** – MAP Testing

**May 18, 2018** – Kindergarten Program

**May 22, 2018** – All Schools Band Concert

**May 28, 2018** – No school (Memorial Day)

**May 31, 2018** – Last day of school (1/2 day) and Graduation

**Beginning of the 2018-2019 School Year Calendar**

**August 27, 2018** - School starts (Monday)

**August 31 & September 3, 2018** - Labor Day Break

**October 18 & 19, 2018** - Teachers' Convention

**November 22 & 23, 2018** - Thanksgiving Break

**December 24 – January 4, 2019** - Christmas Break

**February 15, 2019** - Mid-winter Break

**March 29-April 5, 2019** - Spring Break

**May 27, 2019** - Memorial Day

**June 4, 2019** - Graduation (1/2 day)