



### **We Started with Fifteen Kindergarten Students**

By Dr. David Arrell, Administrator of Grove City Christian School

Grove City Christian School (GCCS) began in the fall of 1990 as a ministry of Grove City Church of the Nazarene (The Naz) in central Ohio. The school opened with 15 Kindergarten students. Today, GCCS provides a quality Christian education to 788 students, K-12. For over 30 years, God has blessed the students and their families with a great education in a loving environment where Christ is the center. Although the road was not always easy, the history of this school showcases God's faithfulness and blessings.

### **The School's Charter**

The school was born out of the vision for the church. As stated in the school's charter, "the Grove City Church of the Nazarene (GCCN), in response to the biblical commandment for the Christian education of our children and believing that this Christian education can best be accomplished in a Christian School and Childcare Center pursuant to the authorization by Grove City Church of the Nazarene, hereby make and adopt the following Charter for the organization and operation of Grove City Christian School and Childcare Center as separate but closely associated entities." The desire was simple: to serve the families of The Naz by providing a Christian day school and childcare center.

### **The Church's History**

Grove City Church of the Nazarene began in June of 1963 under the leadership of Rev. Dale Galloway. He truly wore out his shoes by going door to door to introduce people to Jesus. With 25 people, the first

service began in a nearby elementary school. Within a few years, the church regularly had over 100 in its services. The first church buildings were on Columbus Street in Grove City. By the mid-seventies, the church grew to average about 350 each week.

The church continued its growth. In the early 1980s, it decided that future growth required another location. The church purchased the nearby land and built the first-of-its-kind structure on 11 acres. On Palm Sunday of 1988, the church service began in the building on Columbus Street, and then the entire congregation paraded to the new location to conclude the celebration in the new space. This new building provided 800 seats for worship while remaining flexible to facilitate sports activities and social gatherings, too.

### **A Day School in Sunday School Classrooms in 1990**

Rev. Bob Huffaker was the pastor at its inception. During his leadership, the church experienced unprecedented growth. Next came buildings to accommodate the ministry of both the church and the school. In 1992, 1995, and 1999, respectively, the church added the much-needed classrooms and activity spaces, including a gym. The church acquired additional adjacent land for future growth and athletic fields. In 1998, the congregation built a 3,200-seat auditorium for worship, pageants, and concerts. The church averaged about 3,500 during this time. The most recent school building opened in August of 2022. This new space will enable up to 825 students to enroll at GCCS.

### **Vision for the School**

The school began as a service for the families of the church. However, the vision and ministry of the church have continually been outward focused as well. It was not long before people started to talk about the school with their friends, and the school began to grow to include non-Nazarene families. GCCS is a discipleship-model school, which means at least one of the parents must be an active believer of Jesus in a local church. GCCS accepts students from over 125 area church congregations. Students enroll from various school districts, including the city of Columbus. Voucher students who meet the entrance requirements are accepted into the GCCS program. Since God has blessed GCCS with more growth than anticipated, recent goals are almost completed. GCCS is at 95% capacity of its physical space. The most recent addition provided room for three sections of every grade level, K-12. GCCS is in the planning mode for what God wants to do in the next phase of the school's growth.

### **Challenges**

Every growing organization has its challenges. The school grew as it mirrored the organic growth model of the church. As the school developed, it began to have factions that represented special interest groups. Silos developed in many areas of the school. Even at the board level of the school, there was disagreement about the vision and direction of the school. Some people wanted the school to be an elite private school. Others wanted the school to be open to every student who wished to attend. The school board even voiced a desire to become independent of the church. When the church leadership calmly responded to the request by communicating the anticipated rent and utility costs, the idea quietly dissolved.

It was clear that the church and school would not be divided at an organizational level. It was also clear that division was in the ranks. Even within the school, division existed between the leadership of the schools—elementary, middle, and high school. The athletic department was on its own, with an

influential parent booster organization to support it. Without strong leadership, the school, while growing, was neither unified nor providing a quality Christian education. The dysfunction resulted in the complete dissolution of the school board in 2013. The leadership of the school fell to the executive pastor, and the CFO and other church leaders led the school board.

Just prior to the fall of the school board, the church leaders engaged a consultant to help re-organize and re-educate themselves and the school leaders in the proper leadership of a church-based school. This consultant painstakingly walked with the church and school leaders to build (re-build) the philosophical and practical foundations of operating a Christian school in a church setting. The consultant met with them weekly for training and modeling of proper leadership. This group drafted and approved foundational documents, including the mission statement and charter. These documents have provided clear guidance for future school leaders and board members to follow.

After a full year of work, the school board was re-named the Education Committee. The Education Committee is one of the three authorized committees of the Advisory Board of the church. Selected members of the Advisory Board work with senior church staff—the (lead) pastor and executive pastor as well as the newly named director of education (superintendent of the school), and up to two persons who are not members of the church make up the Education Committee. This design strongly demonstrates the lines of authority but also the full integration of the school in the ministry of the church. The director of education has the task of building bridges between the church and the school in addition to leading the entire school program.

God has blessed these renewed relationships. Everyone on campus recognizes and respects both the ministries of the church and the school. These entities have built multiple bridges over the years, so much so that people do not even think much about bridges, just building and maintaining great relationships. Special events, trainings, and celebrations bring everyone together to celebrate what God is doing throughout the entire week.

## **Accreditation**

School accreditation was also an important task of the new director of education. The education committee sought ACSI accreditation to raise the profile of the school. It was difficult to get the school and the school community ready for an accreditation visit. During that time, the process to be used was determined and documented. An important document, expected student outcomes, was created. This provided all constituents with a clear picture of what is required for our students. These outcomes were added to the documentation project of the curriculum. The school also adopted short-cycle assessments, which provide timely feedback to alter the instruction to fit the learner.

The final major change in the school also came through its instructional delivery model. It is true that cutting-edge technology is employed that prepares students for an easy transition to higher education via Canvas, a learning management software. Google classroom is employed and ClassDojo is used to connect with younger students. The biggest change came in how the Bible is integrated into every subject matter. Most Christian school teachers attempt to integrate the Scriptures into their lessons in an organic fashion. Faculty are trained to intentionally integrate the Bible into the curriculum. This is a major shift in the philosophy and practice of a typical Christian school teacher.

A first decision was to adopt a common definition of biblical integration into instruction, and Dr. Martha McCullough's (2010) definition was chosen. It describes "the process of intentionally planning and

teaching that helps the student think through subject matter and skill development in such a way as to develop the habit of comparing and connecting all knowledge to a biblical worldview.” Defining the established outcome streamlines discussions and lesson preparation. Further, a consultant is utilized to train staff and develop coaches within the staff to reinforce these new beliefs, behaviors, and strategies. The training that the coaches receive reinforce good instructional habits, too. Parents are considered as partners in fulfilling the school’s mission. Therefore, basic training is provided to parents to further develop the habit of students’ thinking about connecting and comparing their current subject matter with the truth of Scripture. This framework has also been introduced to members of the athletic coaching staff in order that they, too, will foster the students’ thinking and application of God’s Word into every aspect of life.

### **Impact on the Local Church and Community**

The symbiotic relationship between the church and the school is valued. The church employs experts in many areas, including worship, technology, and AVL. Students benefit by learning from them and collaborating with them. Some of these students move on to careers using the skills they learned through working with the staff. Students who grew up at The Naz bring their friends from school to youth events and other activities. Two members of the Class of 2022 graduated with their local ministry license because of the mentoring environment cultivated at GCCS.

Students represent the hands and feet of Jesus in the community. To that end, the school requires 70 community service hours before graduation. Most students far exceed that amount. Last year, forty-nine students performed 12,141 hours. Different clubs and organizations on campus support specific ministries like the Ronald McDonald House, Ohio Food Bank, Bed Brigade, nursing and assisted living facilities, and Moms2B. Both the church and the school support a local ministry to the homeless. Over the years, GCCS has provided food, clothing, personal items, tents, propane heaters, and even a truck for use in accepting and delivering supplies.

The new school building permits over 800 students to be served in three sections of every grade level. All are praying and discussing the opportunities for the next phase of ministry growth at The Naz. The questions being pondered include: “What is our vision for discipleship and growth in the church? What is our vision for our community and how can we, as a church (school and childcare), best meet the needs of our community? How big is our vision for Christian schooling? And, therefore, what do we need to fulfill this vision?”

A master site plan has been drafted to see if this vision fits on the current campus. Projects that help the church, the school, and the community have been identified to achieve God’s will and for His glory.

**Dr. David Arrell** is the superintendent at the Grove City Christian School at Grove City, Ohio. He has served also in schools in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Indiana during his 38 years in Christian schooling. He graduated from Lancaster Bible College and earned a master’s degree from Johns Hopkins University. He serves on the ACSI regional accreditation commission and as a field director. You may contact Dr. Arrell at [darrell@grovecity.org](mailto:darrell@grovecity.org).