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Early History of Christian Heritage Academy,
Northbrook, Illinois
September 1982 - September 1984

Many of us thought that Christian Heritage Academy began in September of 1982, when five couples met at the home of Jim and Linda Lindberg in Lincolnshire, Illinois, to discuss the possibility of starting a Christian school in the north suburban Chicago area. But later we discovered that, in a way unknown to us, the school had begun long before that in the unseen work of God.

As we began to work to start the school, we would meet people who had been praying that God would start a Christian school in this area. In response to a survey we placed in church bulletins, one person wrote, "I've been praying for five years that God would start a Christian school around here." Another time, after we had agreed to use the former Oaklane School in Northbrook, a young woman came up to us after hearing our presentation at a Sunday church service and said that she attended Oaklane school when she was a child in the elementary grades. Later she had gone off to college and heard the gospel and committed her life to Christ. After that she had heard that Oaklane school was not longer in use as a school but was being rented out for various community activities — a thrift shop, yoga lessons, drama classes, a nursery school, etc. She had returned to the school building and walked through the halls, silently praying that God would take that building and use it for His purposes — long before we had begun looking for a building.

The secret preparatory activity of God, which had been going on for several years in many people's lives, began to take shape as an organization in conversation between two mothers, Margaret Grudem and Linda Lindberg. They saw the need for a much more biblical, God-centered focus in their children's education, and wondered if it might be possible to start a Christian school in this area.

That conversation led to meeting in the Lindberg's home (15 Mayfair Lane, Lincolnshire) on the evening of September 21st, 1982. Five couples were present: from North Suburban Evangelical Free Church, Warren and Greta Anderson, Warner and Diane Tillman, and Jim and Linda Lindberg, and from Village Church of Lincolnshire, Paul and Margie Engle, and Wayne and Margaret Grudem. The meeting was for the purpose of discussing whether there was a need for a Christian school in the area, and if so, what steps might be taken to start one. Paul Engle, the pastor of Village Church of Lincolnshire, chaired the meeting. Most of us came to the meeting with very little awareness of what we were getting into. I at least thought it would probably be my first and last meeting to discuss an interesting idea, but one which I had no desire to pursue if it involved any time commitments. Most of us were uninformed and probably a bit skeptical about the advantages of Christian schools.

After a time of opening prayer, Paul asked if we might go around the room and let each person say what he or she thought would be the positive reasons for establishing a Christian school. I think we were all surprised to find ourselves listing many potential advantages—education, moral, social and spiritual — which could come from a high quality Christian school. As we talked, we became more and more convinced that such a school was needed, was consistent with biblical teachings about educating children, and was worth investigating further to see what kind of interest we might find in nearby evangelical churches. We agreed from the beginning that if we were to start such a school in this area, it would have to be one which had the highest possible academic standards, coupled with faithfulness to the Lord and the teachings of Scripture, if it were to succeed.

From that point on the experience of Paul and Margie Engle played a very important role. Margie had taught for two years in a Christian school, Philmont Christian Academy in north suburban Philadelphia. Paul had done extensive research into the philosophy of Christian schools and the resources available for starting one. Paul agreed to serve as temporary chairman of a steering committee, which would investigate further the possibility of starting a Christian school.

We decided to contact the Association of Christian Schools International (at their headquarters in Whittier, California) to gain advice and materials. We also decided to circulate a survey in as many evangelical churches as we could find in the area, developing a list from the Yellow Pages and also using the help of Trinity Seminary Field Education office. From that survey (taken with bulletin inserts delivered to about 80 churches) we developed a mailing list, which began to grow rapidly. We planned a public meeting for November 1982, and decided to ask Joseph Bayley, a well know Christian writer who wholeheartedly supported Christian schools, to speak.

November 8, 1982: We had about one hundred interested people to hear a challenging speech by Joseph Bayly. Trinity Seminary graciously allowed us to use their chapel without charge, something that was a foretaste of

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the strong support we would receive both from Kenneth Meyer, President of Trinity Seminary and from Kenneth Kantzer, former Dean of the Seminary and shortly to become President of Trinity College.

As was to be typical of so many of CHA's meetings, this first public meeting had an atmosphere of expectancy, of joy, and of prayer. There was a strong desire to seek God's will in this matter, and an increasing confidence that He was leading many of us to involve ourselves wholeheartedly in this work.

Our steering committee went on meeting, expanded by many others who wished to help. We used interest forms from the November 8th meeting to divide people into committees: Finance, Public Relations, Prayer, Education and Building. And throughout the next several months, the Lord kept bringing to us people — again and again they were people with special skills just at the time they were needed. This was also true in terms of money: though we never seemed to have much extra money to work with, the Lord continued to bring contributions in (often to the amazement of our first treasurer, Dale Rust), and enabled us to watch expenses closely, so that from the very first day our bills have always been paid and there has almost always been a little extra in our account.

The year 1983 was filled with more planning and raising interest and support from Christians in the area. Significant events in the following months included these:

April 18, 1983: We held a public meeting, again at the Trinity Seminary chapel, to form an association, to incorporate as a nonprofit corporation in the state of Illinois, and to elect our first Board of Directors. The first Board elected was as follows: Wayne Grudem, Jerry Alexander, Dale Rust, Marilyn Kruecke, Mickey Jordan, Steve Kaad, and Jeff Crass. After the election of the Board, Paul Engle, who had declined to run for the Board, relinquished his role as Chairman of the Steering Committee, and the Steering Committee was dissolved. Tim Oxley volunteered to serve without charges as our legal counsel.

The Board began to work, selecting as its officers Wayne as President, Jerry as Vice President, Dale as Treasurer, and Mickey as Secretary.

May 17, 1983: Dr. Roy Lowrie, President of ACSI, spoke to another public meeting at Trinity Seminary chapel. He brought with him Dr. Paul Kienel, Executive Director of ASCI. Before and after the meeting, Dr. Lowrie and Dr. Kienel spent some very valuable hours with the Board and with our Committee Chairmen. As at the previous two meetings at Trinity, there were again about one hundred people in attendance, but not all of them were the same people who had been at the previous meetings.

May, July, October, and November of 1983: Dr. Robert Siemens, Principal of the Loudonville Christian School in Loudonville, New York (a suburb of Albany), made four visits here to work as a consultant with us in establishing policies and directions for the school. Dr. Lowrie had put us in touch with Dr. Siemens, and we found his counsel and direction extremely valuable in these early days. Over this time, a goal began to take shape more and more clearly; as God enabled us, we were seeking to make Christian Heritage Academy one of the best Christian schools in the United States. With that high goal in mind, many early policy decisions were made (regarding faculty qualifications, faculty and administrator salaries, the school building, curriculum, educational philosophy, etc.) that had a significant influence on the later development of the school.

December 6, 1983: Dr. and Mrs. Kenneth Kantzer spoke to a CHA Association meeting at Trinity Seminary, telling of their experience with their own children at Wheaton Christian Grammar School twenty-five years earlier, Dr. Kantzer had at one time served as President of the Board of Wheaton Christian Grammar School.

January 10, 1984: After several meetings, we came to an informal agreement to rent the former Oaklane School in Northbrook from the Korean Central Covenant Church, whose pastor was the Reverend Young Jae Lee. We were pleased that an evangelical group so in sympathy with our purposes was to be our landlord.

January 13-15, 1984: Dr. Samuel Warren, Principal of the Colonial Hills Christian School in Atlanta, came to interview with us. We concluded his time here by issuing him an invitation to become our first principal.

January 18, 1984 (9 p.m.): Dr. Warren phoned Wayne Grudem and accepted the invitation to become principal of Christian Heritage Academy beginning July 1st, 1984. We now had a principal but no teachers, no students, and no firm commitment to a building — yet God was at work in it all and kept bringing pieces of the puzzle together one at a time. We were very happy that such a highly qualified administrator (with a Ph. D. from Columbia University and successful administrative work in public schools in New York state as well as a large Christian school in Atlanta) had agreed to join CHA.

January 19, 1984: Our first Board of Reference luncheon was held at Marriott's Lincolnshire Resort. The Board of Reference was a group of respected Christians from various churches, denominations, and occupations,

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who agreed to lend their name to CHA to give us initial credibility with a wide range of Christians in the area. The members of this board were: Dr. Don Anderson, Dr. Warren Anderson, Mr. Joseph Bayly, Dr. David Gotaas, Mr. Warren Hayes, Mr. George Kangas, Dr. Kenneth Kantzer, Rev. Young Jae Lee, Rev. Erwin Lutzer, Dr. Kenneth Meyer, Mrs. Rogene Nelson, Rev. James Nichols, Mr. Timothy Oxley, Maj. Earl S. (Toby) Quirk, Dr. David Roth, and Dr. Robert Siemens.

March 26, 1984: [date not verified — need to check original lease]: The lease was signed to rent part of Oaklane School from the Korean Central Covent Church for three years. We now had a building!

April, 1984: Five teachers were invited by the Board to be our first faculty in the school: Margie Engle for Kindergarten, Amy Moore for First and Second Grade, Marcia Patterson for Third and Fourth Grade, Robin Russell for Fifth Grade, and Char Berry for Sixth Grade.

May, 1984: A new Board was elected, including John Vosnos (who had earlier replaced Mickey Jordan when Mickey moved to become pastor of a church in Guatemala), and also including Lois Yeh, who became CHA's secretary. The Board now included: Wayne Grudem, President; Jerry Alexander, Vice President; Dale Rust, Treasurer; Lois Yeh, Secretary; and Directors Steve Kaad, John Vosnos, Marilyn Kruecke, and Jeff Crass. (Tom Pettry was appointed in June to replace John Vosnos when he resigned due to time pressures.)

July 1, 1984: We began to move into the new building, under the leadership of Jim Lindberg, who had devoted many hours to the task of Building Committee Chairman.

September, 1984: CHA opened with 61 students. With much prayer, and with God's provision for every need along the way, an idea -- once just a dream -- had become a reality.