

## **Saint Laurence Education Annual Startup Report June 2006**

Saint Laurence has become well known in the local Paulding County community and is moving in that direction within several other constituencies, most notably in the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta. Our goal from the beginning was and continues to be “Nativity Atlanta.” This will manifest itself first with the opening of a single school. However, during this startup phase two other locations have also presented themselves as possible sites. In preparation for the first school in Paulding County, an after-school tutoring program was begun. This program has given us great exposure and more importantly produced tremendous results with the students. This summer will include our most intensive program to date, working in concert with the Boys & Girls Club. The bottom line is that we have a strong working program in place as we move toward acquiring the necessary resources to open a school. While the original plan called for opening the school in 2006, these resources dictate that we continue on our current path and plan the school opening in 2007.

The first three phases of our implementation plan were completed in 2004. In January 2005 we began phase IV, the current startup phase. This will end in 2007 with the opening of the school. There are a wide range of tasks to be completed in this present phase. We feel good about our progress in all these areas. Several of these tasks are simply on hold pending the success of what is now our prime concern, fundraising. With success in this area, we are confident we are ready to push all the buttons necessary to open the school.

Previous monthly reports detail the many accomplishments. These reports are included as an addendum as well as three financial reports. Please note that this financial accounting includes all activities since the inception of the feasibility study two years ago, beginning in July of 2005, and therefore includes the entire time period for which we have received support from the Cassin Foundation. The following overview will help identify the major areas of work and achievements.

### **Tutoring**

Tutoring has become the bedrock for getting out our message. Local Paulding support has seen this from a very positive perspective which will result in financial support. The Boys & Girls Club has been overwhelming in their accolades, including giving Saint Laurence the Volunteer Group of the Year Award for all metro Atlanta clubs (21). Tutoring has been the principle reason for much of the positive public relations we have received, such as newspaper articles. Several articles have been printed in local Paulding and Diocesan journals and two have made it into the Atlanta Constitution, our principle metro newspaper. In this program we typically see 15-20 students every day, four days each week. Each tutor takes 2-3 children for an average of 45 minutes. The accolades have come first and foremost because marked changes have occurred with the students. Academics have “sky rocketed,” according to Kevie Dixon, the club’s director. We can show this statistically by using student’s grades and the CRCT, the Georgia State standards test. While this is true and encouraging, we have also seen and heard about a change in attitude. The students have gained enthusiasm for learning and are always very excited to show their tutors their latest report card. Certainly this is the type of overall gain we are

looking for in a Nativity environment. Our summer program will include four weeks of classes of integrated curriculum, with a focus on science and math. Different grade levels will attend each week; each day will include six hours of instruction. These will be 'fun' hands on activities to reinforce their enthusiasm, as we also attempt to ascertain each group's academic weaknesses. Next school year we will return to our normal after school program. Some funding potentials for this program will also be sought, in the hopes of expansion beyond homework assistance. This of course will serve as our prime feeder program when we open the school. Any worries about actually finding enough children to attend the school have been washed away. One of the hardest conversations we have had has been telling parents of these children that we could not open the school in 2006; many have asked for application packages. Our minimum goal when we open the school in 2007 is for 15 students of each gender in the fifth grade. However, with this feeder program in place and assuming we obtain the appropriate funding, we are pondering the option of opening a sixth grade in year one as well, bringing the total first year student body to 60 children.

Tutoring has been a solid success. It will help launch us into a school. Acknowledging that the first Nativity school began in a similar way and took many years before a school was formed, we are confident our path is true. It was difficult having to postpone the school's opening, but we know patience is important in bringing the dream to reality.

## **School Formation**

### **Curriculum**

Substantial research has been conducted in curriculum. Dr. Gail Snipes, currently on our board and expected to be our future principal, has led this task. She is a great asset for the organization. Before Gail joined our team a baseline understanding of our needs was uncovered. Gail has researched many options. She also spent some time with Kim Morcate in New York and attended a Nativity Principal's conference. We have in our possession a copy of the work that was done at the Yale conference as well. We are now comfortable with what we will need. While we are always inquisitive about the latest research for the children we will serve, any real movement in this area is on hold pending the acquisition of the required funding. Final decisions will be made once this funding is in place and the timing is right. As we move toward a July 2007 opening, we expect to make decisions in this area in early 2007. We will certainly look at any best practices that can be secured through the Nativity Network. This will include evaluation methods. We expect to use the standard Georgia tests (CRCT) for comparisons. Georgia is also in the initial stages of implementing a new set of state standards and we will want to correlate with those as well. We want to be very careful not to over-test, which is a common complaint from many educators.

All faculty, staff, students, and parents will be held to high expectations. Many teachers will find the possibility of teaching at our school enticing. We will find the very best available. We will offer quality compensation for quality employees to ensure stability and the very best educational opportunity for our students. We must be able to pay a salary that respects these professionals. Our hope is to be able to match what these educators can obtain in the public schools.

## **Admissions**

Our admissions process has been laid out. Once again many best practices were reviewed from other Network schools. We are confident in the process and with the added knowledge we get from the tutoring program, we are sure we will find the right students who will excel in our environment.

## **Facilities**

No final decisions have been concerning a facility and property. The Lutheran church which originally offered space for our first year is still a strong possibility. Should the Episcopal Diocese decide to start a parish in Paulding County in 2007, we would hope to partner with them. Bishop Alexander really thought this process would be farther along, but he still believes a parish will begin in 2007. We would be ecstatic if this worked out, but it would be a mistake to count on it happening. For both a church and our school, the sooner we purchase property the better. This is understood by both parties.

Another strong option is another location altogether. The Episcopal Church of the Holy Cross has inquired and is moving forward with research on creating a school, and we have agreed to partner with them. They actually contacted the Nativity Network which then got us in contact. Their rector had lived in the northeast and knew of the basics. Their principle lay leader interested in a school has now met with us, and we are moving forward. Their location is more typical of a Nativity school because of its proximity to the city of Atlanta and its position in an economically depressed area. The church facility would comfortably house a middle school today. It is premature to put a lot of work into this option, but it does speak to a possible "Nativity Atlanta" complex. Funding partners might be found that would dictate we move in this direction. Another real possibility is one that has been in our minds since our inception. The Diocese runs an after school program in the inner city that could be converted to a school. This program has been around for quite awhile and could generate a lot of enthusiasm. Our focus is on Paulding County and there the facility issues can be overcome with modest funding when compared to locations closer to downtown Atlanta.

## **Partnerships**

We have developed relationships with several groups. The most important of these today is the Boys & Girls Club and the Episcopal Diocese. The Club relationship is rock solid. The Diocese is very strong, yet we are still surprised to find parishes who have not heard of us. In the end every parish needs a visit, which generally includes a trip to meet with the rector, and then a follow-up to meet with the parish as a whole. While each parish can offer some type of support via their outreach, the real goal is to find individuals within each parish that will champion the cause. In reality this process will take several years to accomplish and ultimately be never ending. Other partnerships such as with local private high schools and colleges, as well as organizations that will foster the personal growth of our student's parents have been advanced. We are really quite confident that our graduates will be well taken care of, and also believe we can pull entire families out of the poverty cycle they are trapped in.

## **Focus Group**

Our focus group, consisting of families who might have children in the school, was dormant for a few months, but has now been stimulated thanks to Rev. Thomas James, who is on our board. We have a strong relationship with these families and they trust us to carry through with our commitments.

## **Business Operations**

Our operations are well oiled. We use quality suppliers for software and hardware and believe we are very efficient in these processes. For example, nearly all of our literature is printed in house at a great cost savings. We use QuickBooks and the accompanying customer manager software to ensure good integration. We also use the Adobe product line for graphics, literature, and DVD's. We have a high quality printer for these publications as well as an LCD projector for our presentations. Our website is also in house and seems to be well received. Our implementation plan was created with Microsoft Project software, with the invaluable assistance from several engineers within our parish. A non-profit technology conference was attended locally and brought a big picture view of the future processes needed as we grow. To ensure regulatory compliance we use Paychex and AIG/Valic for our payroll mechanism. We will be submitting our second IRS 990 in July. This was done in house last year and will be this year as well. Our human resources are overseen by a professional on our board. Solid policies with checks and balances and an employee manual have been completed. The machine is well tuned; we are ready to expand as fundraising allows.

## **Board**

We successfully built and re-energized our board with individuals who do have great passion for this endeavor. We have eight members who offer a range of expertise and advice. We are working together to network with all their possible contacts. There is some potential but we do not believe there is a substantial funding source within this group of contacts. Growing the board with individuals who can be focused along these lines is a goal. Gail is our current Chair. Edith Woodling, who is Chaplain and acting principal for St. Martin's Episcopal Middle School, will assume these responsibilities in July. Rev. Woodling also was involved in another Episcopal school start-up. She brings a wealth of experience and knows what it takes to make this happen. All board members have agreed to stay with us as we open the school. Once open, we will institute a rotation process.

## **Fundraising**

This is a wide topic as there are many avenues we are exploring. The work in each area will be explained. Fundraising began at our inception. Initial monies were collected via the 501c3 of our home parish. Upon the approval of our own 501c3 application we moved into a higher gear. Since that time, we have raised \$213,500, \$146,500 of which has come from the Cassin Foundation for our feasibility study and the current startup phase. We have therefore raised \$67,000 outside of the assistance from the Cassin Foundation. A detailed QuickBooks report is attached as an addendum.

The processes we have and will undertake are well understood in the area of fundraising. Networking is really the key in all avenues. Research and follow up must be done well and promptly. This work requires dedicated and consistent manpower working the system that is in place. Our main technique is with the formation of Sponsor Groups. This cuts across all our potential supporters. Several large mailings have been created with moderate success in raising funds, and great success in spreading the word. One mailing was our initial newsletter. For this we have obtained the non-profit mailing status, which paid for itself in the first mailing. While we have many Sponsor groups on paper, our top six in round numbers are as follows:

Executive Director Friends and Family	\$32,000
St. Teresa's Parish	\$10,000
Saint Laurence Board	\$8,000
North Atlanta Convocation (St. Martin's Parish)	\$6,000
Episcopal Charities	\$5,000
Marietta Convocation	\$3,000

At this point in our history, everything must take a backseat to this part of the business. We do have a fundraising plan in place. One reality is that to effectively institute the plan, we need more manpower focused on this task. We have identified a strong candidate for the Development office and filling this position is a priority.

## **Grants**

Frankly, this been our biggest disappointment. We have secured several modest appropriations, but no where near our original goals. Based also on the history of other Nativity schools, we had hoped to secure almost half of our initial funding through this avenue. We have applied to over 60 institutions. We have had success within our diocese and expect this to continue, but this will not generate the kinds of funds we need. It seems most foundations will present a better opportunity once we have opened the school doors, but this initial startup phase is a harder sell. We have also come to realize that several natural disasters, most importantly Hurricane Katrina, has resulted in monies being redirected to relief efforts. We have made it through the initial filter of one foundation and this application will be completed this month. We have not found individuals who are connected with a foundation who can champion our cause. Once we can find these kind of people, we are confident our success rate will increase dramatically. In the end, this avenue also comes down to networking.

## **Corporations**

This is an area that has simply not had a lot of effort. We have made inquiries of the Atlanta Falcon's sports franchise and there seems to be a good match with their outreach goals. Our original plan called for less emphasis within the corporate community and we had modest goals. We do have a line on a couple of individuals who can help us here. Our efforts to date are a result of time management needs. A new option has presented itself via networking with The University of the South Alumni and this will be advanced over the next few months. Once again, networking is the key. Indeed, most corporations we have investigated require an employee who will spearhead the request.

## **Metro Atlanta**

This is a very large avenue that incorporates other groups. Metro Atlanta is an untapped resource; with the right connections, we are very confident our funding needs can be obtained. Our efforts to date have focused on networking within the Episcopal Diocese, which we believe is our best path into finding possibilities and the individuals who will pursue them. Further discussion will therefore be included under those headings. It should be noted that most, but not all, potential donors from this area consider Paulding part of the Metro complex, a reading that was not an issue in our original research.

## **Episcopal Diocese**

Ultimately, this will be the community that will breathe life into Saint Laurence. Bishop Alexander has supported us from the beginning. He has suggested strategies, helped us in spreading the vision, and pointed us toward several individuals. He has now been nominated for the position of Presiding Bishop, the leader of the American Church. We're told he is a leading candidate. Should he be elected, a transitional period at the diocesan level is inevitable. Of course, the inspiration for this project came from Saint Teresa's. This parish, home to most tutors and a majority of our board, has been going through a transition in looking for a new rector. Scott Kidd, who gave the inspirational sermon as a deacon, has now been ordained and has taken a position in another parish in the diocese. There are 93 parishes in the diocese. Many parishes have been visited and many have offered support of one type or another. The process has been to visit a convocation (a group of around 10 parishes). We then follow up with the individual rector of a parish. After that we hope to gain an audience with the congregation, hoping to find individuals with passion for the project. Unfortunately, some rectors have been very supportive, even finding us outreach monies, but have balked at a presentation to the parishioners. A few churches have not been able to help even via outreach. Other individual parishes have been very helpful and should be able to sponsor a student on their own. It should be noted that our diocese was called on in a large way to help with the Katrina aftermath. Several parishes told us they could not help this year, but they would like us to return in the future. The diocese and parish outreach dollars will sustain our current operations, maybe even let us expand tutoring, but the success of the school will depend on finding those individuals within each parish who have a passion for the children we serve. They exist and we'll find them, but it is taking longer than we had hoped. Some rectors are a bit hesitant in giving out names of their biggest donors and it's not hard to understand why. We simply must realize that this is a tough time for the Episcopal Church as a whole when it comes to funding. Since the national meeting two years ago, the estimates I've heard is that we have

lost 15% of our members and 25% of our financial backing. The biannual meeting is being held in June this year and we are all interested in what may result. Getting around to all the parishes is a large task. We have seen many but also need to allow for our employees to maintain their own personal parish life. That doesn't mean those individuals with resources are not available. They are, and we will locate them. They are just a bit more difficult to hook. Saint Laurence Education will be featured, along with other educational communities, in the new quarterly journal this fall and it should create some of the best PR to date. The diocese will be a solid long term supporter. Our goal is for 15 sponsorships or \$150,000 annually. This will be a tremendous help, but more will be needed. We are hopeful of winning a United Thank Offering grant from the national church as well which is a one time opportunity.

### **Sewanee**

The University of the South in Sewanee, TN offers huge potential. This is Alen's alma mater and the southern Episcopal Seminary. This avenue has of course a strong correlation with the Atlanta Episcopal Diocese. Making a match within these two constituencies presents a very strong opportunity. Just like a rector however, Sewanee is not going to hand out contributors names. With that said, there are research tools available to alumni that can achieve a lot. This work can be accomplished, but the process is time consuming. Our largest individual donor to date has come from Sewanee, as have several others. The work in this arena is really just in its infancy. Dedicated time for this work is needed. Beyond fundraising, effective communication could result in inspiration for individuals to look at Nativity schools in other cities. Alen recently visited Sewanee for several reasons. He was told they have quite a few alumni who have started schools and the editor of the journal was seriously considering a publication dedicated to those efforts. This would probably be the best marketing we could envision. We also received help from the development office as well as career services which might funnel interns our way.

### **Paulding Community**

We have become very visible and have been well received in Paulding County. We are involved within the community and are members of several civic organizations. Alen has been involved with 'Leadership Paulding' this year and is on the steering committee for 'Planning for Paulding.' Nearly all prominent business leaders are informed. We had hoped to find a more serious financial commitment this year. We should receive modest support from a good range of organizations and individuals, but it would be overly optimistic to assume this community would be able to fund the school. We are confident this community will support our current tutoring operations in perpetuity and that assistance will increase over time, but there are simply not enough individuals who have a passion for this type of project to fully fund a school. From this angle, the original concerns of the Nativity board in this area were well founded.

### **Government Grants**

This area was not explored until recently. Unfortunately, no real potentials were found. There are many possibilities once we open the school and start to implement specific programs, but startup funding and even tutoring assistance is not readily available. This is

an area that requires constant tracking and research and which will be a lower priority until increased manpower becomes available.

## **Individuals**

This is the ultimate area of funding. As mentioned above, these persons will be found through several avenues. They must be found to ensure our operation. Some have been found and initial presentations made. Others have been identified and we are networking to find the best ways to approach them. Atlanta indeed has great wealth within its community. Our general plan is to find specific individuals who are willing to help and spread the word. We will then hold some type of small event such as a dinner with the friends of that individual, with the understanding that a financial request will be made. Hopefully a few will agree and we can hold further events with their contacts. This general 'networking' process will locate our future supporters. We must spread the word and enthusiasm to find the folks. Our largest donor to date is a college classmate of Alen's who is a philanthropist and who has a passion for education. He made a \$20,000 challenge and \$18,500 of this has been received. We have since secured another \$2,000 commitment from Rev. Woodling's school; the final \$1,500 of the challenge will be received when the donor returns from overseas travels. In our crosshairs are three individuals who could probably fund the school and even a network of schools themselves. One is a personal friend of Alen's, another a prominent Episcopalian and business leader, and the last found via Episcopal contacts but simply an individual with a desire to help these kids. The first has given us a verbal commitment which may manifest itself by the end of the year. The other two still need work. We want to be very careful, not going too fast. Given the required time to cultivate these relationships, this avenue will make Saint Laurence Education a reality.

## **Conclusions**

This is a very exciting and yet stressful time for Saint Laurence. The ship is strong and efficient. Our tutoring program is producing fantastic results and we know our school will produce much more. Funding on the other hand has not been as forthcoming as we had hoped. The fact is that we started this project from ground zero. We did not begin with several individuals or even the diocese as a funding foundation. We did not know all the players in the community to jump start the process. The tough but prudent decision to postpone the opening to 2007 had to be made. We have learned a tremendous amount and have a very strong handle on everything associated with the schools opening at a basic level. Our next step is putting the correct professionals in the appropriate leadership roles. We are ready to push the buttons that will open the school, but we are simply short of the funding to do so. At this point funding really does dictate our next move and fundraising takes priority. Putting the leaders in place will be needed to have the dedicated effort required in each segment of the business. Our passion continues with great enthusiasm. Nativity Atlanta will be a reality on God's timetable, and we will work hard and wait patiently until that day comes. The support of the Cassin Foundation has been instrumental in getting us to this point, and the last installment of its grant will give us the resources needed to find and cultivate those individuals who will then create a legacy, breaking the cycle of poverty and producing leaders who will return to their community and help build its future.