

# Prairie Bible Institute Annual Meeting

## Report to the Board of Directors



October 18-20, 2023



# PRAIRIE COLLEGE

## President's Report October 2023

### OUR HEARTS ARE FULL!

No matter our circumstances in life, business, or ministry, we can always find reasons to be discouraged as well as reasons to be encouraged. It is my personal pre-disposition to be an optimist, kept in check by keeping an eye on the realities. As we are now into another school year and as we approach this Board meeting, I think there are more reasons to tilt toward being encouraged than normal.

**Total (unduplicated) headcount:** At the end of each fiscal year (June 30), we calculate the total number of students we have served in the previous 12 months. This includes students that join us on-campus in person, attend class on-line ("hyflex students"), take our online education courses, or are prison inmates.

Drumroll please...Our total students served in the year we just completed was 480, up from 443 in the previous year, and 437 the year before that. I think that is a number to celebrate! In 2010 we had 250, all on-campus in person. We still have about 240 students in that category. (We have seen revenue grow from \$7.5 million to \$11.1 million over the same period.) So, all of the growth in our enrollment has come through new channels of delivery – hyflex attendance of live classes, online (asynchronous) education, and prison inmate enrollment, which was at 50 inmates last year.

Some of our recent strategic initiatives have been focused on the expansion of our delivery channels, and the increase in enrollment is clearly benefiting from these initiatives. Inmate training is likely the one that is most unique and perhaps most rewarding. And the "Prison Bible Encounter" program that is being led by Gord Allert has recently tested the possibility of adding a women's prison to their list of locations. Gord reported on their visit in our weekly Wednesday morning staff prayer time – "Over 35 women attended an information session we conducted at the women's institution in Edmonton yesterday – that's about 20% of that prison's population! We were well received by staff and potential students alike. PTL! We expect to start teaching there in about 3 weeks. We are beginning a new class in Drumheller today with a new facilitator. Please pray..."

It is my opinion that we have been given a unique opportunity, and a special trust with ALL of the students. We are stewards of God's Word for this small window of time in each of these students' lives, and the fruit of our work will be the stories they write with their lives over the next 40 or 50 years.

What a privilege we have to be in this position!

## Strategic Initiatives

At this point we have two strategic initiatives underway – the completion of the application to the Ministry of Advanced Education that would grant Prairie the permission to offer the Bachelor of Education (B. Ed.) degree, and the Capital Campaign that would see our campus renovated and set up for the next 20 or 30 years.

**Bachelor of Education** – initiative being led by Darrel Reid. It has felt like our application had been stalled for no known reason for about 18 months.

After repeated enquiries into the reason for this, we finally received an explanation: The Ministry had a problem with our use of the term “Arts” in our Bachelor of Arts in Intercultural Studies (B.A.I.S.) and Bachelor of Arts in Ministry (B.A.M.); degrees that we had been offering since 1992 and 2002 respectively. Their opinion was that we had not followed proper application procedures for the use of those terms and therefore we were not in compliance in offering them. In addition, Ministry guidelines changed in 2018 that put several Alberta-based Christian colleges offside on the use of “Arts” in our degrees. We had responded to this when notified by the Ministry, and had not heard back, except by phone from the Minister who told us (and apparently them) not to act on the notification. We thought our degrees had been grandfathered and therefore we were in compliance.

This, however, was not the case, and therefore our application for a B.Ed. with the Ministry was awaiting our compliance with their requirement to discontinue use of the word “Arts” in our degrees. Knowing our need to be in compliance with the Ministry, we therefore agreed to discontinue use of the word “Arts” until we can reapply for use of the term “Arts” in our degrees, with the understanding that those students currently enrolled in those degree programs would be able to finish the degrees to which they had enrolled, i.e. BAIS and BAM.

Within a couple weeks of our agreement to come into compliance, the Ministry was offering us dates for a CAQC (Campus Alberta Quality Council) visit, which is the next step in the application process. At this point we are hoping this visit will take place toward the end of November.

Looking ahead, there are two CAQC visits. The first is to verify that Prairie College is capable of delivering university-level training **as an institution**. The second is to review the specific degree (B.Ed.) that is under consideration. CAQC will provide a report and recommendation to the Minister on each of the visits, at which point the Minister will decide to grant or deny the permission to Prairie to begin offering the B.Ed. (whose decision may or may not agree with the CAQC recommendation).

We believe this is an important initiative for the College, for K-12 Christian schools in Alberta and for K-12 schools around the world. We are in the business of preparing people to meet the greatest needs in the world, and clearly education is one of those great needs. Please pray...

**Capital Campaign** – In May, with the counsel of the Board’s Capital Campaign Steering Committee (“CCSC”), we retained Gordon Dirks to lead this important initiative. Through the summer, Gord pulled together the team, which, in addition to Kendi Dyck and our Development Team, includes Ray Sawatsky and Darrel Reid.

Money continues to come in for the Capital Campaign, but the traction is just beginning to come together for this team of campaign specialists. I believe we will see good results in the next year, and are hoping for surprisingly good results in the next two years. We have been refining the details that are needed for a new hangar/classroom building and a new residence, which are our top priorities.

At this point, it appears the **hangar/classroom building** would cost \$6 million, half of which is being tackled by MAFC with the other half by Prairie. Our goal is to have that funding identified and pledged this winter so that ground breaking can take place in the spring of 2024.

As a result of our opportunity to visit some schools while Elaine and I were away this summer, it became clear to us that the **new residence** should be comprised primarily of 4-bedroom/2-bath apartments (or “pods”) that would house 8 students. This was the model that we thought was having the best reception among the colleges we visited.

We are designing the apartments with a divider wall and door that would allow summer conference guests to have smaller two-bedroom units. The building will likely be built by Eagle Builders in Red Deer. At this point, we are estimating the total cost of the building, including an allowance for furnishings and demolition of the old residence will be \$16 million.

Expansion of Graduate (Master’s Level) Degrees – This is an ongoing strategic initiative that should not be underestimated in its importance to the future welfare of the College. Dr. Mark Jonah will be proposing the next degree that he, along with the Academic Council, feel we should add to our offerings. Many Christian colleges that appear to be healthy (Briercrest, Tyndale, Providence), have expanded their graduate school offerings and now have 50% of their students in graduate degree programs. This is a space that I believe we need to expand into.

### **Planning for Succession**

Articles abound on the topic of college and university presidential succession – typically focused on the short-term nature of time in office and the sudden nature of departures (five major US universities had their presidents quit in one week this summer). The primary reason given was the increasing complexity of the role that comes with serving such diverse audiences, most of whom feel uncommon levels of affinity with “their” school. Such loyalty is to be treasured...until it eclipses other, equally important constituencies, at which point the CEO is required to rein it in. And

then the offended party resorts to social media, hoping to hold the Board and CEO hostage. One article even suggested that “being a college or university president may be the toughest job in America” (Inside Higher Ed). It is a tough role to fill, and, as with most positions, it is likely that it is least appreciated when the person is doing a good job.

As mentioned during the May Board meeting, I believe it is time to start thinking/talking about and planning for succession, especially if we are to see an effective, high-speed passing of the baton to the next President of the College. This is something that is not done well at many organizations, both secular and not-for-profit. I would like to think we can do it well, so that the school moves from a good chapter in its history, to an even better one in the next.

We will be talking about a timeline for striking a Search Committee, retaining a Search Consultant, interviewing candidates, appointing a new President, and then a short transition plan. For about 20 years, corporate thinking has been that this is solely a Board activity. Prior to 2000, the general thinking was that the responsibility of the outgoing CEO (identify and prepare your successor). Most recent thinking has moved to a blend of the two, which I think has the highest potential for smooth and successful transitions, although this can only be true when the retiring CEO is leaving in good standing. I believe we have the circumstances to demonstrate how this can be done well, for the good of the College as well as all the constituencies (Board, employees, students, alumni, donors, and Gov’t ministries).

I’ve also included an HBR article in the Appendix that addresses the question of where to find the next CEO (internal promotion, external hire, external hire to-be-promoted, or from the Board). I think it is worth a slow-read.

We will talk about the various options and move forward as you direct.

I want to give a heartfelt thank-you for the short sabbatical Elaine and I were able to take this summer. We got away for the majority of two months. We saw a few colleges and looked at the most current residence practices, we visited a couple of major donors, we visited family, and we enjoyed having a lot of time together hiking some spectacular canyons, like Zion, Bryce, Grand Teton, and Yellowstone. There were multiple benefits to taking the break. Thank you.

Let me take this opportunity to thank each of you, once again, for your work on our Board. Please keep us in your prayers. We are looking forward to seeing you on campus in a couple of weeks.

*Mark*

Mark L. Maxwell  
President