

October 7th 2020:

Since 2017, I have served on the Board of Education at Beautiful Saviour Lutheran Church. Growing up I attended WELS parochial schools from K-12th grade, attending Resurrection Lutheran in Aurora IL K-8th grade. Graduated from Luther Preparatory School, Class of 2008. I have a passion for enabling others to receive a Christian education throughout their adolescence.

Professionally, I have 8 years of experience as a Commercial Freight Broker, specializing in railroad operations. I worked at Samsung for several years in San Diego as a project lead for their North American transportation management division.

In April 2020, during the beginning of the COVID pandemic, my brother Jon Polfer passed away suddenly. He assisted me to get started on this project as he had real-world experience working on developing websites and other computer skills. He graduated with a theology degree with a minor in computer science from WLC. After his passing, I resigned from my job in the transportation industry due to the loss and grief I was experiencing.

Due to the break in my career, I decided to focus my talents on something I was passionate about, helping our WELS school increase enrollment. With the school at a pivotal juncture, I took on the rebranding project. In an attempt to gain 4 to 8 students in our 3-5 grade classroom for the 2020-2021 school year. I knew having a great website and increasing our social media footprint would be key to reach the most potential parents possible. I started working several hours a day researching website design and creating the new website with updated content.

Our problem was a lack of enrollment in Beautiful Saviour Lutheran elementary school, with the congregation funding 70% of the school's expenses. 14 students enrolled in K-4 grade in 2019-2020. After 2018-2019, our school discontinued offering 5-8 grades due to a lack of enrollment.

Beautiful Saviour Lutheran School has been a part of the Carlsbad CA community for over 40 years. The school began as a mission of the church to educate the children with God's Word at the center of our culture. The height of enrollment was in the 90s and 2000s. I recall our congregation chairmen stating, "We are Carlsbad's best-kept secret in affordable private education".

What we were doing in terms of promotions tactics before June 2020 :

- Sending out mailers (postcards, relying on phone traffic/inquiries)
- Corner signs
- Relying on phone traffic/inquiries
- Relying on word of mouth
- Canvassing in Carlsbad with flyers

The Board of Education compared the life cycle of the school to a business. We felt it had reached its maturity stage after 43 years as enrollment declined steadily since 2007. We felt it was necessary to realign our brand and image with the Carlsbad, CA community, or head in another direction closing our Lutheran school.

WELS Statistics on Beautiful Saviour Lutheran School

<https://yearbook.wels.net/statpageLES/25540>

In February 2020, the board voted to change the school name from Beautiful Saviour Lutheran School to Carlsbad Christian Academy. We felt the name realigned with what the school had to become, no longer a school with a name and brand that says, “We are a school for the children of Beautiful Saviour Lutheran congregation” to “We are a private Christian school serving the Carlsbad CA community”.

Carlsbad Christian Academy is the school ministry of Beautiful Saviour Lutheran Church. We kept our Lutheran teachings in every way. However, our new name opens doors for others.

Our rebrand theory was shaped by a book I read, [Fishing on the other side: A guide to being a church in the digital age](#) by Mark Weible. I found that it had valuable insights when it comes to promoting a religious organization online. For example, churches can register with Google and qualify for \$10,000 worth of Google ads per month for free. I encourage you to check out the book for yourself. Here are a couple of quotes that resonated with me.

“Effective missionaries are students of language and culture...The internet is cheap, readily available, easy to use, and widely accepted.”

“Twenty-First Century humans will exist in cyberspace as well as time and space and the Church will need to meet in both places.”

“Since more people are used to getting more of their information through internet searches, if they can’t find your church on a search engine, the assumption is that either the church is poorly run, or it does not exist.”

The board of education changed our whole approach and decided to start “fishing on the digital side.” To us that meant, making our school visible on mobile devices vs. flyers, postcards, canvassing, etc. Marketing to our community through Google and Facebook. Mobile devices are polarizing when it comes to grabbing our attention, on average 1-4 hours per day. We felt we should directly advertise to our target market on mobile devices. All of our digital content created was designed to be mobile-friendly. Our previous website was not very mobile friendly and we feel this contributed to low potential enrollment.

One of our church members is a professional photographer, Alanna Farmer, donated her gifts conducting a photoshoot of our campus and students. We utilized those photos for our new website and to kick off our social media rebrand under the name Carlsbad Christian Academy. The new photos gave our website a professional touch to our school, showcasing how CCA authentically serves the coastal community and avoiding stock photos.

The CCA Board of Education began looking for a volunteer in June 2020 to help with social media and digital marketing, we felt this was necessary to show the community we exist. The board identified a volunteer with professional marketing experience to assist with our Rebrand. We considered an intern from a local university seeking a communications or marketing degree with the ability for the student to earn college credit. Through the power of networking on the internet, the board connected with Ashley Suarino, a marketing professional with 4 years of marketing experience.

Ashley agreed to graciously volunteer 10 hours/week as CCA's Digital Communication Manager. Ashley reports to our board of education twice per week through video chat sessions to discuss strategy and updates. Ashley's main focus is the management of social media, digital ads designer for Google and Facebook, website consulting, and improving SEO.

Ashley's Professional Background: Master's in Digital Communications at Syracuse University, Bachelor's in Advertising and Public Relations. Worked in marketing in NYC before COVID, started volunteering for CCA 6/24/2020.

Ashley Suraino's Personal Story

"I had been recently let go and looking for a new job with little success due to COVID-19's impact on the job market. I saw a post by Kia Polfer (Brian's now wife) about volunteering, in a LinkedIn group for Delta Zeta alumni. I immediately wanted to know more about what exactly Carlsbad Christian Academy was looking for in a volunteer. I was needing and looking for more purpose during the pandemic and it seemed like the perfect opportunity to get involved in.

In my first conversation with Brian, I could tell just how passionate he was about this project and improving the school. He had a vision for the school and the drive to make sure the school was successful. Hearing Brian's passion for this project made me more excited to be involved with CCA. Working alongside people who have a similar drive and passion for what they do has always been important to me. I was excited to get started right away and confident that we would be able to accomplish the goals Brian spoke about during our initial conversation." - Ashley Suarino

Ashley and I immediately began collaborating, posting on social media platforms via Facebook and Instagram. Through our research, posting on social media 3-5 times per week would make us above average compared to other schools. This also would give parents some content to

consume when researching schools via social media. We created Google and Facebook ads spending about \$2,500 on digital ad campaigns. We believe it was worth every cent. Focusing on creating a call to action throughout our website, we tried to make it as easy as possible to schedule a tour and check out our school. Within 30 days from the launch of our website, CCA had 40 requests for tours through our “Schedule a tour page” on our website www.carlsbadchristian.com.

On July 17th, 2020, California’s Governor Newsom mandated that our county’s public schools in San Diego County CA would need to start the school year distance learning format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The governor did allow for private schools to apply for a waiver to remain open, which Carlsbad Christian did apply for to conduct in-person instruction in the 2020-2021 school year. The website inquiries for tours flooded our email inbox all summer. What a blessing!

Stats: CCA Enrollment Recap since June 11th 2020

It was a **busy summer** at Carlsbad Christian Academy...

<i>Data: As of 9/27/2020</i>	<i>6/11-9/27</i>	<i>Launch CCA Website - 1st Day of School</i>	<i>Since School Began - 3rd Grade Teacher Call</i>	<i>Addition of dedicated 3rd Teacher- present</i>
	Total	6/11 - 8/23	8/24 - 9/11	9/12 - 9/27
School Inquires <small>CCA Website & Facebook</small>	148	119	23	6
Tours Conducted <small>Calendly Data</small>	86	70	9	7
Student Applicants <small>Online Only</small>	93	50	22	21
New Students Enrolled	54	39 <small>8 (TK) 31 (K-5th)</small>	6 <small>2 (TK) 6 (K-5th)</small>	9 <small>0 (TK) 9 (K-5th)</small>

As a result, we currently have 82 students enrolled in Carlsbad Christian Academy. With Covid-19 the inability to meet in person to drop off registration documents, we were forced to come up with a new online application process to accept students into Carlsbad Christian. We utilized [google forms](#) to create a [student application form](#). The applications began flooding in, we soon needed to create a waiting list. Our waiting list continued to grow which prompted us to call 2 teachers in the month of August and Sept 2020. Our school’s enrollment grew by over 200%, tripling our enrollment in 100 days.

We are a growing mission, the amount of time and effort put in by our CCA staff this summer is a testament to what our teachers believe at their core, teach Jesus little lambs. We saw the Lord’s hand in growing the enrollment at our school in Carlsbad CA.

We anticipate a flurry of inquiries about our school for next year continuing our online marketing efforts. We are dedicating more dollars of our budget toward digital advertising in December - April as a result of what we learned in this summer.

The Board of Education is exploring aligning our extracurriculars with the resources that exist already within our community. Potentially offering club surfing, we are 1 mile from the beach. Club sand volleyball. Potentially building a greenhouse on campus for STEM science, developing oceanography as part of our curriculum.

This coming October 2020 we continue our call process for a full-time principal for the 2021-22 school year. Our Pastor Wayne Uhlhorn is acting principal since the position became vacant Sept 2019. Carlsbad Christian asks that the Lord blesses our mission and provides a tremendous leader to guide us in our new mission at Carlsbad Christian Academy. May the Lord continue to shed his many blessings on our school ministry.

If other WELS schools would like to contact me regarding our promotion tactics in further detail please feel free to do so.

In Christ,

Brian Polfer
Board of Education at Carlsbad Christian Academy in Carlsbad, CA

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Tools utilized at Carlsbad Christian Academy to increase our digital footprint and enrollment

Google

★ The goal is to be in the top 3 google search results i.e. Local 3 pack. Google users rarely search on the next page.

Google Location (My Google Business App)

- Must have significantly more photos than competitors like you (google provides the data on your competition).
- Update your google business with complete and accurate information.
 - School hours, phone #, email address, a summary of your organization, product offerings.
- Results: When searching "private schools Carlsbad CA"
 - Rank increased from 40th to 3rd in 4 months
- Create or manage your location on google

- <https://www.google.com/business/>

Google Ads

- Create a budget for ads, target 7-10 keywords
- We targeted keyword search “private schools”.
- Advertised to users within a 15-mile radius, within a standard driving distance to school.

Social Media (Coastal theme throughout all platforms)

Facebook : Increased followers of CCA on Facebook by 22% in 3 months (from 252 to 309 followers as of 9/10/2020).

- Completed and updated our new page with accurate information.
- Posted professional photos on the page, and cover photo.
- Encouraged followers to apply to the school online and notified of upcoming registration dates.
- Emailed current parents we will be providing updates throughout the year via social media platforms, encouraging them to follow and engage.

Facebook Ads

- Utilized Facebook insights to determine the best times to post.
- Created several ad campaigns. We learned short 8-10 seconds videos had the most engagement.
- Professional photos and videos help you stand out.
- Utilize Facebook's call to action buttons.

Instagram : (@carlsbadchristian)

- Increased number of followers by 168% in 3 months (from 45 to 121 followers as of 9/10/2020)
- Hashtags: Used in social media posts to categorize content, making our content easier to find and engage with.
- Adding location: Using a general location people frequently search = more people seeing and engaging with posts.
- Tagging relevant accounts - This gains more exposure for our Instagram page and more engagement.

Website: SquareSpace

- Website - Squarespace (\$220 annual fee)
- A website dedicated to the school - separate from the church website
- Re-designed registration process
- Professional photos of our students, teachers, and campus. Avoid stock photos (try to keep uniformity with all photos).
- Make it easy to schedule a tour, storing all information in one spreadsheet that provides transparency to the staff, board, and admissions team.
- Easy for people to navigate through the website. Keep it simple.

- Added FAQ page
 - Allows parents/guardians to easily have some of their questions answered without having to take additional steps (ie. calling the school office, sending an email with their questions, etc.)
 - Makes decision making easier when choosing a school

Calendly (Free program, ability to upgrade to business package)

- We shared with our teachers and principal this online tool for easily scheduling meetings and tours.
- Choose your availability and length of the meeting. Block out any time and make changes in real-time.
- Any parent once shared the link, can easily click to schedule a tour through an email link. The system sends them a confirmation and reminder. (On the back end the admin immediately is notified and can choose who will give the tour.)
- The app allows multiple users, staff, and admissions teams to review scheduled tours.