

# ***25 Years, O God of Glory!***

## **SALT LAKE LUTHERAN HIGH SCHOOL 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration 2008-09**



My project is the preparation and planning for the celebration of the 25 years that God has blessed the Salt Lake Valley with the ministry of Lutheran High School. The goals of the project include: a) growing and strengthening our "Active" donor base; b) generating excitement for and connectedness with Lutheran High School in the larger Lutheran/Christian community; c) purposefully engaging our 300+ alumni in becoming and staying involved with Lutheran High events, programs, and celebrations; d) using the year's events as a way to get our "story" out to the greater public and grow our enrollment; and e) publicly celebrating the 25 years of service provided by Ms. Sheila Dewey in her role as administrative assistant since the school opened. Essentially, we want to integrate an advancement plan with the celebration events to grow "friends" and "funds" for the ministry of Lutheran High School and to propel the school into its next twenty-five years with significant momentum.

This project is perhaps a little unique in that the actual events and scope of the project haven't happened yet and the overall results won't be known until June 2009 (and beyond). I can tell you this, I am very grateful to have started the preparation and planning for this celebration as early as I did! In fact, in going through several stages of the planning, I wished I (or someone prior to my arrival) had started the groundwork even earlier because of the amount of time that it involved. I owe a lot of thanks to the Van Lunen Fellows program for my getting to this project as early as I did and for holding me accountable to see it through. I am really looking forward to our anniversary year and experiencing all of the events and celebrations we have planned. I also am excited to see how God will bless these efforts!

**Charles Gebhardt  
Lutheran High School  
4020 South 900 East  
Salt Lake City, UT 84124**

## **SALT LAKE LUTHERAN HIGH SCHOOL 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration 2008-09**

I feel I should initially give you the context of my situation and resulting project. I arrived at Salt Lake Lutheran High School in the summer of 2005 as the tenth administrator in the school's short history. I had previously been assistant principal for seven years at a small Lutheran high school in Nebraska and this was my first endeavor as head of school. My immediate predecessor had been in the position for five years. Prior to him, the average administrator had stayed for one to two years and "moved on". As a result, there had been very little continuity in the capacity of school leadership, files had hardly been "cleaned out", and there was no substantial history available to start from in order to prepare for such a significant milestone celebration. I rationalized that if I chose this celebration as my Van Lunen Fellows project, it would force me to get started in a timely fashion, keep me on track to be prepared for the event, and enable me to bounce ideas off of experts and peers through the program.

Furthermore, in my opinion, the lack of consistent and stable leadership is the main reason why Salt Lake Lutheran High School has never really *thrived* in its twenty-four years of existence. With such a turnover in the leadership role, parents understandably are nervous about the direction and longevity of the school. The school serves grades nine through twelve and in only four of those twenty-four years has enrollment passed one hundred students. As a result, the school has struggled financially and been surviving "hand to mouth" for most of those years.

It was clear to me when I arrived in Utah that restoring relationships with past families, donors, and supporting congregations - and generating an environment of optimism regarding the high school and its future - were going to need to be high priorities for me. Quickly realizing that I had arrived in the twenty-second year of the high school and had a major milestone anniversary just a few years away, I was hopeful that we could turn things around and that the anniversary year could play a major role in that. My focus then is to use the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration as evidence of God's desire not only for Lutheran High School to continue to serve in the Salt Lake Valley, but for the school to *thrive*. I want God to use the year as a springboard for generating excitement and good feelings in our current and future constituents and to propel the school forward with momentum into its next twenty-five years.

In forming a vision for what the year would look like, I determined that in addition to incorporating our anniversary into all of our "regular" annual events and traditions (golf tournament, concerts, auction, graduation...), we would have three main celebration events. They included a "kickoff" event at the beginning of the school year, a mid-year celebration of some type, and a culminating event at the end of the year that would springboard the school into its next twenty-five years. I wanted them to include some

significant speakers, so the first order of business was to contact those individuals and get our events on their calendars.

The dates were quickly set and the individual events were beginning to take shape by the late summer of 2007. The first event, the *Silver Anniversary Kickoff*, will be held on Sunday, August 24, 2008 at Christ Lutheran Church and School in Murray, Utah. Our traditional opening worship service will feature liturgy and music referencing the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the school. The president of the Rocky Mountain District - LCMS, Rev. Randy Golter, will preach. Following the service, a celebration pot-luck dinner will be held in the school gymnasium and include a recognition of the original founders of Lutheran High School.

The mid-year event will be held February 6-7, 2009 and be called *The Grand Reunion*. The two-day event will include basketball games, individual class reunions, and a formal reception on Saturday night featuring past faculty, staff, and administrators. The highlight of Saturday evening will be the recognition and celebration of the twenty-five years of faithful service provided by Ms. Sheila Dewey, school secretary and administrative assistant since the beginning of the school in 1984. So far, this is still a surprise to Ms. Dewey.

The end-of-year culminating event will be called the *Silver Jubilee* and take place on May 17, 2009. It will be a banquet-type event and include Dr. Ross Stueber, Executive Director of the Association of Lutheran Secondary Schools as speaker. The focus of this celebration will be to thank all of our past donors and volunteers and to be an igniter event to kickoff a new capital campaign to launch Lutheran High School into its next twenty-five years.

The faculty of Lutheran High had set the school year themes of the three years leading up to and including the anniversary year in the spring of 2006 with the overarching theme of "Live God's Truth" based on Ephesians 4:15-16 which reads, *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*" The themes of each year were selected as: 2006-07 - "Serve In Christ" (1 Peter 4:10), 2007-08 - "Alive In Christ" (2 Timothy 1:6-7), and 2008-09 - "Grow In Christ" based on Ephesians 2:21-22, which reads, *In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."*

Once the dates and speakers for the main events had been set, my focus turned towards getting some help in the form of an anniversary committee. Right away, one parent stepped forward who had experience in graphic design and offered to come up with a variety of anniversary logos for us to choose from. I had originally thought that all of our publications and mementos would include this logo so it was a

pretty “big deal”. She went right to work and in a few weeks we had several logos to choose from. Since no other volunteers had joined the anniversary committee at that time, I turned to my office/administrative staff and board of directors. After a little deliberation and some slight modifications, the logo at the beginning of this document was chosen.

A second major component of the project that I wanted to get started on right away was the formulation of a written history. There were a few motives for this. First, I knew that there was a lot of history about Lutheran High School that I didn’t know or hadn’t been told and what better way to really get to know the story of the school than to put together a “complete” historical record? Secondly, there were six file cabinets in my office area that I knew contained not just old information, but also a lot of old and unnecessary information to keep. I needed to clean out and organize the files of the nine previous administrators! This turned out to be a much more labor-intensive project than I had originally thought. Over the next few months, I gathered more than six paper boxes full of records and notes that could be shredded. The hours involved were too numerous to count and I ***strongly encourage*** any head of school to be diligent about clearing file cabinets of “disposable” information in a timely, if not annual, manner. Obviously having cleaned and organized the files (reducing them from six to three cabinets) they are now very useful to me, and truth be told, there were also precious nuggets of information and history discovered. I found files labeled “LHS History” and various notes and meeting minutes that had important events noted. There had been a history outline left by my predecessor and I used this as my starting point for the written history. As items were discovered, I would add them to the appropriate year in an outline form. I also started a physical history file that was organized year by year including a file labeled “Pre-1984” which stored information on the start-up of the school. This group of files proved to be invaluable to me in the writing of the history and I pray that those who follow me as head of school will maintain it.

As the school year progressed, much time was spent on compiling the history booklet. This involved not only the writing of the book, but having Ms. Dewey and others from our association read through it for accuracy and additional information. There were four or five drafts through the process. Once the information was relatively “firm”, I started gathering photos that I would incorporate into the book. By June, the book was ready for printing.

In addition to the history book, planning continued on the details of the events. As the three major celebration events were solidified, we still needed to discuss and finalize ways that we would incorporate our anniversary into our regular events such as our golf tournament in September, our annual dinner/auction in March, and our graduation ceremony in June. In conjunction with this, some frustrations continued to be the lack of volunteers coming forward to help. I understood the lack of participation through November and December due to holiday schedules and parties, but I was hopeful that in January or February a committee of at least three or four others would come together. The head of my Parents’

Group and I were really the only two members of this “committee” with other people offering suggestions about mementos, celebration event activities and locations, and other bits of “advice” from the “sidelines”. Again, this was probably my largest frustration and disappointment. Remember that all of the day-to-day operations of the school still needed to be dealt with and certainly the surprises or “fires” that popped up had to be addressed putting everything else on the “back burner”.

As I shared earlier, the results of this project won’t really be known for some time to come. I am really looking forward to our anniversary year and experiencing all of the events and celebrations for which we have planned. I also am excited to see how God will bless these efforts! In consultation with Byrle Kynerd, I have really been trying to focus on the kickoff event and how it will *set the stage* for the whole year. Byrle has given me some great advice on how to present this milestone to our constituents by reflecting on the people involved in the school’s past. He reminded me that the people involved in the history of the school are a significant part of the past (staff, students, donors, and congregations). He recommended that we affirm those people – restate publicly that they have done God’s will – that we should reflect on God’s grace to the school – and that our focus be on **what HE has done** *through* these people. Byrle has encouraged me to convey excitement about the present and future of Lutheran High. That we must trust God to enhance what He has used these past people to accomplish. ***The Founders helped create a “great Storehouse” of grace, mercy and other blessings and those that have followed have beautified it. Can the current generation contribute to the advancement of the school to honor those Founders by benefiting those who will come in the years ahead? In so doing, we will continue to trust God to extend what God has used the Founders to begin and develop.***

I certainly feel that I have learned a lot through this process. In a lot of respects, it has felt like a capital or building campaign and I’ve noticed that it has really wiped me out mentally and emotionally. I don’t think this is due to the project itself, but with the other duties as executive director, principal, assistant principal, admissions officer, public relations officer, custodian, and the like – one more thing on top of it all has really taken its toll. I feel fatigued. I have a new respect for and understanding of the statistic that a large percentage of administrators hand in their resignation following major events like a capital or building campaign. I pray that the feeling is merely temporary and that I will be able to “recharge” myself in the next couple of weeks before school resumes and the anniversary events commence. In spite of this, I remain thankful to be a Van Lunen Fellow and appreciate having worked on this project.

**Anniversary School Year Theme:**

**“GROW IN CHRIST”**

*“In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.*

*And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” Ephesians 2:21-22*

**Charles Gebhardt  
Salt Lake Lutheran High School**