

American Heritage School dedicated by Elder Rasband in Salt Lake City

BY Tad Walch DESERET NEWS | [Nov 18, 2022](#)



Noelle Pace shakes hands with Elder Ronald A. Rasband of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints after he dedicated an American Heritage School campus in a former Latter-day Saint meetinghouse leased from the church in Salt Lake City on Friday, Nov. 18, 2022. (Kristin Murphy, Deseret News)

The new downtown Salt Lake City campus of a private school that places Jesus Christ at the foundation of its academic mission was dedicated Friday as a “sanctuary of learning” by Elder Ronald A. Rasband of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The American Heritage School is not a church-run school, but its new campus is leasing a decommissioned Latter-day Saint meetinghouse remodeled to accommodate students and faculty on a campus that will eventually educate students from kindergarten through high school graduation.

The downtown campus on 200 North opened Aug. 30 with 115 students and 20 faculty. There now are 125 students, and American Heritage is actively looking for more students with room to reach 275. This newest campus in the heart of Salt Lake City was a multi-year

effort following an invitation from Elder Rasband to consider bringing the school to the state's capital.

On Friday he stood to dedicate the repurposed chapel as a schoolhouse while standing beneath a historic, treasured stained-glass window in what was once the meetinghouse's chapel.

Preserving the stained-glass window that portrays the First Vision

The Belgian-made window symbolizes the school's fusion of academics and Christianity.

The window is more than 115 years old and portrays the First Vision, the moment in 1820 when Joseph Smith said God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him. Latter-day Saints believe the vision led to the restoration of Christ's ancient church.



Light pours through a stained-glass window in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' Salt Lake Stake Center in downtown Salt Lake City. (Kristin Murphy, Deseret News)

“The history of the world, of civilization and of religion, was changed forever in that moment,” Elder Rasband said during the dedication meeting. “I hope as you study and learn, as you interact with friends, teachers and others in school and in the community, you will keep foremost in your mind to ‘hear him.’ This window will serve as your reminder.”

Claire Kenney, 14, a ninth-grader who transferred to American Heritage this fall from Mueller Park Junior High in Bountiful, said she enjoys studying the violin in front of the stained-glass window in the school’s performance hall, which was the meetinghouse chapel.

“I love it,” she said. “I’m so glad they were able to keep it.”

Keeping it required care amid the retrofitting, said Sam Roberts, the job site superintendent for Hogan Construction. The remodel began in April, leaving just four months for the work.

“This was a challenging venture with an incredibly tight timetable,” he said.

The arch-top gothic-style window was crafted in Belgium for \$895 and offered to the church in 1907. It was placed in a meetinghouse near downtown, then moved to the building American Heritage now occupies when it opened in 1966 as the home of the Salt Lake 17th Ward, one of the earliest congregations created in the Salt Lake Valley after the arrival of the Mormon pioneers.

“They planned for the new building, which we now enjoy, to include a prominent view of the window to remind visitors that any who lack wisdom can ask of God,” school principal Leland Anderson said.

What kind of education does the American Heritage School offer?

The American Heritage School aligns itself with the values of the Church of Jesus Christ, but is part of a worldwide cause to help parents of all faiths magnify their children’s futures, said the head of school, Grant Beckwith.

“Christ is our first cause,” Beckwith said during the dedicatory service, which included the school song that ends with the line, “Prepare for Christ to come in all you do.”

Durgin Jones, a ninth-grader at the school, spoke about the parable of the Good Samaritan. He said each student at the school is a brother and a sister, and that he hoped everyone would dedicate themselves “to the neighbors we encounter here.”

Marcelo Do Santos, a parent who spoke during the meeting, said his daughters had been bullied at their previous school, and that one recently said at American Heritage she had found friends who care about her.

“This school gives our children a safe place where they can involve the Savior in their secular and spiritual education,” he said.

Some of Elder Rasband’s grandchildren attend the non-profit, K-12 private school’s sprawling American Fork campus. In March 2019, he asked school officials to meet with him, then invited them to open a downtown Salt Lake campus and offered to lease the meetinghouse at 142 W. 200 North on favorable terms.



Grant Beckwith, American Heritage School head of school, and Elder Ronald A. Rasband, of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, announce that Elder Rasband will greet all the youth after dedicating an American Heritage School campus in a former Latter-day Saint Meetinghouse, leased from the Church in Salt Lake City, on Friday, Nov. 18, 2022. (Kristin Murphy, Deseret News)

The invitation was a reflection of the First Presidency’s direction that church leaders find ways to further the connection between the church and the area around Temple Square, Elder Rasband said. The school is designed to encourage families to live downtown while being able to provide their children with faith-based education.

Kenney said she has noticed big differences in the private-school education.

“I’ve noticed that at this school, I actually have to try,” she said. “In public school, I didn’t really have to.”

That's not the only change.

"I like how we talk about the gospel with our studies," she said. For example, she recently learned that the foundations of science all rely on Jesus Christ, she said.

History of the building

Church members donated 10,000 hours of labor to construction and nearly half of the \$550,000 cost during the mid-1960s, Elder Rasband said. Some of those members attended Friday's dedication.

"These faithful people leave you a rich heritage of Christ-centered lives," he said. He added, "A love for the Lord (has been) fostered here for many years."

Elder Rasband said he had what he called a very, very intense prompting that the education he valued for his grandchildren should be available in Salt Lake City as part of the First Presidency's purpose for making downtown more open to families.

"We love this school system," he said.



The Heritage Youth Choir sings during a dedication ceremony for a new American Heritage School campus in a former Latter-day Saint Meetinghouse, leased from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in Salt Lake City on Friday, Nov. 18, 2022. (Kristin Murphy, Deseret News)

Elder Rasband and other apostles through the decades had attended their Sunday church meetings in the building.

“We pay tribute to those who for years past have studied the gospel and been enriched by thy Spirit in this building which is now being consecrated to serve students with equal desire to grow in knowledge, understanding and opportunity in their mortal journey,” he said.

His invitation to turn the meetinghouse into a new American Heritage campus surprised school officials.

“Under other circumstances, we as a board would have been highly unlikely to accept,” board chairman Dan Burton said. But he said he and the other school officials decided to accept for three reasons — they felt a spiritual prompting, they believe God loves his children and the school provides opportunities to teach children that love and they support church leaders as prophets, seers and revelators.

The school aims to help students develop a love for America and the Founding Fathers as well as increase their faith in the Plan of Salvation, a Latter-day Saint term for God’s plan.



People applaud during a dedication ceremony for an American Heritage School campus in a former Latter-day Saint meetinghouse, leased from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in Salt Lake City on Friday, Nov. 18, 2022. (Kristin Murphy, Deseret News)

“Here, in this building, you will learn, discuss, experiment and become good citizens,” Elder Rasband said during the services. “Here, you will honor the past and the contributions of so many. Here, you will study with teachers who have and will introduce truths that connect everyday living with eternal principles. Here, you will establish new academic traditions with Christ as the foundation.”