

Dear Society members, Alumni, and Partners of Valley Christian Schools,

In March 2016, the Valley Christian Board of Directors approved the 2016-2019 Strategic Plan. In that plan, one of the foundational goals is for Valley Christian to be a more “loving, compassionate, and Spirit-filled community”

The board has established a wide range of tactics to meet this goal including changes in the VCHS Chapel experience, training to create a more welcoming environment for parents and students at all of our campuses and events, and the expectation and commitment to "competing Christianly" in athletics. During the creation of this strategy plan and contemplation on how best to implement the plan, the Board of Directors began discussing and praying about the appropriateness of the “Crusader” mascot in light of this vision.

The Valley Christian Board of Directors has determined that the Crusader mascot will be retired and replaced with a mascot that more accurately reflects Valley Christian’s commitment to “honor and glorify God by being a loving, compassionate, and Spirit-filled community.”

This has been an extremely difficult decision for the board and this decision was made after months of researching, wrestling, and praying over this topic. The board understands the “Crusader” mascot has served our school well since it was established in 1947 (1935 -1947 we were called “The Western Star”). The 1947 Crusader Annual states the following:

“This year our annual is dedicated to the expression of an ideal which the recurrent crusader design symbolized: Crusaders for Christ.

Every phase of school activity hinges upon this IDEAL, in that it gives expression to the philosophy of Christian living. In the classroom its motivating influence makes itself felt in every lesson. By it, teaching objectives are established, so that the child of the covenant may be furnished with the whole armor of a Christian: the girdle of Truth, the breastplate of Righteousness, sandals of the Preparation of the Gospel of Peace, the shield of Faith, the helmet of Salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. According to this standard of excellency, outcomes of Christian education are evaluated.

In 1947, it is clear that VCS leaders viewed the term “Crusaders” as faith-filled warriors, adorned in the Armor of Christ. We are grateful to our founders for leaving us with this legacy and recognize that for many years the mascot of Crusaders symbolized our highest ideals and evoked images of self-sacrifice, honor, and devotion to God. As such, the “Crusader” mascot was congruent with Valley Christian Schools.

In the new, more global environment, of which we are now active participants, the mascot of Crusaders no longer commonly represents the ideals central to our Christian-school community. For much of the world, including many with a deep heritage of Christian education at Valley Christian Schools, the word “Crusades” represents violence, brutality, and pain.

To the world, “Crusader” does not represent well who we are as a school and it is no longer a reflection of what we are trying to accomplish at Valley Christian Schools.

The board understands that sincere Christians can debate the value of the historical Crusades and their place in history. Arguments supporting both sides of this issue could be well presented, and both could be true. However, because the “Crusader” image is offensive to many within and outside of our community, the Board of Directors has determined changing the mascot aligns more closely with our Strategic Plan to be a more “loving, compassionate, and Spirit-filled community.”

The “Crusader” has been part of a strong, historical tradition of Valley Christian and it is difficult to part with tradition. The Board of Directors feels very strongly that changing the name does not eliminate, or somehow taint our history or end our tradition. In fact, having the courage to consider making this change highlights our commitment to being Christian, viewing the world Christianly, and loving our neighbors. The true tradition of Valley Christian School is built on a Christian foundation, not a mascot. We must be willing to hold loosely to the parts of our tradition that no longer fit with our community or that may be offensive to children that God loves while at the same time, hold tightly to the tradition of faith, grace, and love on which the school was built. By changing our mascot, we are not losing tradition, but acting out of the values of our Christian tradition.

It is not the intention of the Board of Directors to erase, shame, or somehow diminish the value of the 69 years of Valley Christian Crusaders. We intend to honor the VC Crusader history while at the same time making a change to a new mascot in order to demonstrate our commitment to being Christ-like in a changing world while leaving the mission of the school unchanged.

Public discussions will be held on Tuesday, March 14 at 5:30 pm and Wednesday, March 15 at 5:30 pm in the High School Verhoeven College and Career Center to provide more information about this decision. In the meantime, the Board of Directors asks the Valley Christian Community to be prayerful and sensitive to the fact that individuals on *both* sides of this issue have strong and appropriate convictions on this matter. As a Christian community we ask that grace, peace, and generosity be extended to all.

A new mascot will be chosen by the Valley Christian Community. The Board of Directors will introduce a process and timeline in which alumni, society members, faculty, staff, and students will participate in the selection of a new mascot to take us into the future.

In Christ,

Valley Christian Board of Directors