

Come Together, Right Now!

By Gary Mabry, VP, Church

The whole concept of “reunion” just makes you smile. There are the family reunions, when the nieces and the grandsons have grown so much you hardly recognize them. There are the high school reunions when you see how many women have changed their hair color from gray to blonde and how many men have changed theirs from brown to clear. At college reunions, you are amazed at how the campus has blossomed with new buildings and dorms, outdoor sculptures and fountains, library technology and seriously upgraded dining facilities. A church reunion celebrates the commitment, contribution and sacrifice of those who fought the good fight, heard the call to mission and now joins in the celebration of fresh, dynamic leadership. No matter what part of the movie you entered the theater—veteran or a newbie—the experience is one that nurtures connections and bridges generations.

I am pleased to have been a part of the choral tradition of Abilene Christian University. Our choirs met in the Roxie Neal Recital Hall of the Leonard Burford Music Building, a structure named after the legendary Choral Director and Department Chair, who had been blind from his mid 20s. By the time I arrived there in 1970, Jack Boyd was Director of Choral Activities. I studied voice with Jeanette Lipford and Rollie Blondeau. Several years after my graduation, I returned to teach there, sharing the choral duties with Jack Boyd, then Milton Pullen. The building was a bit cramped for space, so we stored our risers in the men’s restroom. I have the opportunity to relive a good bit of that history and those experiences, returning to campus every other summer to conduct the ACU Alumni Chorus. Now we meet in the lovely Williams Performing Arts Center at our Choral Reunion for two days of rehearsal and recording. Dr. Boyd and I do most of the hymn arranging and conduct this ensemble of 150+ singers, who range in age from 20 something to 80 something. Right there in the soprano section are singers who were my classmates, singers I conducted in the 1980s, and Jeanette Lipford reminding me to “speak slowly and clearly” when giving instructions. As a bonus, I get to tune in for a Charles Nelson history lesson. It sure beats a cookies and punch reception.

In 1991, I joined the faculty of the University of Texas at San Antonio and started the UTSA Women’s Choir. In addition to 23 years of music making, we celebrated a 10-year, 15-year and 20-year reunion. Many former members have returned for these occasions to share stories and rehearse a few old favorites. The highlight is a Saturday evening concert. In March of 2010, we gathered 60 voices to form the UTSA Women’s Alumni Choir and presented a Prelude Concert at Carnegie Hall. Some of those 1991 vets, now mothers and teachers, came to the Big Apple by plane and train to be a part of the experience.

I get some of that peaceful, easy feeling every time you and I gather for a convention. Here we are wrapping up the 2014 TCDA Convention—convocation, a reunion of colleagues and friends to share our love for choral music and teaching. It’s not just the reading sessions, the clinics and the exhibits that liven up this jumpstart for fall event; it’s the dynamic of “coming together.” I always look forward to seeing everyone again in San Antonio and hope I was able to see you!