

# *A More Excellent Way: A Changing BYU in a Changing World*

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**I**t is a privilege to gather with and greet you today. I look forward to our Annual University Conference because, in many ways, it signals the start of another academic year and the beginning of yet another series of special adventures here at BYU.

For me a sense of time has always been a little tricky. It certainly is today.

In some respects it seems that so much has transpired since we last met in this setting that it must have been years ago. Nearly a year ago I was formally installed in my current position after a summer's "test drive." We have had two more commencement exercises, graduating thousands and replacing them with incoming students. We have had honored and valued associates retire, have welcomed impressive new faculty and staff in hopes of matching our incredible students, and have had both sorrow in the death of colleagues and loved ones and joy in the birth of new babies and other wonderful events. We have suffered through some disappointments and rejoiced in tremendous successes in virtually every area of the university. And yet we are here: stronger, more vibrant, and with even greater potential for the future. As I tally the events, it seems like we have been together a long time.

On the other hand, it also seems as if we gathered in our last Annual University

Conference just days or possibly weeks ago. As I have thought about our beloved friend and mentor Elder Neal A. Maxwell in the days since his passing, I smile at his comment made in his later years that he could remember when summers were three months long! This summer has seemed very short.

We all must deal constantly with the realities of the present, but we must never forget the past—particularly when that history has been so significant in shaping us as an institution and positioning us for our current success. Nevertheless, it seems to me that we have a particular responsibility as a university generally and as Brigham Young University specifically to look carefully and thoughtfully to our future.

As I have considered my comments for today and our directions for the coming year, it has seemed to me that two notions, quite separate in some respects, intertwine as we think about our unique situation at Brigham Young University. The first is that BYU is a changing university in a changing world. The second is that both change and order must be

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*Cecil O. Samuelson was president of BYU when this address was delivered at the BYU Annual University Conference on 24 August 2004.*

reflected in our thinking and considerations if we are to accomplish the purposes for our existence as a university. It is clear that much around us is changing and that we must often be both proactive and reactive in response. It is also apparent that, for us, some important things do not and cannot change. It behooves us always to be clear about these distinctions.

Although it is true that the past is only the prologue to the future, it is also true that our strength and potential have been and are deeply rooted in our past and the prophecies made about BYU. I mention this because, although many institutions of higher learning feel that they can excel only by escaping or even repudiating their roots and history, we are grateful to be at a place where our past lights the way to our future excellence if we are willing to do our parts. BYU was originally established not for what it might do in its first years or decades but especially because of what it must do now and in future years. The vision was clear at the beginning and it remains clear today as we attempt to travel through the waves and shoals of rapidly changing seas. It is comforting and necessary to understand things that must change as well as things that will never change.

In this context the Apostle Paul coined the phrase “a more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31). Without the need to disown or apologize for what we have thus far done, we acknowledge that a fundamental principle is the need to seek and follow “a more excellent way.”

All of the gospel gifts, attitudes, and principles articulated by Paul are appropriate for our consideration. For example, he described a diversity “of gifts” and “differences of administrations” (1 Corinthians 12:4–5). I do not believe that he had the Development Office or the Smoot Building in mind as he discussed gifts and administration, but he does describe much about the ideal university. Said he: “For as the body is one, and hath many members,

and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12). All of us have differences in our gifts, strengths, and weaknesses, but we are all to be one and one with Christ.

As BYU strives to be “one,” meaning united and pulling together, we recognize that we have many members: more than 33,000 students, 1,600 faculty, and 2,500 administrative and staff personnel. We have our own interests, personalities, preferences, strengths, and weaknesses, but we are also “one body” in that we share in a common mission to achieve academic excellence in the context of nurturing our testimonies of God the Eternal Father and His Son, the resurrected Jesus Christ, and of the reality of the restoration of the gospel through the Prophet Joseph Smith. This commonality of faith and testimony—together with our joined commitment to scholarly excellence in each of our disciplines and our commitment to the learning and teaching of our wonderful students—provides the basis for the “oneness” we seek and experience.

We are not really the same, except in the most important things. I am grateful when those with gifts and talents I do not have share them. Sharon and I have been warmed and blessed by your thoughtfulness and generosity. We have been welcomed and are now at home. Thanks to so many of you for your roles in our acceptance. And thanks also for being who and what you are.

As many of you know, at my inauguration in September 2003 President Hinckley gave us a charge to help BYU become the best it could be.

Perhaps with the goal of teaching correct principles but wanting us to govern ourselves, the prophet did not specify how or when we were to be the best or by what measure we are meant to be the best. He is the chairman of our board of trustees and the Lord’s prophet. As a result, I have spent many hours reflecting on how we might merit his approval and meet

his expectations and encouragement. Most of you have also thought about this, and I have benefited from your observations and counsel.

I confess that I still have not been at BYU long enough to know all the answers, and I hope that day never comes. If it does, in my mind then it will be time for me to leave. I hope you know that part of the reason for retaining my ignorance in some important areas is so that I can still legitimize my presence here. I love being at BYU!

I believe my previous university experience, now being supplemented, honed, and enlarged on this wonderful campus, allows me to have some feeling for a few of the questions we should be asking. I believe it is consistent with gospel principles that inspiration can occur bottom-up as well as top-down. By that I mean that the best insights often come from those closest to the issue being considered. Given that a wider perspective may occasionally also be useful, it is optimal when the streams of inspiration converge on common ground with all those involved. In the spirit of sharing ideas that may provoke or supplement your own, let me provide a context for my sense of some of our challenges and opportunities at a changing BYU—challenges and opportunities that will position us to be even better in fulfilling our roles within a changing worldwide Church and a rapidly changing world.

### **Changing World**

If I may, let me mention some world changes that are shaping our futures. You will be able to think of many such examples.

First, amidst very dramatic shifts in global population concentrations, Christianity is moving southward (see Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2002]). Many people, including Christians, from the Southern Hemisphere are moving north, but the growth of the Christian faiths is progressing most quickly and remark-

ably in the Southern Hemisphere—including Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Our Church is no exception, and the worldwide Church of the relatively near future is likely to be more “southern,” less formally educated, less materially well off, and less Caucasian. No wonder President Hinckley was prompted to begin the Perpetual Education Fund.

Some developed countries, particularly in Europe, are seeing a drop in total population with very low birth rates and yet an influx of immigrants, mainly non-Christians, primarily from the south. The ethnic demographics of many nations are changing, including those of the USA. At the same time, many of the lesser-developed nations continue to have impressive population growth without always having the infrastructure to support and sustain their people.

Demographic shifts may bring the two great world religions of Christianity and Islam into increasing contact. We see evidence of confrontation in many places and cooperation in few. Perhaps in Africa we see the clearest beginnings of the battle for the souls of these people. With all of the obvious problems facing the developing world, family and other basic values may be more intact in Africa than in some Western and urban situations.

Second, resource and environmental management will likely focus not so much on finding energy sources, food, and useable water as it will on efforts to see these resources allocated and distributed appropriately (see Center for Strategic and International Studies [CSIS], *Seven Revolutions*, “Resource Management,” at [www.7revs.org/Resources/res2.htm](http://www.7revs.org/Resources/res2.htm)). I’m told that some estimates indicate that population growth and increasing standards of living will double food consumption around the world in the next 30 years.

As many of us travel, we are frequently reminded of how fortunate we are with respect to our material circumstances in addition to our spiritual environment at BYU. It should

give us pause that well over half the world's population subsists for a day or longer on less than what many of us spend for a quick lunch at the Cougar eat. It is understandable and natural that our Church leaders, who travel the world constantly, are very much aware of the abundance we enjoy at this university. Although we could always use more resources to advance our work, we must also constantly think of how we can do more and be better with what we already have. I believe, and I have mentioned this before, that most often our limitations in our quests for excellence are not money or resource related. Rather, we limit ourselves with a lack of faith, imagination, or just hard work.

President Hinckley has invited us to think of what we will stop doing when we propose a new initiative. As I share his counsel with you, I ask that we do an even better job of balancing. We can do so by carefully shortening the list of good new things we want to start and thoughtfully adding to the list of those things still good but perhaps no longer of top priority. I express appreciation to and admiration for those who make things work well for our students. I have been particularly impressed with many of you in our latest cycle of university resource planning who are so clearly concerned about and dedicated to our students.

A third area of staggering world change with huge implications for all of us involves technology and the diffusion of knowledge and information (see CSIS, [www.7refs.org/Technology/tech2.htm](http://www.7refs.org/Technology/tech2.htm)). These changes and expansions are occurring at a revolutionary—not evolutionary—pace. For example, changes in computation, genomics, and nanotechnology are reshaping materials science, chemistry, and physics—not to mention biology, engineering, medicine, and other disciplines.

This is one reason why BYU is investing as we are in the people and equipment relating to keeping on the advancing edge of relevant technology. We can't do all that we would

like to do in this area, and it is only one of several that vies for our precious and scarce resources. By the way, in addition to the obvious merits and necessities of these endeavors, we must measure what we do by its potential contribution to advancing meaningful teaching and research across the university that supports, enriches, and particularly benefits our students.

We share much in common with other universities in this country and elsewhere as we analyze and study these trends and others I might mention. These changes have obvious impact on what we need to do and what we need to become. None of our disciplines are static and several are changing very rapidly. Although I maintain significant interest in my own professional discipline, my attention to other pressing and important matters these last few years has left me obsolete in places where my knowledge and skills were close to the advancing edge fairly recently. As with individuals, universities also quickly face obsolescence when they fail to continue to change, grow, and adapt to their new and often rapidly different environments. This is why lifelong learning is such an important BYU aim and why we must consider these issues thoughtfully even when they stretch us beyond our comfort zones.

BYU, like all vibrant living organisms, is changing and must change in some significant ways. As I discuss the modifications in our landscape though, we of all people must never forget that some things—our fundamentals and our “charted course”—do not and will not vary (see J. Reuben Clark, “The Charted Course of the Church in Education,” talk given at Aspen Grove, 8 August 1938).

### **Some Basic Questions**

Of the many important issues we could pursue, I introduced to key academic and staff leaders on campus last spring some questions I think are basic. There are many more that

could be appropriately asked, but the ones I posed in our leadership retreat relate to standards, measurement, resources, faculty, and students. Let me mention each of these briefly because I wish to invite the entire campus community to engage in thinking about and discussing these kinds of inquiries in the months ahead.

By standards, I mean we need to consider questions such as these:

- How does BYU determine which external or nationally normative standards deserve our attention and effort in our quest to excel?
- How do we define our own or internal standards that will lead us to become the best we can be?

In this context, measurement includes issues such as the following:

- What are the most significant tangible measures of our success in achieving our mission and aims?
- How do we estimate or evaluate the intangible measures?
- How do we align these measures with our efforts to bless and benefit our students? After all, they are the reason the rest of us are here!

As we think of resources, questions such as the following come to mind:

- How do we prioritize our finite resources to accomplish our mission and aims?
- What are appropriate resources for us to seek? Which are not appropriate?
- How do we plan and prioritize resources in light of BYU's role as part of the kingdom with responsibilities unique to us?

Among our most precious resources are our faculty and staff. Thus we ask:

- Who will be the new faculty we recruit? How will we decide?
- What will be their qualifications?
- How will faculty FTEs be allocated or reallocated?
- How will we address such issues as rank and continuing status?
- How will we address teaching, mentoring, research, and citizenship work loads?
- How will we address changing faculty expectations as the university continues to change to become the best we can be?

Our reason for being here is our students, and they must be the beneficiaries of all that we do.

- Who will be the new students we admit?
- Are current selection criteria and procedures appropriate and adequate?
- How do we achieve excellence without being inappropriately exclusive?
- How will we serve (or will we?) "late bloomers" or nontraditional students?
- How will we fulfill our responsibilities to international students and the worldwide Church?

### **Opportunities for Dialogue and Enlightenment**

You will all be able to think of additional, important categories of concern as well as multiple questions in each area. I encourage you to do so and to discuss them among colleagues and the administration. In addition, we will attempt to encourage inquiry and discussion via a number of various fora in the months ahead. These will include regularly scheduled events such as our leadership retreats and, in addition, some special gatherings to be developed shortly. Also, we will look to expand our dialogue and understanding of the changing world that I have addressed so superficially in my comments today. We have many on our campus who will be able to contribute very significantly in this respect. We will also have

guests of many perspectives and experiences with us to strengthen our opportunities for enlightenment. This is an important part of the work of a university such as ours. We will have more to say about these matters as we work with you in the weeks ahead.

### **Current Situations and Directions**

Let me now, in the remaining minutes allotted to me, share some perceptions of our current situation and direction as I see them. I will attempt to do what I ask of each of you: try hard to consolidate what I really know and what I believe while keeping an open mind and heart as we learn together about some of the details and new or changing opportunities and responsibilities that we face. Time permits a brief overview of three areas and then a few comments on the notion of order and change that I mentioned at the outset.

### **Downtown Salt Lake Center**

One of the significant changes that we face is what I perceive to be a unique opportunity for BYU quite unlike any that we have had before. Because we are in the early stages, there are many details not known—at least to me. Further, the ground rules and circumstances are new to all of us here at BYU. I speak of the new BYU downtown Salt Lake Center. Let me tell you briefly what I do know and what I do not know and then share some possible implications and opportunities for us.

As is now widely known, President Hinckley announced last fall that a new campus would be located adjacent to the Church headquarters complex in downtown Salt Lake City. This campus will house the LDS Business College (now located a few blocks east on South Temple Street); the BYU Salt Lake Center (currently located on Highland Drive in the Holladay area); and some new or expanded BYU programs. Recently the Church has acquired the Triad Center buildings located on the city block between North

and South Temple Streets and between 300 and 400 West. Tentative plans currently call for our initial occupancy of some of this space for these programs. It is our understanding from the trustees that although BYU will be colocated with the LDS Business College, each will remain separate entities with distinct institutional identities—as is currently the case. Although we hope to be able to share some classrooms and support services, the clearly different missions of these two institutions will be maintained.

Likewise, although there will be a significant expansion of BYU activities on the Salt Lake campus, this does not signal the creation of a new or separate institution. What we do will be part of BYU here in Provo and will be coordinated with and through our current academic structure. Because we will be on the Church campus, some of the support services will be provided by the Church rather than through our excellent people in Provo. Our current Salt Lake Center programs will generally continue to operate as they do now, with the understandable adjustments that occur in any organization over time and with changes that become appropriate.

The major and new difference that will be immediately obvious and substantive will be the location on the Salt Lake site of programs that we have thus far described as “clusters.” They will be part of established colleges or schools here on the Provo campus. Although exactly who or what will be there is not yet fully clear, it is likely that there will be business and education clusters in addition to others over time.

Several dimensions of this new effort are unique. The first is that this project is being carried out at the direction of the First Presidency as part of their strategy to enrich, enliven, and preserve central downtown Salt Lake City. They approached us rather than our taking a proposal to the board of trustees, which is the usual procedure when BYU embarks on a new

or expanded enterprise. The second dimension has to do with the criteria that have been receiving consideration in the decision as to whom will be the most likely candidates to locate there. Basically, the following are among the measures that affect the decision:

1. Is there a demand for the program on the part of BYU students that is currently not being met?
2. Does the college or school have the excellence, capacity, and willingness to have an expanded program if appropriate resources are made available?
3. Is there a high demand, currently unmet, for graduates in the area in question?
4. Will the cluster be able to function with relatively large numbers of students without the need for extensive space or unique, expensive equipment?
5. Are there sound academic reasons, even advantages, for our students to be located in downtown Salt Lake City?

Other considerations will also apply. These include things we can do to be good citizens in the city and also to avoid where possible becoming an additional threat or distraction to Salt Lake Community College, Westminster College, the University of Utah, and other institutions with a stake in Salt Lake City.

Most of our BYU academic programs can satisfy some of the criteria. Indeed, all of our limited enrollment programs can. But at the start we will be limited in the numbers we can accommodate in Salt Lake City. Likewise, disciplines that require large amounts of specialized space, have a low density of students in their academic space, or require expensive equipment and laboratories are not considered to be particularly good fits at this time. There will be more on this later, and even more of our faculty and staff will be broadly and deeply involved in the months and years ahead.

### **Reaffirmation of University Accreditation**

On a different but important topic, let me remind all of us that we are now in the final two years leading up to our next round of accreditation. I believe most of us would not list the work and effort attendant to the accreditation process near the top on our agenda of things we most enjoy doing. Nevertheless, the exercise is essential as we attempt to maintain and, where possible, enhance the stature and reputation of BYU in the broad educational community. In addition, the necessity of self-examination, which is part of the process, is essential if we are to be the best we can be.

I have been involved with accreditation activities in various ways for more than 30 years. Although there is much that I would like to be different, one change seems very positive to me and to the advantage of Brigham Young University. There was a time when virtually all the criteria for success of an institution in meeting its goals and responsibilities were externally imposed. That is, we were judged on the basis of what others thought we should be rather than on what we are striving to accomplish.

Although sometimes subtle, the change is dramatic for places like BYU. Now we are basically asked to identify clearly who we are and what we expect to accomplish. We then are measured by our own standards. Although this seems to be a very welcome and appropriate change in attitude and direction, it is not without pitfalls.

In the "old days" when we might fall short in a particular area or activity, we could say, sometimes with justification, that this measure should not really apply to us because we are so different.

In our current environment we have in large part identified who we are and the measures to be used. The expectation is that we will be and do what we say we are and will accomplish. We must be both consistent and have complete integrity with our aims, mission,

and self-descriptions. No longer can we hide—except in a few limited ways—behind the notion that because we are different we do not require or deserve the scrutiny of others. In fact, it is part of our mission to represent this university broadly, and the accreditation process will be helpful in doing so. Nevertheless it is demanding, sometimes grueling work, and I express appreciation to the very many in our BYU community who are and will work so hard to see this process through to a wonderfully positive conclusion.

In all of this we will be working on the issues of standards, measures, resources, faculty, and students for our own purposes, but the activities will meld well with our accreditation efforts. In addition, we will be working even more vigorously and in more focused ways with our loyal alumni and generous supporters and friends.

#### **Loyal Alumni, Generous Supporters, and Friends**

We look to these groups for financial support and without apology will continue to court, pursue, and ask for their treasure. Beyond financial contributions, however, we are also learning much from them about their experiences with us. Many will know that we do extensive surveys of our graduates and alumni and are able to use their experiences and perceptions, for example, to improve our administrative processes, our counseling and advisement of students, and the interactions students have with faculty out of class.

For many years the building program has been an important part of BYU priorities. I suspect that this will always be the case because our needs for renovations and new facilities remain at a high level. I am impressed with the science and precision that go into the assessment and planning for our physical facilities. We are very close to completing the wonderful new Joseph F. Smith Building, which will be such a tremendous asset to our campus. We

are finishing the new athletic complex and are on schedule in our student housing projects. We also are preparing for the next steps in the continued upgrading of our campus and buildings.

As important as these facility issues are, I mentioned on my arrival a wish that persists today. That is, that our “soft” infrastructure will receive the attention it needs so that our academic and student programs will match in their quality and availability the magnificent physical resources we enjoy. Much of the dialogue I cited and invited earlier will relate to this broad notion of helping us be the best we can be.

#### **Order and Change**

As I have described some of the changes in the world and at BYU, it is important to note that I do not believe our era is unique only because we are involved in rapid changes. Think of where we are and from whence we have come. The changes in BYU during its history have been dramatic, positive, and almost unimaginable when we think of what has transpired since 1875. Perhaps the greatest difference is that we no longer need to worry about the survival of our great university but rather primarily how to make it better. That is a great change, and our progress has been truly and wonderfully amazing to this point.

As we think about and work toward our continuing progress, I believe a statement by Alfred North Whitehead applies to us: “The art of progress is to preserve order amid change, and to preserve change amid order” (*Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* [New York: Free Press, 1978], 339; part 5, chapter 1, section 3). BYU is a place of both change and order, and we must always be clear about which is which.

As I have stated, much of what we do to anticipate, accommodate, and master change is not unlike what is going on at other great universities. What we do with respect to order



may also be consistent with the orderly efforts of others.

In another respect, the “order” at Brigham Young University is absolutely unique because it refers not just to policy, procedure, and practice but also refers to “the order of the priesthood” (D&C 94:6) under which we were established and by which we are governed and supported today. In a day when higher education has been largely secularized, even at nominally religious institutions, BYU is closer to its sponsoring Church than it has ever been—and it has always been close.

Although we still receive the majority of our financial support, and many other resources as well, from the Church, we are now in a position to contribute significantly to the kingdom in ways that were not possible even a generation ago. We have continued to provide a superb BYU education to faithful members and select others as we have from the beginning, but now we are also able to establish contacts and exert influences that have a potentially positive impact on and for the entire Church. I mention only a few examples of the many that are easily identified: BYU-TV, the combined Church and BYU data center, the work

in preserving ancient religious texts, and the contributions of those who promote religious liberty. Just as we ask our students to “give back” to the university after they finish here, it is wonderful that we, in various ways, can “give back” to the Church that sponsors, strengthens, and supports us so well.

We know who we are. We know that we have made the commitment to do our parts in advancing scholarly excellence while lifting and strengthening the faith and testimonies of our students. Without apology, we affirm the supremacy of Deity, the reality of the Restoration unfolded through the Prophet Joseph, and our allegiance to today’s presiding high priests who are also the officers of our board of trustees.

As I conclude, let me again express thanks to all who make BYU what it is and are committed to doing their parts in helping our university become what it should and must become. I am firm in my conviction that our work is the Lord’s work when we truly focus on His agenda and not our own. I invoke the blessings of heaven on us all in this wonderful, new academic season. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

