

Distinguished Graduates of 2006

CECIL O. SAMUELSON

Graduates, families, brothers, sisters, honored guests, and friends, as we offer our hearty congratulations and best wishes to those we honor in these exercises today, it is my most pleasant privilege to extend again our warm welcome and greeting to all of you. We are especially grateful for the presence of Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve and chairman of the board of trustees' executive committee and Elder Robert D. Hales of the Twelve and also a member of the executive committee of the board of trustees. Elder Hales is conducting these services, and we shall hear from him later. We also welcome Sister Bonnie D. Parkin, Relief Society general president, and Sister Susan W. Tanner, Young Women general president, who are also members of the board of trustees.

In addition, we recognize Elders Merrill J. Bateman and Neil L. Andersen of the Presidency of the Seventy, Elder W. Rolfe Kerr of the Seventy and commissioner of Church Education, Elder Paul V. Johnson of the Seventy, and President Kim B. Clark of BYU—Idaho. We appreciate the special and substantive support of them all.

Each graduating class at BYU is remarkable in many ways. Let me mention some of the aggregate characteristics that I find inter-

esting. I will be highly selective due to time constraints.

As is typically the case, our 6,401 graduates come from all 50 states, three U.S. territories, and 70 other countries. Almost 29 percent are from Utah, and 13 percent are from California. Twenty-three percent of the graduates are from the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences, and 11 percent each are from the Marriott School of Management and the College of Humanities.

Fifty-three percent of the individuals in the graduating class are already married, and several more of you seem to be making serious progress toward this important milestone. Almost half of the undergraduates have attended other institutions of higher learning prior to transferring to BYU.

While we do not yet have final data for this year's baccalaureate graduates, the most recent available information tells us that BYU ranks 10th among all U.S. baccalaureate-origin institutions for 1999–2003 doctorate recipients. This is a remarkable achievement when you think of

Cecil O. Samuelson was president of Brigham Young University when this commencement address was given on 27 April 2006.

the many prestigious institutions sending their students on to graduate programs. Similarly, BYU ranks very near the top of all universities that provide students for graduate professional schools in dentistry, law, and medicine.

More than three-fourths of the graduates have functional facility with a second language, and almost half of BYU students have lived outside of the United States for at least one year. Thus you see that we have not only a large group of graduates but a highly accomplished and diverse class as well.

I will forbear in reciting our statistics on campus fudge consumption that have been shared in the past, but it is reported that this group of distinguished students has done more than their fair share in making chocolate-covered cinnamon bears an increasingly popular staple in the campus diet. As a group they have also been loyal supporters of the long and varied list of campus activities that include concerts, lectures, devotionals, forums, and athletic events. You will be missed and will be welcomed back to continue to participate in the life of the Y as your circumstances permit.

This has been a full and rich academic year at BYU. Earlier this month a large and distinguished panel of reviewers from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities visited our campus for three days. Their purpose was to see firsthand our efforts and accomplishments toward the reaffirmation of our accreditation as a university. While the process will not be fully complete until summer, we are encouraged and felt that these reviewers left Provo with both appreciation and admiration for so very much that transpires at BYU.

In preparation for their visit, we have had tremendous and significant efforts taking place for more than two years that have involved many faculty, staff, and students. Under the guidance of Dr. Gerrit Gong and several senior university leaders, an impressive self-study document was prepared that focused on our efforts to meet or exceed all of the accredita-

tion standards. It also identified our strengths and areas where new opportunities to improve exist in our goal to fulfill President Hinckley's challenge to become "the best that we can be." This process has been very helpful in giving us all a better insight into the remarkable institution that BYU has become and also into what we need to do to become even better and meet our prophetic destiny.

As we have thought about our university-wide accreditation process, it has occurred to me that today and tomorrow in our graduation ceremonies we are also accrediting all individuals listed in our program. The dictionary reminds us that to accredit is "to endorse or approve officially." In these graduation rites of passage, we signal our enthusiastic approval of you individually, and your diploma carries the official endorsement of the university. Again, I congratulate each of you.

As important as the continued accreditation of the university is, for us aligned with the mission and responsibilities of BYU, there are higher authorities who also should concern us. Of course, I mention your families, loved ones, and special friends who have supported and assisted in significant ways that have made your academic successes possible. I constantly think of the faithful tithe payers across the world—most living in much less favorable circumstances than we find ourselves—who have invested in BYU and in each of you through the thoughtful generosity of our Church leaders. I think of special donors and benefactors who share their treasure that BYU might accelerate its progress and that our students might be blessed with educational experiences otherwise unattainable. I never fail to be greatly impressed with the support and confidence expressed in our activities by those who preside over the Church.

And I think repeatedly about how heaven may view our efforts, attitudes, and accomplishments. The Apostle Paul in his counsel to the Romans talked about the

importance of appropriate conduct, clear thinking, and proper priorities for those aspiring to be disciples of Jesus Christ. He said, “For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men” (Romans 14:18). I believe being acceptable to God and having the approval of the right kind of men and women are the ultimate accreditation that we should each personally seek. And the basic standard by which we will be measured is whether or not we serve Christ.

As you leave BYU—some for a season and some perhaps forever—it is our hope and prayer that you will leave part of your heart here, just as we hope you will take part of BYU with you. This happens in many ways. We hope that you will never be the same because of what you have learned and what you have gained while you were a BYU student. We hope that you will remember with great fondness your classmates, roommates, ward members, teachers, Church leaders, and your many friends and associates. We hope you will take with you the high standards of academic rigor and integrity you have honed and learned while here and will continue to represent BYU with distinction.

Another unique experience of this academic year was the announcement made, after the approval of the board of trustees, of the beginning of the fund-raising and planning for the new Gordon B. Hinckley Alumni and Visitors

Center building here on campus. We have been greatly encouraged and touched by the many thousands of our students, alumni, faculty, and staff, together with many generous benefactors, who have decided to be part of this remarkable project that will honor our beloved prophet and also provide an important new gateway and introduction to this already wonderful and beautiful campus. We thank you for your thoughtful generosity and continue to encourage all who have yet to participate to consider doing so. This is an opportunity—very infrequent in most of our lives—to participate in something very special. It also gives evidence to our appreciation and understanding that in coming to BYU at this special time, we truly drink from wells we did not dig and harvest fruit that we did not plant. We have been blessed to be here at this season, and I hope we will continue to think during all the mortal days yet allotted to us what it is that we can do to bless the lives of those who will yet follow us to BYU.

As you now transition into the next exciting phase of your life—continuing with further education, a new job or career, perhaps a full-time mission and, hopefully, marriage for those who have not yet taken that significant step—I invoke heaven’s blessings upon you and yours as you join the ranks of the distinguished graduates of Brigham Young University. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

