

# *“Laying the Foundation of a Great Work”*

MICHAEL O’CONNOR

**A**s BYU Alumni president, I have been able to attend several commencement exercises, and I have noticed that graduates often experience a range of emotions. Perhaps you feel like this student who, some years ago, sent a letter to then President Jeffrey R. Holland stating:

*Dear President Holland:  
I am completing my undergraduate experience at BYU this month and will be graduating in our upcoming commencement service. My parents are relieved, my professors are surprised, and I am holding my breath. Things could go wrong, you know, even at this late date. [Jeffrey R. and Patricia T. Holland, “However Long and Hard the Road,” BYU devotional address, 18 January 1983]*

At this point in time I think you can all exhale. You made it!

It is with great pleasure that I hereby confer on each of you lifetime membership in the Brigham Young University Alumni Association. We offer our congratulations and welcome you into this great association of more than 370,000. You will have many

opportunities to join your fellow alumni in meaningful activities associated with the university.

So now let me tell you how the rest of this goes today: I usually congratulate you for your achievement and challenge you to stay connected with the university. And you should stay connected with the university. Now you can move on to life’s next objective: posting pictures of yourself in cap and gown on social media and checking how many “likes,” “favorites,” and “retweets” you will receive today.

Receiving a degree from Brigham Young University is really a tremendous accomplishment. In the words of Sir Winston Churchill, it is a victory accomplished with much “blood, toil, tears and sweat” (first statement as prime minister, House of Commons, 13 May 1940).

But today my message is to express our gratitude to all of you. You matter. You are of great value to this university and an asset

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*Michael O’Connor was president of the BYU Alumni Association when this commencement address was given on 15 August 2013.*

to this university. We are thankful to have you here. We realize that, just as for a highly recruited athlete, the superior academic standards required for admission mean that you had a choice of where you could pursue your education. We are glad you chose BYU.

Thank you for attending this tremendous university and for helping us achieve the great reputation that we enjoy.

In 2012 we ranked No. 1 nationally for our accounting program and in the top five for our master's of accountancy program, for our public relations program, and for our graduate and undergraduate entrepreneurship. We also ranked as the Best Value Law School. We were No. 10 for graduates who go on to receive doctorates, and we ranked impressively in many other categories.

Thank you for not only choosing BYU because of its academic standards but also for choosing BYU because of its commitment to providing an atmosphere that is consistent with the teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

You just don't achieve sixteen straight years of receiving the No. 1 Stone-Cold Sober Campus Award without some real effort.

The recent edition of *BYU Magazine* highlights a few of the other accolades that our students have received this year. BYU students have won awards in mechanical engineering, musical performance, animation, landscaping, entrepreneurship, physical education, and mathematic competitions, to name just a few.

Coming from an alumnus who would have had a hard time getting admitted to this university now with the grades he had then, I personally thank you for increasing the value of my BYU degree.

While we appreciate the awards BYU receives, most of the student success stories are not nationally recognized. We hope you all have had experiences here that have enriched your lives.

One of our graduates today, Micah McArthur Taylor, was able to travel to China with the Contemporary Dance Theatre group. While in China her dance group was able to perform for church and civic groups. Micah found that despite the language barrier, she could communicate spirit-to-spirit through dance. She gained a new appreciation for what it means to be part of this world family and a confirmation that we are all children of our Heavenly Father. Thank you, Micah, for helping BYU touch the lives of those you worked with in China.

Another graduate, Tim Menditto, has been one of our valuable student employees. His main assignment has been to assist in hosting duties on our beautiful campus. His profound interest in cultures, languages, and service has helped him connect with the general public as well as with the various dignitaries and special guests who visit BYU. His natural inquisitiveness and cooperative attitude keep him well educated and represent us positively. Thank you, Tim, for going the extra mile while hosting visitors to this campus.

I am confident you will all use your individual talents to "go forth to serve" and will represent us well.

D&C 64:33 states:

*Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great.*

During your time here you have laid strong foundations. That "great work" is your future and the fulfillment of your dreams.

When you left your families to come here, BYU became a new home for you. As BYU alumni, this campus and these people will always be your family. Please keep the Spirit of the Y alive wherever you go, and may Heavenly Father bless you in the great work that is your bright future.

In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.