

“Why We Do Some of the Things We Do”

CECIL O. AND SHARON G. SAMUELSON

SGS: Good morning! We add our voice of welcome to all of you at the beginning of a new year and new winter semester. While it is chilly outside, you exude a warmth that is both pleasant and encouraging. We join you in looking forward to an exciting and productive experience as we push forward to make 2014 one of our best years ever.

Two years ago, in the devotional that began the 2012 winter semester, we spoke to the theme of things that we appreciate most about BYU. Some may recall that we mentioned our Mission and Aims statements, our Honor Code, and our opportunities to attend devotionals and to speak freely about our faith and testimonies. We do not plan to repeat that message today but have chosen to discuss a similar, but different, topic: the reason we do some of the things we do at BYU. We intend our focus to reach far beyond the local culture and environment that we on campus experience and enjoy.

COS: In the October 1999 general conference priesthood session, President Gordon B. Hinckley, then our prophet and chairman of the BYU Board of Trustees, gave an interesting address concerning some of the things our sponsoring Church does and why

they are done. At that time Sharon and I were not at BYU and had absolutely no inkling that I would have the assignment that has occupied us these last several years. Because he was the president of the Church and also because I occasionally wondered about some of these things myself, I was particularly interested in the matters he might choose to address in the limited time remaining in that great priesthood gathering.

Before speaking to any specific topics, President Hinckley’s prefatory comments included the following:

*Our great mission is to testify of [Jesus Christ’s] living reality. We should not be involved with anything not in harmony with this major objective. We should be involved with whatever is in harmony with this objective. [“Why We Do Some of the Things We Do,” *Ensign*, November 1999, 52]*

He then went on to address this question: Why does the Church sponsor BYU? (See “Why We Do,” 52.)

Cecil O. Samuelson was president of Brigham Young University when he and his wife, Sharon G. Samuelson, gave this devotional on 7 January 2014.

We wish our time this morning would allow us to repeat all he said on that occasion. His impressive message is widely available electronically and in print, and I commend its careful reading and study to all who have an interest in this great institution of BYU specifically and in Church education generally.

President Hinckley began by declaring that the Church's support for education has a doctrinal root in the Doctrine and Covenants.

SGS: Then he quoted these important verses from Doctrine and Covenants 88:78–80:

Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand;

Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms—

That ye may be prepared in all things when I shall send you again to magnify the calling whereunto I have called you, and the mission with which I have commissioned you.

COS: President Hinckley lamented that because of the great expense related to BYU and other Church educational efforts, it is not possible to serve all those who would like and deserve this great learning experience. He said the Church would try to make it available to as many as possible through BYU, our other schools, institutes of religion, and seminaries. He mentioned how grateful all who are here should be as well as his disappointment with the occasional person who complains or does not seem to appreciate the unique opportunity to be at BYU.

SGS: President Hinckley then went on to say the following:

Moreover, the university has brought much favorable notice to the Church. Its sponsoring organization, the Church, is widely recognized. It has become known for standards and ideals which have been written about and talked about and which have let the world know of those things in which we believe. Its academic programs and its athletic programs have both brought honor to the university and the Church. And as generations of students move through its halls and on to graduation and then out across the world, they will bring honor to their alma mater and its sponsor, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. ["Why We Do," 52–53]

COS: President Hinckley made further comments and assurances about BYU and Church education generally before moving on to other important topics, but it is very clear how our prophet leaders think about BYU. We feel it appropriate that we should express some pleasure and comfort about this remarkable support and reassurance, but we also hope all at BYU feel the tremendous responsibility this entails for everyone so associated with Brigham Young University. With that heavy but blessed burden in mind, let us now delve into a few of the reasons that we at BYU do some of the things we do.

SGS: First, let us mention you students. After all, it would be a very difficult proposition to make the case for having a university without students. We are aware that at some places and at some times, it may seem to those studying that they are viewed as a necessary nuisance rather than a fundamental reason for the establishment of a university. Should that ever be the case, please read and carefully consider those verses from section 88 that President Hinckley quoted and that we have repeated today. For BYU to be the best it can be, the students who study here and represent the university in so many ways must also strive to be the best they can be.

COS: All of you students have been very carefully selected. Your excellence in

academic achievement and potential are widely understood—and at least as important in our admissions considerations is your “fit” for BYU, meaning your willingness and capacity to meet and follow the mission and aims of a BYU education. Our Honor Code, our commitment to service to others, and striving to be spiritually strengthened go hand in hand—all being essential for successful students at BYU. It is this inspired combination of values and attributes that reflect the now widely recognized ability of BYU graduates to serve their families, churches, communities, and nations with such effectiveness and remarkable contributions. You who come here are not perfect, nor is the admissions process perfect, nor anyone or anything else at BYU, but hopefully you and others will understand the breadth of prayerful consideration that goes into our admissions decisions and also the sadness we feel that we cannot accommodate more who would like to come and who could grow and contribute.

Second, we work very hard at continually striving to improve the quality of the university in both broad and narrow ways. In many respects, the measure of a great university is found in the caliber and attributes of its faculty. BYU has always been blessed with a devoted and committed faculty. Over our history from humble beginnings, we have had a gradual but significant strengthening of our faculty in all of its dimensions. In virtually every discipline in which we are engaged, we now have professors and colleagues who have achieved broad distinction in their endeavors while keeping their primary focus on our tremendous students. Our mentoring efforts and successes, for example, have led to national leadership among universities in placing our graduates in the most outstanding graduate and professional education programs in the United States and abroad.

SGS: Third, we have the responsibility to become a light unto the world wherever we can. President Hinckley mentioned both our

academics and athletics. In each of these areas, and in others as well, we have continued to advance, and, had we time today, we could list for you many successes and much recognition that have continued to bring acclaim to both BYU and our sponsoring Church.

By now I am sure that some of you wonder if we think our primary responsibility at BYU is to brag. Let us defend ourselves a little by sharing just two bits of homespun philosophy you may or may not recognize. First, someone once said, “If you done it, it ain’t bragging.” Second, Ann Landers, the former queen of etiquette, in a newspaper column said, “Bragging is not an attractive trait, but let us be honest. A man who catches a big fish does not go home through an alley” (Ann Landers nugget of the day, 20 January 1989).

COS: We fully realize the potential conflict or confusion between what Jesus said about “let[ting] your light so shine” (Matthew 5:16) and keeping your “candle . . . under a bushel” (Matthew 5:15). Our purpose today is to be clear about why we do some of the things we do at BYU and the potential impact for good that these things have not only for the Church but also for the university and for others as well.

Although there are many examples supporting the premise that we must share what we do at BYU as well as render service broadly, time allows us only a brief glimpse at a few matters. Most would be aware that we have frequent visits to campus from people of prominence who represent the best of many cultures, professions, and peoples. We invite them because of what they can teach us and help us better understand about the world around us, but we also are anxious to host them on campus because of what it is they may learn and better understand about who and what we are. Our students have the regular privilege of hearing these distinguished visitors in addresses and classroom discussions.

We also host conferences that have gained wide recognition and appeal. Just one example

would be the Law and Religion Symposium that is jointly sponsored by the J. Reuben Clark Law School and our supporting Church. Here we bring distinguished legal scholars and governmental leaders who share our concerns about the importance of religious liberty throughout the world. As with many of our impressive visitors, a number of them might find it awkward to respond to an invitation to visit our Church leaders alone but feel it quite natural to come to a renowned university of quality to participate in significant learning, teaching, and sharing. This would not be possible if Brigham Young University did not have a reputation as a fine and serious academic institution.

SGS: BYU also has a tradition of solid outreach throughout the world. For many years we have had the opportunity to send volunteer teachers to China, for example, to teach English and increase appreciation for Western thought and cooperation. Our nursing students and faculty, our engineering students and faculty, and several of our outstanding performing groups have increased friendships and cooperation all around the globe. All of these things are expensive, and all are opportunities that bring friendship, gratitude, and recognition to and an understanding of BYU and our sponsoring Church.

Likewise, we regularly have some remarkable events on campus that have a major impact locally and afar. Currently the BYU Museum of Art is hosting the *Sacred Gifts* exhibit, which displays some of the finest religious artwork of Carl Bloch, Heinrich Hofmann, and Frans Schwartz. Most of these pieces are on loan to BYU from Denmark, Sweden, and the Riverside Church in New York City. Our friends in Europe have allowed them to come because of the respect and trust enjoyed there by BYU and its museum of art. These paintings have never left Denmark before and likely never will again. We hope you will take the opportunity to see these wonderful masterpieces.

COS: Over the decade we have been at BYU, both at home and as we have traveled, we have had many personal experiences that emphasize and clarify the point Sharon has just made. My dear, why don't you tell our friends about the remarkable trip we took to Rome, Italy, with Noel and Sydney Reynolds and Christian Heal soon after we arrived at BYU in 2003?

SGS: Although we had been to Rome a couple of times before, we were very excited to have a unique experience with these colleagues because we had been invited to the Vatican Library by Catholic leaders to discuss a cooperative venture regarding the preservation and translation of ancient Syriac texts that the Vatican Library possesses. We were treated cordially and respectfully as details of our continued cooperation with the library were discussed. Never before had we understood to this degree how important the substantial and serious scholarship going on at BYU is in making friends and having a positive influence for the university and the Church throughout the world. We are pleased that this special project continues and also several others that could equally be mentioned. Even though most of our students might not be fully aware of such activities, they are extremely important and valuable in the broader work and initiatives of Brigham Young University.

COS: For many years the Division of Continuing Education at BYU has blessed thousands of lives by providing courses and instruction, increasingly online, for those living far from campus.

As another example, an increasingly significant part of our educational outreach activities is found in the various venues of BYU Broadcasting. Through the combined efforts of BYUtv, KBYU, BYU Radio, BYUtv International, and our 24/7 Internet streaming around the world, we are reaching millions of people. In the United States alone BYUtv is now in about 50 million households. In 2009 BYUtv was found in only one Nielsen rating measurable

market. In 2013 that figure had risen to forty-six of the major markets in the USA.

Before we say more about what we are doing with BYU Broadcasting, let us return to the words of President Hinckley in the 1999 address we mentioned at the beginning of our remarks today. As he spoke of our sponsoring Church, President Hinckley reminded us that “it is concerned primarily with worship of the Lord Jesus Christ” (“Why We Do,” 52). Therefore, all that we do ultimately must be in harmony with that key objective and responsibility. That is why in 2009 our BYU Broadcasting efforts adopted the slogan of “Seeing the Good in the World.” When you read the words of the Savior in Matthew 5, you will see the roots of that phrasing.

SGS: Now, how is that to be accomplished? Many of you know that I am an avid BYU sports fan. While we both attend as many sporting events, lectures, and musical and dramatic presentations as we can, we are extremely grateful that we can follow many of these events on BYUtv when we cannot personally be in attendance. In this we are not unique. We know of those who have tuned into one of our television or radio stations to watch or listen to a sporting event and have stayed tuned to other programming because they really do want to “see the good in the world.”

Programs like *Granite Flats*, *Studio C*, *American Ride*, *The Story Trek*, and others have a large following among our BYU and Church communities, but they have also attracted many not of our faith because of the wholesome quality of these programs. Let’s listen to what a few have had to say about their BYUtv experiences.

[Some short video clips were shown.]

COS: Several years ago the Church Missionary Department developed a strategy that we have borrowed and refined at BYUtv. While surveys of various kinds have demonstrated that people describe their desire for

the increased availability of wholesome and educational television programming, it is clear from viewing patterns that the primary motivation for choosing a particular program or event is to be entertained. Thus you see in our programming that we do seek to have high-quality entertainment that is uplifting and clean but also that tends first to engage and then enlighten the viewers. It is common for people to become aware of our devotionals, general conference sessions, and Mormon Tabernacle Choir broadcasts, as well as scripture roundtables and other Church-sponsored events, while simply, at least initially, seeking just to be entertained.

SGS: Likewise, many good people have been introduced to wonderful, uplifting programming attractive to people of many faiths by shows such as *Fires of Faith*, *Silent Night*, and the upcoming production on *Handel’s Messiah* that will premiere later this year. Let’s view just a couple of brief clips from these programs that have gained national acclaim and attention.

[Some short video clips were shown.]

COS: Hopefully this brief account of why we do some of the things we do at BYU will increase both understanding of and appreciation for the opportunities and responsibilities we have as members of the Brigham Young University community. We wish we could share many more examples, and we encourage you to think of those you have observed that have contributed so broadly.

BYU is a great institution established by the Lord’s prophets to fulfill sacred purposes. It is prospered under the hand of heaven. We can never adequately express our appreciation for being associated with BYU and hope you sense the same feeling.

We know God lives and that Jesus is the Christ. We, like you, feel honored and blessed to have the privilege of being involved in this great work. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.