

Learn Throughout Your Lives

CECIL O. SAMUELSON

Graduates, families, brothers, sisters, and friends, it is a wonderful privilege to be with you and witness the various expressions of excitement, elation, and anticipation for the future. I see in you relief that it is finally over and also mutual and reciprocal feelings of appreciation for each other and for special experiences that have been part of your BYU journey.

We are certainly pleased to honor specifically all those graduates whose names are found in the program today, and we also pay tribute to and thank the many who have made these accomplishments possible. In this we include spouses, parents, children, and other family members, professors, teachers, classmates, friends, Church leaders, faithful tithe payers, generous donors, and all whose various contributions make the miracle of BYU a reality.

We are especially pleased to recognize Elder W. Rolfe Kerr of the Seventy and commissioner of Church education who has been assigned by the First Presidency to address us today. We welcome Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Presidency of the Seventy; Sister Bonnie D. Parkin, Relief Society general president and a member of the board of trustees; Sister Susan W. Tanner, Young Women general president

and also a member of the board of trustees; and Bishop Keith B. McMullin, second counselor in the Presiding Bishopric. We are also pleased to recognize Sister Vickie Matsumori of the Primary general presidency, who is with us in the audience. In addition, we welcome a number of special friends and supporters of both our graduates and the university.

Within each graduating class there are some significant commonalities with preceding graduates and also some unique characteristics of the current group. Today we will grant a total of 2,643 degrees that you will see described more fully in the program. Slightly more than half of our graduates are women, and 53 percent of the class is married. For most of you, these degrees have really been achieved by family committee, and we honor all who have contributed.

I think the age-span difference in our graduates from 19 years old to 85 years old—66 years—is the greatest I have experienced since coming to BYU. We would like especially to honor Betty West, graduating in

Cecil O. Samuelson was president of Brigham Young University when this commencement address was given on 17 August 2006.

general studies, whose tenacity demonstrates that it is never too late to learn and never too late to fulfill your educational aspirations. Congratulations, Sister West! Please stand and let us recognize you. While we are at it, we also thank all who have encouraged and assisted you in this marvelous quest over these last several years.

Sister West has a wonderful history and life story that has been publicized in the media recently and is well known to many friends and admirers. I should mention that a number of you graduating today and tomorrow have also overcome amazing and sometimes unique obstacles in achieving these significant recognitions. We pay tribute to you and celebrate with you.

This past academic year at BYU has been remarkable in many ways. Our students and faculty continue to be recognized nationally and internationally for scholarly achievements, remarkable successes in various competitions, and also in the individual accomplishments of our friends, alumni, and broad university community. In recent weeks we have had our university accreditation reaffirmed by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. I want to thank so many of you publicly for your key and substantive contributions in this most significant and important process.

Last June 23rd we were privileged to have the First Presidency, several members of the board of trustees, loyal and generous donors, and alumni join with us on campus for the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Gordon B. Hinckley Alumni and Visitors Center. We also were pleased to have a birthday party for President Hinckley as he celebrated his 96th birthday with us. Undoubtedly, many of you have noticed the very big hole in the ground where the men and machines are already at work and on schedule with the construction of this special building. We hope you graduates will accept this invitation to make the new

Hinckley building your BYU home and destination frequently in the years to come.

We are very grateful for our beautiful campus, our many remarkable buildings, and the tremendous resources that have been provided for us. We must remember, however, that the buildings, grounds, resources, technology, libraries, and other accouterments that make our lives both pleasant and productive are not really the core of BYU. That is found in the prophetically assigned mission of this institution and in the people involved: the students, faculty, staff, administration, alumni, donors, and other supporters. We are here because we have vital work to accomplish while we are in residence and particularly as we “go forth to serve.”

It has been said that the real measure of the worth and the contribution of a university is in the graduates that it produces. I believe this is true, as long as we also acknowledge the contributions that have been made to the students prior to their arrival at their university. At BYU this dimension is particularly true because our select student body is made up of those who have qualified broadly and have prepared exceedingly well both academically and personally before their matriculation. Thus, as we congratulate you, our graduates, we also thank those who have helped you prepare so well long before you arrived on this campus. We include parents, spouses, other family members, Church leaders, teachers, and all who have had great and special influences on you in your early, formative years.

Our goal, and that of the board of trustees, is to have a university worthy of our student body. Think of these words of President Spencer W. Kimball in his campus address entitled “Education for Eternity”:

In all the world, the Brigham Young University is the greatest institution of learning. This statement I have made numerous times. I believe it sincerely. There are many criteria by which

a university can be judged and appraised and evaluated. The special qualities of Brigham Young University lie not in its bigness; there are a number of much larger universities.

It should not be judged by its affluence and the amount of money available for buildings, research and other facilities. It should not be judged by prestige, for there are more statusful institutions as the world measures status.

The uniqueness of Brigham Young University lies in its special role—education for eternity—which it must carry in addition to the usual tasks of a university. This means concern—curricular and behavioral—for not only the “whole man” but for the “eternal man” [and woman]. Where all universities seek to preserve the heritage of knowledge that history has washed to their feet, this faculty has a double heritage—the preserving of knowledge of men and the revealed truths sent from heaven.
[Spencer W. Kimball, “Education for Eternity,”

preschool address to faculty and staff, Brigham Young University, 12 September 1967, 1–2]

We hope and expect that you have grown in your understanding of the knowledge of the world and also in your convictions concerning the truthfulness of the revelations from heaven. Most important, we pray with confidence that the skills you have acquired and the talents you have magnified will allow and assist you to continue to learn throughout your lives “by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118). As you do, you will, as the Apostle Paul said, “save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Timothy 4:16).

BYU has enriched you and you have enriched BYU. With all of this, we invoke the blessings of heaven upon you and yours as you “go forth to serve.” In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

