

OF ONE MIND, ONE HEART:
LEARNING TO COUNSEL TOGETHER IN FAITH

David L. Ward—Faculty Association President

Editor's Note: The following address was given before the faculty on 23 August 2005.

As President of the Faculty Association, I welcome you to Fall Semester.

I'm happy to welcome President Clark and his wife, Sue, to Brigham Young University–Idaho. As a campus community we've enjoyed the able leadership of President and Sister Wilkes and President and Sister Bednar. During the time of their tenure we've experienced impressive growth of a vision of what this college could become through faithful consecration and sacrifice. Now we look beyond the present in the hope of enjoying a spirit of inspired innovation through the leadership of President Clark as we deepen our commitment to all that is good and right and possible at this University. This spirit can be ours as we unite our efforts in order to gain deeper insight into where this University must go in order to achieve the Lord's purposes as revealed through the prophetic vision of President Hinckley.

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I welcome as well those newly hired faculty who have enjoyed but a taste as to the privilege of teaching at BYU–Idaho. May you come to understand your personal stewardship in this unique university as you dedicate yourselves to learning and teaching by study and by faith.

I believe we are

Now, it's traditional for the President of the Faculty Association to introduce those serving on the boards of that Association. While I am grateful for the past, present, and future service of those representing you on the executive and general boards, I'm not going to introduce them at this time. They will introduce themselves to you, as you enjoy time to discuss how we might function more effectively as something we're presently calling the Faculty Association.

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I refer to the Faculty Association tentatively because I believe we are at a point of redefining the Association, as we work toward realizing each point of our mission statement as indicated in our newly ratified constitution. Underscoring each point lies a commitment to promote a vision of learning and teaching that will contribute markedly to BYU–Idaho's becoming a premiere learning and teaching university. Just what that vision is, and how it's to be realized, should be two questions at the heart of this Association's activity.

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Thus I will forgo inviting you to pay dues in order to belong to the Faculty Association. In case you haven't heard, there are no dues. Those of us who have been here for a while know that in the past, whether you

paid dues or not, you could enjoy all the privileges of membership in this Association. You could attend Faculty Association banquets. You could participate in the Spori Summit. You could nominate and vote for faculty to serve on the executive or general boards of the Association, and you could vote to honor exemplary and distinguished faculty. Information as to banquets, the Spori Summit, and the opportunity to vote in these ways will be given in due time. Look for it. But for now, we ought to consider this Association in terms higher than banquets, social activities, and honoraria, as we turn our attention to more central matters having to do with rethinking the Faculty Association.

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Having done away with dues as a determining factor for our Association's identity, we have the opportunity to establish our association upon a deeper commitment to work together to discover how to use our university facilities to gain insight into innovative ideas and approaches that will contribute to more inspired learning and teaching than we have yet experienced. In doing so I am convinced that we will be blessed to enjoy the kind of sociality the Lord refers to in the Doctrine and Covenants—a sociality that will crown our relationships with joy in our accomplishments here, and in the hereafter (Doctrine and Covenants 130:2).

This sociality will be manifest through banquets and activities and honoraria. But if these are to be more than occasions of eating and social entertainment, we must all commit to doing our part, contributing our time, talents, professional commitments, and personal gifts to gain greater insight into learning and teaching, and how to share those insights in ways that bring about inspired innovation within the classroom and throughout this campus.

As faculty-with-faculty and faculty-with-administration, we have learned to counsel with each other to achieve ends during this transition no one alone could have envisioned nor could any one have brought to pass. But there's more to do—much, much more. To use a maxim I teach my students: The hardest thing for us to really do is the thing we think we're already doing. To put it in terms applicable to rethinking education on this campus, and the Association's place in that education, the hardest innovations for us to truly bring to pass are the innovations we think we're already bringing to pass.

At the heart of what we must do to work together in greater unity lies the need for us all to learn how to counsel more sensitively through nothing less than the Spirit of Christ. I mention this not simply as a once-and-for-all encouragement to launch this Fall Semester on a spiritual note. I mention it as an invitation for us all to keep it uppermost in our minds and hearts as we join together to counsel, then work, to enjoy the direction of the Lord as to what innovations must be put in place for this University to achieve its prophetic mandate. Let me briefly explain.

When considering all we've been blessed to accomplish in light of all that is yet to be accomplished, the challenge we've been blessed to bear during this transition is a challenge God doesn't seem to want to resolve once and for all. It's the challenge of discovering ways to adapt our individual thinking and personal gifts to a single prophetic vision. The difficulty that we must address in faith is that of learning how to be true to the highest interpretation of our prophet's vision *individually*, so as to contribute our minds and hearts toward the fulfillment of that vision *collectively*.

The miracle that God seems intent upon bringing to pass in our midst is that of uniting multiple views into a higher singular understanding of the prophet's vision as to how Brigham Young University–Idaho may become a premiere learning and teaching institution. This we can achieve. This we must attain. But this inspired status will not be realized without a greater sensitivity and appreciation of the agency through which God invariably works to bring to pass His great purposes. What BYU–Idaho can become is something we've heard talk about. It's something we've been taught about. It's something we've heard prophesied about.

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But all the talk, the teaching, even the prophesying will have been in vain if we don't learn higher ways to honor the agency of each other, valuing the experience that shapes each other's interpretations as to what is best for this university. As we learn these ways, we will be blessed to work toward the unity of achieving higher purposes than any single interpretation may be able to make of our prophet's vision.

Working with each other in processes of inspired innovation requires us to be clear as to how the Lord works with those who counsel in faith. Let's look into this carefully.

I used to think that an inspired idea would be received readily by the faithful. Maybe you were like me. Oh, the nay-sayers would put it down. The unfaithful would find fault with it. But the faithful would see the hand of the Lord in the idea and would be drawn to adopt it. However, over time I've come to see that this view of inspiration isn't quite true to the process that must be worked through—particularly during faithful counsel.

The truth is, inspired ideas—even the best of such ideas—have to be discussed through strong rationale and sensitive compromise. Insightful and innovative ideas come by way of revelation to those who are committed to work together to learn the will of God, lending their best reasoning powers to discern and shape it. The Lord seems to imply the importance of intelligent, sensitive exchange to learn His will, when with gentle invitation He says, “Come, now, and let us reason together that ye may understand” (Doctrine and Covenants 50:10). With this in mind, there may be more to Christ's promise than we might otherwise

assume when He taught, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, as touching one thing, behold, there will I be in the midst of them” (6:32). In another verse of scripture, Jesus commanded, “Be one; and if ye are not one, ye are not mine” (38:27).

Taken together, these verses suggest that the Lord is not interested as much in our discerning right answers to questions, or lighting upon the best idea or plan to solve problems, as He is in our becoming one with Him and each other through reasoning intelligently and sensitively toward discovery of such answers, ideas, and plans. In a word, it’s through the process of intelligent, sensitive reasoning with one another that we will be led to discern insightful, innovative ideas. Yet, as wonderful as these ideas may be toward improving learning and teaching on this campus, the greater result will be that the faculty and administration will become one with each other and with the Lord. Such inspired unity, made possible through what M. Catherine Thomas calls the “Spirit of Atonement,”¹ will be the deciding condition that bears witness to the world of BYU–Idaho’s unique, premiere quality.

This truth will become profound to each of us the more the Spirit teaches us how to contribute to the greater insight or revelation possible at this University. But to do so, the Lord may have to adjust an assumption or two as to how He “reasons among us.” Again, in the past I thought that if Christ were in the room where two or more are gathered to seek and know His will, He would somehow change everyone’s viewpoint so there could be agreement. When agreement wasn’t achieved as readily as I had supposed, I would find myself anxious to resolve dilemmas or to put argument to rest. But the agreement that the Lord requires is more than surface deferment, or that which results when one cannot argue against a stronger opposition. “I, the Lord, require the heart, and a willing mind,” says Christ (Doctrine and Covenants 64:34). For there to be true agreement in council, hearts and minds must submit to a higher purpose than winning an argument or pushing through a proposal—no matter how inspired the view may seem.

Yes, in counsel where Christ is among the participants, the Savior does change minds and hearts toward a greater unity. But the change of viewpoint is not going to occur simply by Christ’s touching our minds when we reach a level of faith that satisfies Him. Rather, the change of mind and heart required to discover innovative ideas will occur as those in that room reach a level of faith through their love and discussion, a level of faith drawing them into a higher understanding of one another—even an understanding whereby each is enabled to “esteem his brother as himself, . . . practis[ing] virtue and holiness before [God]” (Doctrine and Covenants 38:24).

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If we don't recognize the importance of the discussion to bring to pass God's purposes; if we perceive opposition as mere belligerence (evidence of a viewpoint that should be put to rest); at the same time, if we share opposite viewpoints just for the sake of being intellectual or playing the devil's advocate to test all points possible—we are likely to spend valuable time and resources in nothing more than academic posturing. Posturing is another name for hypocrisy. And where hypocrisy motivates thought and action, there the Spirit of the Lord cannot be. Without the Lord's Spirit we will be disqualified from discerning our own viewpoints honestly or from magnifying our gifts charitably. In all discussions, the presence or absence of the Lord's Spirit will always determine the difference between realizing a prophetic vision or settling for something less.

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God truly does care about this place. He truly cares about providing a quality education to His children. This is what Elder Richard G. Scott was referring to in part when he declared, "That the miracle occurring across this campus has its origins in the Lord, Jesus Christ."² Through educational opportunities, God can open our vision as to our godly potential. Further, He educates our desires to strive to learn to live true to principles that enable us to enjoy intellectual and emotional gifts of empowerment and mercy through the grace of Christ.

It's becoming more clear to me than ever before that men and women access the power of Christ's atonement through taking educated steps to heighten their intellect and humble their hearts. This is at the heart of all educational endeavor true to God and Christ. As such it should be the aim of this University to teach our students how to accomplish this, as we, their faculty and administration, are taught how to do so through higher powers than our own.

This, then, is what this Faculty Association should be focused upon. That we may learn to discern what this Association needs to be in order to discern more inspired approaches to the learning and teaching that is to shape this campus, is my prayer and hope for us all. ☺

NOTES:

- 1 M. Catherine Thomas. *Spiritual Lightening*. Salt Lake City, Bookcraft, Inc., 1996.
- 2 Elder Richard G. Scott. "BYU-Idaho Faculty Workshop," Rexburg, Feb. 2004.