

Inaugural Response

President David A. Bednar
President of Ricks College
Ricks College
February 27, 1998



President and Sister Hinckley, honored guests, students and colleagues of Ricks College, my brothers and sisters.

I am honored and humbled by the charge and responsibility I have received today from the President of the Church. The invitation from the Brethren to become the fourteenth president of

Ricks College was unexpected and has been a great blessing in my life and for our family. One does not aspire to or apply for a position such as this. My only qualifications for this sacred stewardship are a willingness to work and a desire to learn. President Hinckley, I accept your charge and pledge to work with all of my heart, might, mind, and strength to achieve the goals you have outlined. I appreciate and will strive to be worthy of the trust the Brethren and the Board of Trustees have expressed in me and our family through this invitation to serve. This is the most exciting and overwhelming invitation I have ever received.

Not only was the invitation to serve as the president of Ricks College unexpected for our family, it was surprising to some people who have known me. I recently received an interesting email message from the daughter of one of my Primary teachers. Back in the days when I attended Primary, it was held once a week in the afternoon following school. I remember riding every week with a number of my friends to Primary with Sister Gladys Cheney, our teacher. Apparently, I have forgotten much of what transpired during those weekly trips to Primary. The email message I received from Sister Cheney's daughter included the following statement:

My mom really wanted to write you a letter because she has been following your life's progress through the years in the *Church News*. She is so proud of you and wanted to let you know that, but did not quite know where to begin. I told her I would write you a quick letter, and that was fine with her. She chuckles every time she thinks of those rides to Primary and how well you've turned out.

Clearly, the invitation to serve at Ricks surprised the one Primary teacher who undoubtedly knew me the best!

Brothers and sisters, I have been taught since my youth to "follow the prophet." Never in my wildest imagination, however, did I ever think I would speak in the same meeting with and

literally "follow the prophet" as I have been assigned to do today. I pray for and invite the spirit of the Holy Ghost to be with us during our time together, that I may appropriately express the feelings of my heart and that we may understand each other and be edified on this special occasion.

In the few minutes I have to speak with you today, I would like to achieve two major objectives: (1) to express appreciation to some very special people and (2) to speak about the future of Ricks College.

I would like to begin by expressing appreciation to my wife, Susan. Next month Sister Bednar and I will have been married for 23 years. We have now reached the point in our lives where we have been married longer than we were single. Other than my time in the mission field in Southern Germany, I really do not remember very much about what it was like to live without her.

Susan is a virtuous woman and a righteous mother. Purity and goodness are reflected in her countenance. Indeed, she is receiving His image in her countenance (*Alma 5:14*). I love her and appreciate the complementary influence she is in my life. I thank her for the woman she is and the lessons she has taught me. All that is good in my life has come because of and with her.

In our marriage we have been blessed with three sons: Eric will soon be 22, Mike is about to turn 20, and in a few weeks Jeff will be 16. No mom and dad could be more pleased than we are with these precious sons. Susan and I have become one through these young men, and we have learned much in the process of attempting to teach and rear them. They are wonderful boys, certainly not perfect boys, but they are very good boys.

Let me share with you just one quick story about our sons. We lived for many years in Fayetteville, Arkansas, while I was employed as a business professor at the University of Arkansas. We were and still are avid Arkansas Razorback basketball fans. We had season tickets and enjoyed attending almost every home game. A few years ago the featured game of the season, No. 1 UNLV versus No. 2 Arkansas, was scheduled to be played on a Sunday afternoon. We had a long-standing tradition in our family of not participating in little league, soccer, basketball, or other sports events on Sunday, nor did we attend or watch sports on Sunday. In our family council meeting the week before the game, Susan and I asked Eric, Mike, and Jeff what they thought we should do with our tickets. The unanimous decision we reached was to sell the priceless tickets

to one of our neighbors. I will never forget Mike saying to me immediately after the closing prayer in our family council, “Dad, hurry up and sell those tickets before I change my mind!” They really are very good boys.

Eric and Jeff are present with us today. Mike is serving as a missionary in Bolivia. We are confident that he is aware of and participating in the special spirit of this occasion.

I express appreciation to my mom and dad, both of whom are deceased. I am thankful for their sacrifices in my behalf, and I hope they are aware of the events of this day.

I also am thankful for Sue’s parents, Kay and Nyla Robinson. I love them as I love my own parents and appreciate their love and support.

Finally, I am thankful for many other relatives, friends, and colleagues, too numerous to mention, who have influenced me in positive ways. I appreciate the contribution each of you has made to my life.

Now I would like to spend a few minutes visiting with you about the future of Ricks College. As we prepare for and move into the next century, we at Ricks College are embarking upon a voyage that will be filled with high adventure. Sweeping changes are occurring around and along our “charted course,” (J. Reuben Clark, Jr., “The Charters Course of the Church in Education,” *The Improvement Era*, September 1938, Volume 41, Number 9, pp. & nbsp 520-575) both in our sponsoring institution, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and in the world of education. The rapid growth of the Church throughout the world will require us to be ever better stewards of the sacred resources and support we receive. And the changes presently taking place in institutions of higher education around the world are nothing short of revolutionary. New technologies, innovative pedagogies, and more sophisticated students are challenging us to rethink and reevaluate many of our most fundamental assumptions about the processes of learning and teaching.

These and many other changes will cause us to move out of our established “comfort zones” and confront a series of apparent contradictions and paradoxes. For example, it will be necessary for us at Ricks College *to remain the same even as we change*. The “Spirit of Ricks,” the unique combination of spirituality and supportiveness that characterizes the interaction among students, faculty, and staff on this campus, must be preserved and enhanced even in the midst of dramatic changes in how we accomplish the work of education. It will be necessary for us at Ricks College *to serve ever better the thousands of students we have on campus while simultaneously reaching out to bless the lives of tens of thousands of young Latter-day Saints throughout the world*. We have an ever increasing responsibility to use the resources of this great campus to assist in the building of the kingdom of God in all of the world.

It will be necessary for us at Ricks College *to move forward rapidly even as we pause to thoroughly assess and evaluate our existing programs and our present use of physical space*.

The swift currents of change along our route will not cease temporarily for us to make unobstructed and safe midcourse corrections. Rather, as we navigate, we must remain fixed upon the instruction we receive from the Board and our own specific mission statement to guide us through turbulent waters.

Along our charted course we will undoubtedly encounter many potential perils and unseen obstacles. It is a wonderful feeling of security and safety to know that we are under the leadership of a pilot who knows the course the ship is sailing. William R. Sloan, president of the Northwestern States Mission, shared the following observations and experience in general conference many years ago:

I have rejoiced in my acquaintance with the leadership of this Church. I am thrilled beyond all words of expression for this acquaintance with them and bear witness that they are men of integrity and men of God.

Last summer it was our pleasure to visit Alaska. We took the inland route, and you who have enjoyed that wonderful voyage know that the channels you go through, in many cases, are very narrow. One evening the pilot invited Sister Sloan and myself into the pilot room. As we sailed along the narrow channel, he pointed out to us and said, “I want you people to note that just on the opposite side, on the right side of the boat [and the boat was moving very slowly] a few feet underneath the water, about eight or ten feet from the vessel, there is a great ledge of rock. Many a ship has struck the same and been sunk.”

So it is an inspiration to know in this Church that God is at the helm, and that his servants are inspired, directed and led by his influence. (William R. Sloan, *Conference Report*, April 1932, p. 17)

I testify that as we follow the direction of our inspired Board of Trustees, we will steer clear of the dangers, both seen and unseen, that could impede our progress towards our desired spiritual and educational destinations.

The mission of Ricks College is clear and unchanging. Our efforts and resources are aimed at educating the whole man and woman, to focus upon the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical development of every student who studies on this campus. Specifically, the mission of Ricks College is to (1) build testimonies of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and encourage living its principles, (2) provide a quality education for students of diverse interests and abilities, (3) prepare students for further education and employment, and for their roles as citizens and parents, and (4) maintain a wholesome academic, cultural, social, and spiritual environment.

Elder John A. Widtsoe described the importance of this kind of comprehensive approach to education:

...let me say again, that to be merely mentally trained is to be only partly trained. The man whose mind only

has been trained may be likened to the ship with great engines and a huge propeller, ready to drive the ship forward, but without rudder, chart, compass, or definite destination. When we add to the man, so trained, spiritual training, then it is as if we add to the ship, with its wonderful machinery, a compass, a chart, a rudder, and a dependable intelligence which controls the whole machinery, above and below deck, so that the vessel may reach a safe haven, according to a definite purpose. (John A. Widtsoe, *Conference Report*, October 1922, p. 48)

Let me provide one additional example of how important it is to maintain a clear focus upon the holistic education of young men and women. As I quote the following statement, I invite you to surmise the institution being referred to:

Let every student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life (John 17:3), and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning. . . Every one shall so exercise himself in reading the Scriptures twice a day, that he shall be ready to give such an account of his proficiency therein, both in theoretical observations of the language, and logic, and in practical and spiritual truths, as his tutor shall require, according to his ability; seeing the entrance of the word giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple. (“The Founding of Harvard College,” *America*, Vol. 2, pg. 155-156)

This statement is found in a book entitled “The Founding of Harvard College” and describes many of the basic principles upon which that great institution was founded. Clearly for us at Ricks College, maintaining a clear focus upon our central mission will be essential as we sail into the uncertain waters of a new century.

For the past several months, I have been intrigued by and diligently studying the account in the Book of Mormon of Lehi’s family and their travels in the wilderness. As they reached the place called Bountiful, which was located near the sea, Nephi was commanded by the Lord to:

...construct a ship, after the manner which I shall show thee, that I may carry thy people across these waters. (1 Nephi 17:8)

Brothers and sisters, the more I reflect upon this verse, the more interesting it becomes to me. Nephi was not a sailor. He had been reared in Jerusalem, an inland city, rather than along the borders of the Mediterranean Sea. It seems unlikely that he knew much about or had experience with the tools and skills necessary to build a ship. He may not have ever previously seen an ocean-going vessel. In essence, then, Nephi

was commanded and instructed to build something he had never built before in order to go someplace he had never been before. May I suggest that Nephi’s experience in building that ship is a model for us at Ricks College as we prepare for and move into the next century. We, too, must build something we have never built before in order to go someplace we have never been before.

Nephi further describes the process of constructing the ship:

...and we did work timbers of *curious workmanship*. And the Lord did show me from *time to time* after what manner I should work the timbers of the ship. (1 Nephi 18:1; *emphasis added*)

Two points stand out in my mind about this verse. First, the manner of workmanship was curious. It is interesting that the phrase “curious workmanship” is used five times in the Book of Mormon: once in the testimony of the eight witnesses, twice in relation to the Liahona, once in relation to the productivity of a righteous and prosperous people, and in the verse I have just quoted in relation to the manner whereby Nephi would build the ship. The word curious in these contexts does not mean strange or weird or odd. Rather, it connotes careful, skilled, expert, and deliberate. Clearly the concept of “curious workmanship” sets a standard for us at Ricks College as we move forward to meet the challenges before us.

Second, the phrase “time to time” suggests to me that Nephi perhaps did not receive everything he needed to know about shipbuilding as he began his task. Apparently he received the necessary knowledge “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little” as it was needed. This may be one of the first recorded instances of a just-in-time learning process.

Now please note with me the description Nephi provides in verse 4 of chapter 18.

And it came to pass that after I had finished the ship, according to the word of the Lord, *my brethren beheld that it was good*, and that the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine; wherefore, they did humble themselves again before the Lord. (1 Nephi 18:4; *emphasis added*)

Even Nephi’s brothers, who initially opposed the idea of constructing the ship and who were reluctant to help, ultimately had to acknowledge the “goodness” of the finished product.

I know, brothers and sisters, that we will be guided and directed by Him whose school this is as we respond to the challenge to build an educational ship of curious workmanship. As we at Ricks College construct our ship and travel according to the coordinates set by the Board and identified in our mission statement, Ricks College will become increasingly different from and distinctive among other institutions of higher education. Surely, we must build this ship after the

manner which the Lord will show unto us and not after the manner of men. Our standards and practices indeed will be unique, and we will be “set apart” from the world.

I anticipate that we will be the focus of both flattery from the prominent and scorn from the many mocking voices originating in the “great and spacious building,” which Nephi described as the pride of the world. Those taunting voices will counsel us to “chill out,” “loosen up,” “stop being so old-fashioned,” and to “get in step with the ‘90s.” Some may mistakenly believe that we can chart our future course by comparing ourselves to the patterns and practices of the world. Certainly, we might rationalize, we are doing well because our standards are so much different from those generally found in the world.

Brother and sisters, please do not misunderstand the point I am attempting to make. There is much in our world that is “lovely, praiseworthy, and of good report.” And there are many professionals, craftspeople, and artists who greatly bless and enrich our lives through their diligence and intelligence. The Church and its related institutions do not have a monopoly on goodness. However, through the Restoration in these latter days, we do have the fullness of the Savior’s gospel, and the standard of progress we must apply is not to be found in comparisons to the perverse and misguided patterns and practices of the world. If it were, then comparing ourselves to the world would permit us to feel safe and secure while slipping ever deeper and deeper into what Nephi described as the river of filthiness. Rather, the standards come from and are established by the Lord. They do not change or vary, and they will be increasingly distinctive and, some will say, outdated in an ever more secularized and hedonistic world. May I suggest that those scornful voices will be one of the surest indicators that we are following precisely the proper coordinates on our voyage. The very fact that the world may say we should “loosen up” will be a confirmation that we are following the correct course.

Thus far I have highlighted the challenges and changes before us, and the fixed points of prophetic vision and a clear understanding of our mission that will provide direction for us during this voyage. I would now like to focus upon several fundamental principles that should be at the heart of all we are and do at Ricks College. Our planning and decisions and programs and activities should be focused upon and give emphasis to these basic principles.

1. TRUE TEACHING IS DONE BY AND WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE HOLY GHOST.

All truth, spiritual as well as secular, is manifested through the spirit of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is a revelator, a teacher, a comforter, and a sanctifier. To create an environment where the Holy Ghost can teach, everything done at Ricks College must be in harmony with the principles of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. As Elder Parley P. Pratt

explained concerning the man or woman who is taught by the Holy Ghost:

His mind is quickened, his intellectual faculties are aroused to intense activity. He is, as it were, illuminated. He learns more of divine truth in a few days than he could have learned in a lifetime in the best merely human institutions in the world. (*Key to the Science of Theology*, pg. 59-60)

And as President Brigham Young taught:

It [the Holy Ghost] shows them things past, present, and to come. It opens the vision of the mind, unlocks the treasures of wisdom, and they begin to understand the things of God.... They comprehend themselves and the great object of their existence. (*Journal of Discourses*, 1:241)

2. EVERY PERSON AT RICKS COLLEGE IS A TEACHER.

Everyone at Ricks College—faculty, staff, students, ecclesiastical leaders, and so forth—has a responsibility to impact others for good. Each interaction with a student or colleague is a potential teaching and learning opportunity. Let me provide two examples of what I mean by this principle.

My first example of this principle is the faculty of Ricks College. We presently have 353 full-time teaching faculty on this campus. These dedicated teachers have provided a total of 5,209 years of service to the youth of the Church at Ricks College. Consider the impact for good of those years of faithful service in the lives of thousands, tens of thousands, and even millions of individuals and families throughout the world. The talents of these teachers easily would have enabled them to hold positions of prominence, prestige, and financial reward far beyond anything they have experienced at Ricks College. Yet they have chosen to forego those opportunities to live and work in Rexburg, Idaho, and serve the young people of the Church. These competent and dedicated faculty members could be elsewhere but love to teach and work and serve at Ricks College.

My second example highlights how non-faculty employees at Ricks College also serve as teachers. I recently was assigned to preside at the Brigham City Utah West Stake conference. The stake president, Michael Dustin, is a graduate of Ricks College. President Dustin came to Ricks College in 1968 with no place to live and not knowing what to expect of college or of himself.

President Dustin found a job on campus and was assigned to shovel snow and clean around the girls dorms. He was hired and supervised by Brother DaVawn Beattie. Today Brother Beattie is the supervisor of Grounds and the Motor Pool at Ricks College. It was obvious as I talked with President Dustin that he had a great regard and love for Brother Beattie. In fact, President Dustin named his youngest son Beattie Dustin as a tribute to DaVawn.

I asked President Dustin what DaVawn had done to have such a profound impact on his life and why he would name his son after him. He gave the following answers:

DaVawn gave me direction in my life and helped me learn how to implement into my everyday life the things I was learning in my classes. He helped strengthen my testimony. He built us up and told us we were doing a good job. He was a friend and someone I could talk to.

When I was unsure about continuing in school, he taught me this principle: *If you get an education, you can more effectively serve the Lord.* That principle changed my life, and I have since taught it to many other adults and young people.

DaVawn is but one example of the hundreds of wonderful employees at Ricks College who also serve and bless students. Brother Beattie, you may not have attended college or received a degree; but in the curriculum of the eternities, you indeed have earned a Ph.D. You have not been assigned to be a classroom teacher at Ricks; however, in the things that matter most, you are an example of the first-class teaching that takes place at this college. Every person at Ricks College is a teacher.

3. THE MOST EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES OCCUR “ONE BY ONE.”

Perhaps the defining characteristic of the Savior’s ministry was His ability to teach “one by one.” For example, following His resurrection, He visited the Nephites on the American continent. He invited the 2,500 gathered near the temple in the Land of Bountiful to come forward “one by one” to feel the prints in His hands and feet and to thrust their hands into His side (3 Nephi 11). In one of the most moving stories in all of holy writ, He blessed the children “one by one” (3 Nephi 17). He touched and tutored His Nephite disciples “one by one” (3 Nephi 18; 3 Nephi 28).

This same principle manifests itself today in the worldwide labors of proclaiming the gospel, which is carried out “one by one,” and of redeeming the dead, as saving ordinances are provided “one by one.”

Ricks College is uniquely positioned as an institution of higher education to show and lead the way in applying the principle of “one by one.” This college is legendary for the individualized and nurturing attention given to students by the faculty and staff. Some people on campus candidly have shared with me their concerns that the growth in our student body and technological changes may inhibit our ability to provide “one by one” support in the future. Let me now emphasize an important point just as forcefully as I can. New technologies and innovative pedagogies at Ricks College cannot and will not replace the special powers of people in the processes of learning and teaching. Technology is not an educational

panacea. In fact, some supposed technological advances seem to create as many, if not more problems than they solve. However, technology can and should play a supporting and complementing role in our work of educating. If we are wise, we will learn to use technology and the other advancements at our disposal to greatly enhance both the opportunities for and effectiveness of our “one by one” teaching. I believe this principle in particular will distinguish us from other institutions of higher education and will in large measure define our educational ship of curious workmanship. We at Ricks College will be both high-tech and high-touch.

4. MORE STUDENTS MUST BE BLESSED.

All worthy youth of the Church deserve a Ricks College experience, yet an increasingly smaller percentage of them will ever have that opportunity. As I indicated earlier in my remarks, it will be necessary for us at Ricks College to serve ever better the thousands of students we have on campus while simultaneously reaching out to bless the lives of tens of thousands of young Latter-day Saints throughout the world. We must learn how to assist and bless institute students and other LDS youth in Rhode Island and Rome while effectively serving our students on campus in Rexburg.

5. RIGHTEOUS SOCIALITY (D&C 130:2) IS ESSENTIAL TO INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT.

The word “sociality” as used in the scriptures refers to more than the sociability and socialness we experience in everyday living. Sociality implies an enduring bond of love and brotherhood and sisterhood. In fact, sociality as described in the scriptures specifically refers to the organization of eternal families. The sweet and tender associations we enjoy “here and now” are but a foreshadowing of the eternal relationships that will endure “there and then” beyond the grave.

The unique environment of Ricks College exists, in part, because of the righteous endeavors of both students and employees. Participation in all types of wholesome activities—spiritual, academic, social, and cultural—promotes the positive interactions that bring about a righteous sociality capable of enduring throughout eternity.

6. SERVICE PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH.

Only those individuals who lose themselves in meaningful service to others can ever discover who they really are. True service both blesses the one being served and provides unparalleled opportunities for personal growth and development to the one doing the serving. As students and staff fulfill callings in their respective wards and stakes, follow through with classroom, club, and other assignments, and carry out responsibilities in their homes, apartments, or

elsewhere, they grow in character and in their commitment to become more like the Savior.

7. A RICKS COLLEGE EXPERIENCE MUST BE AFFORDABLE FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES.

The efforts to provide unique teaching and learning experiences at Ricks College are of no avail if only an elite group, academically and economically, can ever come here. The cost of a Ricks experience must be kept within reasonable and affordable limits.

I believe that abiding by these principles will enable us to both preserve and enhance the spirit of Ricks College as we progress on our voyage of high adventure in a sea of rapid change.

Brothers and sisters, you and I have come here today primarily to be in the presence of and receive counsel from the prophet of the Lord. We have also assembled to celebrate Ricks College and its influence for good. An inauguration ceremony is not about the particular person who occupies the office of president. Rather, the ceremony is a celebration of the institution and its wonderful people. I am grateful to be here with you today and to share in this historic and memorable occasion.

As I now conclude, I would like to pay tribute to the people who make Ricks College what it is. Your faithfulness, dedication, and loyalty are a great source of inspiration to me. You have taught me much in the short time I have been with you. Elder Orson F. Whitney related the following relevant experience:

A captain of a ship in a storm was approached and asked if there was any danger. The tempests had been beating upon the vessel for days; she had been driven out of her course; the waves were rolling mountain high; the appearance of things was perilous, and the passengers were fearful. "Captain, is there danger?" asked one. The Captain smiled reassuringly, and replied, "Not one particle, so long as conditions remain as they now are. I have been down below; I have examined the machinery; every wheel is moving as it was ordained to move; every pin is in its place; every man is at his post; everything is working well, and as long as this continues, there is no danger whatever; but," he added, "if a single wheel refused to move, if a single pin were out of place, if a man were to rebel and mutiny, there would be danger that we might all go to the bottom of the sea. (Orson F. Whitney, *Conference Report*, April 1907, p. 113)

I, too, have been "down below and examined the machinery" of this great college during the past eight months. I am not suggesting that we are perfect, nor do I believe that every responsibility and job on this campus will always be executed exactly as it is today. Indeed, we have much room

for continuing improvement. But the illustration by Elder Whitney is an appropriate model for how Ricks College will move forward majestically through the uncertainties that lie before us. The machinery and pins that must remain as they now are at Ricks College include our faithfulness to the Savior and His teachings, our loyalty to the Brethren, and our willingness to do more than is required or expected in serving the young people of the Church. As we progress on our voyage, there is no danger for Ricks College whatsoever as long as we preserve and enhance these essential conditions. Again quoting Elder Whitney:

So long as we serve God, and are one with each other, the storms that come from without and spend their fury upon us, pass harmlessly over; they only have the effect of driving us together, making us feel for one another, love one another, and strengthen one another. (Orson F. Whitney, *Conference Report*, April 1907, p. 113)

May I now conclude by sharing with you my possession of greatest worth: my testimony that God lives, my knowledge that Jesus is the Christ and that the fullness of the gospel has been restored to the earth in these latter days. I testify and witness that there are living prophets and apostles on the earth today. These things I know. Of these things I testify, and do so in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen. ❁