

I See a School

President John S. Tanner
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Brother and sisters, aloha! When President Eyring invited me to serve as president of BYU–Hawaii, he told me that I should seek revelation for the university. This was a bit daunting because I had hoped for some specific prophetic marching orders. Instead I received a mandate to go to Heavenly Father myself for direction. In the intervening months I have earnestly sought for inspiration.

I have found it in many places. I have found it in my interactions with you. I have found it as I have walked the campus and read the history of the university and of Laie. I have found it in the whisperings at night that filled my soul with joy and in the illumination at dawn that brought light to my mind. Above all, I have found revelation in the revelations that founded this school. A vision of this school has been coming into focus for me.

I envision a university that is a house of learning and a house of light—a phrase that I have asked to be engraved on the medallion that I now wear.

I see a university that is intended to be not only “a school in Zion” (D&C 97:3) but a Zion university—a place where people from many nations learn together in purity, peace, unity, and love. May this school savor so strongly and so sweetly of Zion that it creates an appetite in its graduates to build Zion everywhere.

I see a school with prophetic origins—the only Church college to be established top down. The other Church schools began as grassroots initiatives. This one came by revelation to a prophet, David O. McKay, who spoke expansively and explicitly about his vision for it. Under President Steven C. Wheelwright, this vision was captured in three memorable goals: to learn, to lead, and to build. I endorse these goals. May we continue to read and ponder the revelatory direction given at our founding. I am persuaded that our future is in great part presaged in our prophetic past.

At the same time, may we take direction from living prophets. As we seek and heed the counsel from the board of trustees, I see a university that charts a steady course toward its divine destiny.

I see a school purposefully located in an ancient place of refuge and a historic place of gathering. This is a sacred place blessed by prophets many times over. I know of no Church college where place and purpose are more profoundly or powerfully linked than here in Laie. I see a school that continues to provide a Zion-like place of refuge and of gathering.

This university was intentionally erected in the shadow of a temple—the only Church college to be so located from its inception. Those who built the Church College of Hawaii linked the temple and the school spatially by laying out two new intersecting streets: the streets of Hale La’a (Hawaiian for “holy house”) and Kulanui (Hawaiian for “big school”). May these houses of learning and of light also remain linked spiritually. I see a school that strives to be worthy to keep company with a house of God.

I see a school that concerns itself both with “practical salvation”—as Brigham Young promised King Kamehameha V when the Saints first were established here—and with what President McKay called the higher purposes of education.¹

Here at BYU–Hawaii, students learn both how to make a living and how “to make

living happier.”² Here they are “prepared in all things” for their missions, both temporal and spiritual (D&C 29:8).

I see a school where, in the language of section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants, “all may be edified of all,” where each has “an equal privilege,” and where faculty, students, and staff are bound together in “the bond of charity” (verses 122, 125).

In the School of the Prophets, the teacher greeted each student with the following tender salutation:

I salute you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in token or remembrance of the everlasting covenant, in which covenant I receive you to fellowship, in a determination . . . to be your friend and brother . . . in the bonds of love. [D&C 88:133]

I envision a university where relationships are sustained by shared covenants, spiritual kinship as brothers and sisters, and an aloha spirit that emanates from the pure love of Christ.

I see a school that aspires not merely to impart knowledge but to build character—not simply to inform but to transform. As I said to the students in my first devotional, we have designs on your souls here. President McKay was explicit that this school must concern itself with character education. He often repeated a statement by Ralph Waldo Emerson that “character is higher than intellect.”³ As a boy, this saying sank deep into my soul. As president, I embrace the vision of character education instilled in my heart by the prophet of my youth. I envision a school that inculcates nobility of character, nurturing men and women who cannot be bought or sold, who are “genuine gold.”⁴

I see a school that looks not only upward to heaven but outward toward the Pacific and Asia—a school whose international mission informs all we do, including the students we pursue and the programs we provide.

I see a school that fashions its programs to fit its target areas in the Pacific and in Asia. As President Marion G. Romney said and counseled, our curriculum should be of “specific practical value to the students and to the cultures of the Pacific Basin.” He continued, saying that this school must not be “simply a way station used briefly by the students on their way to the mainland.”⁵ Nor, I would add, should it be merely an island vacation for mainland students. Rather, let all who teach and study here come under the desire to participate in a unique, gospel-based “living laboratory” where people from many cultures gain “appreciation, tolerance, and esteem for one another” as they become educated.⁶

I also envision a university that is really good at helping international students learn English. And I see a school that shares this expertise with other Church schools and entities, thereby playing a critical and distinctive role in the larger Church Educational System.

I see a school that serves its vast target area by leveraging resources through collaboration and technology. Remember that Archimedes said that with a lever long enough, he could move the world.⁷ We must look for long levers to lift a world as large as the one we seek to serve. Technology can supply some such levers, and we must use them wisely and in a way that respects the human dimension of education. We can also increase our lift through collaboration with our sister institutions and with internships.

I see a school that serves its vast target area through leavening as well as through leveraging. I anticipate that BYU–Hawaii will remain relatively small, particularly

compared to the size of its target areas. Yet our school "will leaven the whole lump."⁸ Their influence—the students' influence—will be disproportionate to their numbers, for they will be light bearers, leaders, builders, and peacemakers.

President David O. McKay prophesied, "You mark that word, and from this school . . . will go men and women whose influence will be felt for good toward the establishment of peace internationally."⁹ This prophecy is still in force.

Above all, the influence of our graduates for good and for peace will be felt in the walls of their own homes. They will establish peace through living the principles taught by the Prince of Peace. True peace comes in no other way.

Finally, I see a school that serves as an alma mater (meaning a "nourishing mother") for its students, especially for students who are poor, late bloomers, first generation, international, or nonnative English speakers. In the Old Testament the prophets admonished Israel to take special care of the widow and the orphan and the stranger in the land. I see a school that takes special care of the academic orphan and stranger in the land—as did Sister Ma Manuhii, who cared for a teenage orphan missionary named Joseph F. Smith when he arrived in Hawaii as a fifteen-year-old. He was much like many of our students. He needed to grow up. He needed to develop his testimony and confidence. He needed to learn the language. He was far from home. Discouraged, lonely, and sick, this future prophet found a surrogate mother full of the aloha spirit.

And when President Smith returned to Hawaii for the last time, now an old man, he met Ma Manuhii, who welcomed him and brought some bananas and cried out, "Iosepa, Iosepa!"

He ran to her; he embraced her. He kissed her over and over and exclaimed, "Mama, Mama, my dear old Mama!" Then he turned to Bishop Charles Nibley and, through his tears, said, "Charley, she nursed me when I was a boy, sick and without anyone to care for me. She took me in and was a mother to me!"¹⁰

I envision a university that becomes a beloved alma mater to its students, as was Ma Manuhii to the young Joseph F. Smith.

I have tender feelings for financially strapped students and for late bloomers, for I was one of them. I started college as an English major who could neither spell nor type nor compose a coherent paragraph. And I was also poor. I was always poor as a student. I worked my way through school from my freshman year right through my PhD. So I have a special place in my heart for our I-WORK students, as well as for the students who feel overwhelmed by the academic challenges of college. The university I have come to see and love serves as an alma mater to such students, a Ma Manuhii for academic orphans and for strangers in the land.

Brothers and sisters, such is the school that I envision and hope to shape. Hamlet says that "there's a divinity that shapes our ends, Rough-hew them how we will."¹¹ There's a divinity that shapes the ends of this school. I pray that the carpenter's Son will help me hew them as He may, for my deepest desire is to shape this school not according to my vision but according to His. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. In a letter from Brigham Young to King Kamehameha V, 24 March 1865, 2, Hawaii State Archives, original letter digitally posted at Hawaiian Historical Society, 28 April 2015, [facebook.com/hawaiianhistory/posts/734129930029138](https://www.facebook.com/hawaiianhistory/posts/734129930029138); see also Fred E. Woods, "An Islander's View of a

- Desert Kingdom: Jonathan Napela Recounts His 1869 Visit to Salt Lake City," *BYU Studies* 45, no. 1 (2006): 31.
2. David O. McKay, "Church College of Hawaii Dedicatory Address and Prayer," Laie, Hawaii, 17 December 1958.
 3. Emerson, *The American Scholar* (1837), section 3; cited in McKay, "Church College of Hawaii Groundbreaking Address and Prayer" Laie, Hawaii, 12 February 1955.
 4. Quoted in Henry H. Fick, "Education of the Heart," *Education* 4, no. 2 (November 1883): 178; cited in McKay, "Groundbreaking Address."
 5. Marion G. Romney, "Aloha Center Dedicatory Address and Prayer," Laie, Hawaii, 26 January 1973.
 6. Romney, "Aloha Center Dedicatory Address."
 7. See Pappus of Alexandria, *Collectio* (c. AD 340), book 8, proposition 10, section 2.
 8. McKay, "Groundbreaking Address"; see also 1 Corinthians 5:6; Galatians 5:9.
 9. McKay, "Groundbreaking Address."
 10. Quoted in Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Life of Joseph F. Smith: Sixth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969), 186.
 11. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 5, scene 2, lines 10–11.