The Spirit and Purposes of Gathering

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I now plead and pray for the Holy Ghost to assist me and you as together we discuss the spirit and purposes of gathering.

We are met together today to participate in the groundbreaking for two buildings on this campus—the addition to the Manwaring Center and the new auditorium (now called the BYU-Idaho Center). I recall with fondness July 1, 1997, my first official day on the job as the new president of Ricks College. On that day we conducted a groundbreaking for the Spencer W. Kimball Building. Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles presided at that event. Now remember, it was July 1, and it was my first day as the new president of the college. July 1—it was windy; it was very cold; and because of the inclement weather, we had to move indoors into the west ballroom of the Manwaring Center. Later that same day when I returned to the president’s home, I had to turn on the furnace because it was so cold. It was the first of July in Rexburg, and I had to turn on the heating system in our house.

I called Sister Bednar, who was in Arkansas at the time preparing for the move to Idaho, and described the historic events of the day. I also told her about how cold it was, and that I had turned on the furnace. There was silence on the other end of the phone. She simply said, “David, it is the first of July.” I responded, “Susan, I am in Rexburg.” Such are my memories of my first groundbreaking at BYU–Idaho.

Our gathering today is an important episode in the ongoing development of this Church sponsored institution of higher education. During the last decade, one of the most important educational events of the restoration has occurred in Rexburg, Idaho. And the physical evidence of that marvelous miracle is found in the new and renovated buildings across the BYU–Idaho campus. In just the last ten years the John Taylor, the Construction Management Lab, the Spencer W. Kimball, the Jacob Spori, the Radio and Graphic Services, the Gordon B. Hinckley, the university electrical sub-station, the Student Health and Counseling Center, the University Village, and the Thomas E. Ricks Buildings, were newly constructed. And the David O. McKay Library, the Joseph Fielding Smith, Dorm 5, the heating plant, the John W. Hart, the Mark Austin, the Ezra Taft Benson, the Thomas E. Ricks Gardens, the George S. Romney, the John L. Clarke, the Eliza R. Snow, the BYU–Idaho Stadium, and other facilities which I will not take the time to mention, have been renovated and remodeled.

Can you begin to sense the magnitude of the miracle—and how the hand of the Lord has enabled so much to be accomplished in such a short period of time? And the most important addition to the campus continues to rise majestically to the south of the Gordon B. Hinckley Building. We all look forward to the completion and dedication of the Rexburg Temple of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The pace at and effectiveness with which these projects have moved forward defies rational explanation. I am personally grateful for the lessons I learned as these projects were conceived, critiqued, modified, and executed. The planning for and constructing of these new buildings and the remodeling of existing facilities on this campus has required faith, inspiration, persistence, and patience. I pay tribute to the good people on this campus who have labored so diligently and valiantly to make this construction miracle at BYU–Idaho a reality.

The two buildings for which we break ground today represent the final phase of a comprehensive campus upgrade—the last major elements in the physical infrastructure of Brigham Young University–Idaho. These two projects are the largest and most complex of all the projects that have been undertaken thus far—in terms of both size and cost. And because of their sheer scope, it would be easy for us to “miss the mark” and think only in terms of the temporal purposes and uses of these two buildings.
We would be wise to remember that all things unto the Lord are spiritual, "and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal; neither any man, nor the children of men (D&C 29:34). Interestingly, the renovated Manwaring Center and the auditorium will share a common spiritual purpose; they will both be primary places of gathering. The Manwaring Center truly will become a center for student association and activity. And the new auditorium will make it possible for the entire student body to attend together weekly devotionals, will enable more family and friends to participate in commencement and other significant events, and will meet a wide range of additional needs.

The Principle of Gathering

The gathering of scattered Israel is one of the fundamental principles of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. The Lord gathers his people when they accept him and keep His commandments.

The Tenth Article of Faith states:

We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory. (Articles of Faith 1:10)

Thus on a grand and global scale, the house of Israel is being gathered together in these latter days before the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This supernal spiritual process variously is described in the scriptures as gathering out the wheat from the tares (see D&C 86:7), separating the righteous from the wicked (see Alma 5:57), dividing the sheep from the goats (see Matthew 25:32-33), and assembling the outcasts of Israel and gathering together the dispersed of Judah (see Isaiah 11:12). The spirit of gathering is an integral part of the restoration of all things in this the dispensation of the fullness of times. And as Elder Russell M. Nelson taught us in our recent general conference, the elect of the Lord are being gathered on both sides of the veil (see "The Gathering of Scattered Israel," Ensign, November 2006, 79).

Using the scriptures, we will now briefly review several basic purposes of gathering, places of gathering, and blessings of gathering. The order in which these items are presented is not intended to reflect relative importance or priority.

Purposes of Gathering

First, what are the fundamental purposes of gathering? The Lord gathers His people to worship, to build up the Church, for a defense, and to receive counsel and instruction.

Purpose #1. To worship

"And there was one day in every week that was set apart that they should gather themselves together to teach the people, and to worship the Lord their God, and also, as often as it was in their power, to assemble themselves together" (Mosiah 18:25)

Purpose #2. To build up the Church

Again, verily I say unto you, I will show unto you wisdom in me concerning all the churches, inasmuch as they are willing to be guided in a right and proper way for their salvation–

That the work of the gathering together of my saints may continue, that I may build them up unto my name upon holy places; for the time of the harvest is come, and my word must needs be fulfilled. (D&C 101:63-64).

Purpose #3. For a defense

And that the gathering together upon the land of Zion, and upon her stakes, may be for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth. (D&C 115:6).

Purpose #4. To receive counsel and instruction

And it came to pass after many days there were a goodly number gathered together at the place of Mormon, to hear the words of Alma. Yea, all were gathered together that believed on his word, to hear him. And he did teach them, and did preach unto them repentance, and redemption, and faith on the Lord. (Mosiah 18:7).

Places of Gathering

What are the primary places of gathering? The Lord’s people are gathered into His restored Church, into holy temples, into stakes of Zion, and into families.

Place #1. Into the Lord’s restored Church

“That the work of the gathering together of my saints may continue, that I may build them up unto my name upon holy places; for the time of harvest is come, and my word must needs be fulfilled.

“Therefore, I must gather together my people, according to the parable of the wheat and the tares, that the wheat may be secured in the garner to possess eternal life, and be crowned with celestial glory, when I shall come in the kingdom of my Father to reward every man according as his work shall be” (D&C 101:64-65).

Place #2. Into holy temples

Behold, the field was ripe, and blessed are ye, for ye did thrust in the sickle, and did reap with your might, yea, all the day long did ye labor; and behold the number of your sheaves! And they shall be gathered into the garner, that they are not wasted.

Please note that President Howard W. Hunter taught that the garnerers are the holy temples (see Church News, 17 September 1994). This interpretation by President Hunter adds additional clarity about the importance of sacred temple covenants and ordinances, that the sheaves are not wasted.

Yea, they shall not be beaten down by the storm at the last day; yea, neither shall they be harrowed up by the whirlwinds; but when the storm cometh they shall be gathered together in their place, that the storm cannot penetrate to them; yea, neither shall they be driven with fierce winds whithersoever the enemy listeth to carry them” (Alma 26:5-6).

The Prophet Joseph Smith declared that in all ages the divine purpose of gathering is to build temples so that the Lord’s children can receive the highest ordinances and thereby gain eternal life (see Teachings
of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pp. 307-308, 314).

Place #3. Into stakes of Zion

We ask thee to appoint unto Zion other stakes besides this one which thou hast appointed, that the gathering of thy people may roll on in great power and majesty, that thy work may be cut short in righteousness. (D&C 109:59)

Place #4. Into families

And most significantly, by the power of the Melchizedek priesthood and through the ordinances of the Holy Temple, we are gathered into families that can endure beyond the grave.

And it came to pass that when they came up to the temple, they pitched their tents round about, every man according to his family, consisting of his wife, and his sons, and his daughters, and their sons, and their daughters, from the eldest down to the youngest, every family being separate one from another. (Mosiah 2:5).

Blessings of Gathering

Finally, what are the blessings of gathering? The gathering of the Lord’s people brings blessings of edification, preservation, and strength.

Blessing #1. Edification

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:12-13).

Blessing #2. Preservation

And the day shall come that the earth shall rest, but before that day the heavens shall be darkened, and a veil of darkness shall cover the earth; and the heavens shall shake, and also the earth; and great tribulations shall be among the children of men, but my people will I preserve. (Moses 7:61).

Blessing #3. Strength

For Zion must increase in beauty, and in holiness; her borders must be enlarged; her stakes must be strengthened; yea, verily I say unto you, Zion must arise and put on her beautiful garments. (D&C 82:14).

The Principle of Gathering at Brigham Young University–Idaho

The spirit, purposes, and blessings of gathering also occur in smaller but equally important ways on this set apart and special campus. The power of righteous unity can pervade your classrooms, your home evening groups, the weekly devotionals, among students studying in the library, and in student wards and stakes. This spirit of gathering brings assurance, encouragement, and a sense of purpose greater than self. At BYU–Idaho you gather to worship the Father in the name of the Son, to build up the Church and the university, to find defense and protection, and to receive counsel and instruction.

You gather together to learn and to prepare for your mortal and eternal opportunities and responsibilities. You gather together to strengthen each other. You gather together to develop appropriate relationships and to create eternal families. You gather together to increase in understanding about the purpose and measure of your creation.

These blessings associated with the spirit and purposes of gathering will be increasingly evident throughout your life. You are richly blessed to be students gathered together on the campus of BYU–Idaho. In September of 1997, President James E. Faust, second counselor in the First Presidency, came to this campus to dedicate the John Taylor Building. Elder Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the Commissioner of Church Education was President Faust's companion for that assignment.

Elder Eyring arrived in Rexburg one day early to review several university issues with me and to ensure that everything was in order for President Faust. When I picked up Elder Eyring at the airport, I learned that he had just returned from a two-week assignment in South America. He obviously was tired from his travels, and I was anxious to get him to our home so he could rest.

As we drove to our home, I asked Elder Eyring if he was interested in quickly walking through the completed Taylor Building. He answered that he was interested, and we spent approximately 15 minutes inspecting the classrooms and other facilities.

Our last stop was the Taylor Chapel where Elder Eyring stood near the pulpit on the stand and gazed into the audience area for quite a long time. After a few minutes, I asked him: “Elder Eyring, what are you thinking about?” He answered with this profound and penetrating observation: “I am thinking about how much we do for so few and how little we do for so many.” He then continued, “The tithing of the people I just visited in South America and from good people all over the world paid for this facility. And most of the people who have made this beautiful facility possible will never see or step foot in a building like this. That is what I am thinking about.” That experience influenced me in an important way during the time I served here at BYU–Idaho. And now as a colleague of Elder Eyring in the Quorum of the Twelve, I understand more completely what he meant.

Sister Bednar and I returned last week from an assignment in Slovakia and Hungary. The people with whom we met in those countries will likely never see or step foot in the remodeled Manwaring Center or the new auditorium. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has invested millions of tithing dollars to upgrade the BYU–Idaho campus. These expenditures have been made to provide associations and places wherein you can learn about, gain experience with, and be blessed by the spirit of gathering. Please do not take these sacred resources, your choice associations, and this beautiful campus for granted. Please do not think that you are somehow more deserving or worthy. Please do not allow yourself to get fussy and grumpy because you do not have everything you believe you should have—such as a parking space within 200 feet of the building where you work or where your next class is held. Please be grateful for the singular opportunity you have to learn and work here—and for the responsibility that rests upon you as one who has been the recipient of great
blessings.

A Warning and A Promise

In the authority of the holy Apostleship, I now raise a voice of warning and I make a solemn promise. If the day ever were to come that intellectual arrogance, a lack of appreciation, and a spirit of demanding entitlement take root on this campus—among the students, the faculty, the employees, the administration, or within the community of Rexburg—then in that day the Spirit of Ricks will be well on the way to being extinguished—and the heavenly influence and blessings that have prospered this institution and the people associated with it will be withdrawn. Conversely, as long as intellectual modesty, humility, gratitude, obedience, and frugality continue to characterize those who learn and serve at Brigham Young University–Idaho, then this university will shine forth ever brighter as a beacon of righteousness and of inspired educational innovation.

My Witness

I declare my special witness that Jesus is the Christ and that the fullness of His gospel has been restored to the earth in these latter days through the Prophet Joseph Smith. I know and witness that the Savior lives. He stands at the head of His Church, and He directs its affairs through revelation to a living prophet. I so witness in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.