

“Remarks at Inaugural Dinner”

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Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

I am grateful to raise my voice in congratulation and welcome to Brian Ashton on this day of his official inauguration. He is the man of the hour, well-prepared by heaven as well as by mentors and life experience to assume responsibility for an endeavor that I am convinced will have an impact for good beyond what perhaps any of us can envision at the moment. BYU-Pathway Worldwide has already proved its merit and is already achieving major benefit in the lives of uncounted numbers of men and women and families. Of course, there is more, much more, to come, and I am grateful that one as capable and committed as Brian is now prepared to take the helm.

I am also grateful to have heard even briefly from both Brian and Melinda tonight. You all know the saying that behind every good and successful man is a ... surprised mother-in-law. Actually, I'm confident that Brian's mother-in-law is not surprised but rather confirmed in her good opinion of him; this newest appointment is simply an additional bit of supporting evidence. I am also sure that Melinda's mother-in-law could not admire or appreciate more the woman Brian married. How wonderful and fortunate for us to have the blessing of these two equally yoked and mutually supportive people invested in the success of BYU-Pathway.

As I think about the good already achieved by BYU-Pathway Worldwide over the last several years and its potential in the future, my mind goes to the verse in Alma already cited by President Ashton:

And thus, in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need.¹

The opportunities, the vision, the direction, and the skills that come with diligent effort in BYU-Pathway are foundational in blessing the lives of individual participants and many others in their circle. They produce blessings to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its members. BYU-Pathway reaches people we otherwise could not. It offers access to jobs and vocations, to self-reliance and independence, even to faith and testimony that might otherwise remain inaccessible. It ministers to physical and spiritual needs for both those who figuratively and those who literally lack food, clothing, shelter, and hope.

The material outcomes are easy to see. Let me say a word about some of the equally important spiritual outcomes. BYU-Pathway helps students experience spiritual transformation. For example:

- 95% report an increased testimony.
- 33% of international students currently serve in Church leadership, including members of stake presidencies, bishoprics, and Relief Societies.
- 27% of students are recently returned missionaries.
- 96% of these returned missionaries are active participants in the Church three years after enrolling in BYU-Pathway.
- 16% of new students are less active in the Church when they enroll.
- 12% of new students are not members of the Church when they enroll.
- 30% of those who are not members get baptized.

¹ [Alma 1:30](#)

Of course, many of these outcomes are tied to the fact that BYU-Pathway students also attend institute. Nevertheless, there seems to be no end to the good that can come from being a part of BYU-Pathway Worldwide. At the same time, as we reflect on the wants and needs spoken about in the scripture from Alma that I cited, we are concerned that many who want to be part of BYU-Pathway cannot be or cannot continue to be, as has been mentioned because of their immediate need. We find, for example, that among our international certificate and degree students, 90% of those who withdraw have a passing grade. So, for them, it is not a matter of losing interest or of lacking desire or ability. Thirty-four percent fail to obtain two meals a day; 60% experience unstable housing; 68% have limited or inadequate internet connection. These and similar challenges force some of the most promising and most in need to forego the thing that would lift them, or help them lift themselves, out of these very circumstances.

Thus, as was mentioned, we face a significant opportunity to help with scholarships, grants, and other forms of enabling help for a goodly number of our BYU-Pathway students and potential students. We are confident in the quality of BYU-Pathway's offerings. Of course, we continually strive to improve what BYU-Pathway can offer, and that will be a hallmark of Brian Ashton's administration, but the question is access to BYU-Pathway's superb content and tools. This is an unfinished aspect of our work. I know that President Ashton and those serving with him are committed to finding ways and means to remove the obstacles that stand in anyone's way who wants to be a part of BYU-Pathway. If they call upon any of us to help, I hope we will do whatever we can.

During the last two weeks of February, my wife, Kathy, and I, along with Elder S. Mark Palmer of the Presidency of the Seventy and his wife, Jacqui, and others were in the Africa West Area. Our meetings and activities included time in Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast, and The Gambia. We were pleased to see what has been happening in that area with BYU-Pathway Worldwide due to the untiring efforts of Matt Richards and many others and the unstinting support of the Area Presidency. There are plenty of obstacles, including the chronic scarcity of existing jobs in the local economies, but the progress and outcomes to date are very heartening.

In the course of our travels, we had audiences with some key political leaders. These included the president of The Gambia, Adama Barrow; the vice president, Isatou Touray; and first lady, Fatoumatta Bah Barrow; the vice president of Nigeria, Oluyemi Osinbajo; and the special counselor to the president of Côte d'Ivoire, Mr. Drissa Koné. It became clear in each of our visits that these leaders were interested in long-term root solutions for the needs of their people, an interest that always included the matter of education. This gave us an opportunity to talk about BYU-Pathway Worldwide, which is functioning to some degree at least in each of those countries as well as other West African nations.

None of these leaders had much awareness of BYU-Pathway, but as we described what it is, what it does, and who it reaches, each of them immediately saw the unique benefits that BYU-Pathway offers. They could see how it filled a gap that was of concern to them, and we could feel their genuine enthusiasm. I trust they will remember what they heard and felt when our people come back with requests to remove the bureaucratic roadblocks that sometimes arise and prevent us from functioning fully and broadly in the country.

My real point though is the testament that this experience is to the inspiration behind BYU-Pathway Worldwide. The hand of God is in it. Anyone can feel it. I can feel it, and I am happy to bear witness of it. With you, I invoke the blessings of heaven on the work of BYU-Pathway Worldwide and all who support and direct it, especially on this day, our dear friend and brother Brian Ashton. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.