

“Why We Gather”

Clark G. Gilbert

BYU-Pathway Worldwide President

I’m standing in one of our Salt Lake gathering locations. It is empty now, but by Thursday night, this room will be full of students from all across the Salt Lake Valley. In a recent visit to the Philippines, I asked a group of students who had traveled the furthest for their weekly gathering. The answer came in the *number of vehicles* used to get to a Pathway site. Nikki Jalos won the award with three different vehicles: a motorcycle taxi with an attached passenger cab, a Jeepney mini-bus, and a more traditional metro city bus!

So many students make incredible sacrifices to gather. And while we are continually working to open more sites and employ virtual gatherings, the fact remains that gathering requires real investment.

So, why do we gather?

Certainly, it would save a lot of time and effort to just have you work through online courses independently, and not bother with these otherwise demanding requirements to gather.

As we developed online courses at BYU-Idaho, President Henry B. Eyring cautioned: “[I]t would be easy to look for ways to help learners learn alone, using the wonders of technology. The same technology could give learners the experience of helping others they love to learn with them.” He also reminded us that “[t]he climbs to the places God would have us go are never for us alone. ... Losing sight of that need to climb with others could slow our progress toward dramatically improved teaching and learning.”¹ It seems there is something about lifting and building others that is foundational to why we gather.

One of the miracles of BYU-Pathway is in the gathering. Think about all of the learning opportunities tied to the gatherings. There are structured activities, such as joint problem solving and peer evaluation. Students also have the opportunity to be the “lead student” to facilitate the gathering during their first year of PathwayConnect.

Of course, we also gather online. Some of this happens in virtual gatherings. Last year, I joined a group from Russia who gathered across five different time zones. Gathering also happens in online course work, where students participate in discussion boards, evaluate each other’s work, and complete group projects. Your courses are designed around the Learning Model with opportunities to Prepare, Teach One Another, and Ponder and Prove. It turns out, the Learning Model doesn’t really work without gathering; it is kind of hard to *teach one another* if there is no one else in the course!

I would like to suggest three reasons why we gather.

First, when we gather, we deepen our engagement with the Learning Model. For example, when you know you are responsible to teach others, you *prepare* differently, and your discussions are more substantive. A student from Dallas, Texas, explained to me: “When I was assigned to be the lead student, not only did I prepare differently that night; my preparation was different going forward. I was more empathetic and engaged when others were in that role.” In [Doctrine and Covenants 88:122](#), we are admonished to: “Appoint among yourselves a teacher, and let not

¹ Henry B. Eyring, “[The Temple and the College on the Hill](#),” (BYU-Idaho Devotional, June 9, 2009), www.byui.edu/devotionals

all be spokesmen at once; but let one speak at a time and let all listen unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified . . .”

Second, when we gather, we create opportunities to act. In [Doctrine and Covenants 58:28](#) we read: “For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves.” In *Lectures on Faith* we read that faith is a principle of action and power.² Several years ago, I participated in a weekly gathering in Heber, Utah, where the students were working a math problem. One student — I’ll call her Suzie — had been away from school for some time and expressed doubts about her math skills. During the gathering, it became clear she had the wrong answer. A wise lead student invited her to the white board. Suzie accepted the invitation and began to work the problem. When she got to the place where she had made the mistake, rather than jump in and correct the error, her group instead asked her why she had changed part of her formula. Suddenly, she saw her mistake, made the correction, and began jumping up and down! The whole group then began cheering. Suzie’s courage to act — and her peers’ willingness to let her act — allowed her to make the powerful discovery.

Third, acting in a gathered setting invites the Spirit and the Spirit then becomes the true teacher. In that setting in Heber, Utah, part of the power in that room was the Spirit witnessing truth. It’s gathering that enables the use of agency, which then opens opportunities for the Spirit to teach.³

In closing, I would like to extend two invitations. First, I invite you to continue to explore why we gather and share your insights. Second, there are also ways you can make your gatherings more effective. Think again about that gathering in Heber. Suzie needed to feel safe to work in front of others. That required others to listen, to show support, and to encourage Suzie. It also required that they came prepared. I would invite you to explore ways to be more effective as you gather.⁴

It is my prayer that we find these and other blessings as we gather in BYU-Pathway. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

² *Lectures on Faith*, (1985), 3

³ For further discussion, please see: Richard G. Scott, “[To Acquire Spiritual Guidance](#),” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Oct. 2009, 9

⁴ For further discussion, please see: David A. Bednar, “[The Spirit and Purposes of Gathering](#),” (BYU-Idaho Devotional, Oct. 31, 2006), www.byui.edu/devotionals