

# Following Prophetic Direction: Five Years and Looking Forward

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## Introduction

BYU–Hawaii employees, missionaries, and every member of our campus 'ohana, good morning and aloha! I'm so grateful that we are gathered here today. I'm thankful for each of you and for your consecrated efforts to build BYU–Hawaii and fulfill the prophetically directed mission that we have. Our purpose today is to be together, reflect on the progress we have made, confirm our alignment with the direction given to us by the Church Educational System (CES) Board of Trustees, and recommit to a level of excellence that honors this university's heritage and the trust that our Heavenly Father has placed in us. This address serves as our strategic and spiritual directive for the 2025–26 academic year.

July 1, 2025, marked five years since Monica and I began our assignment as President and First Lady of this university. It has been a remarkable and transformative journey. Together as a university 'ohana we have demonstrated resilience and care for our neighbors through the pandemic. We embarked on a significant expansion of on-campus housing for both single and married students, and we have seen improved student outcomes in many ways. We have experienced a cultural renewal with annual voyages by Iosepa (our voyaging canoe) and an increasing number of students joining us from Hawaii. We have also experienced great spiritual renewal, as indicated by the substantial and increasing participation of our students in temple worship and temple service as ordinance workers.

We have made the university more accessible to those whom it is charged to serve by more than doubling the number of available spots in the IWORK program and in our domestic Hukilau work-study program.

We are deeply grateful for the efforts of every member of the university community over these last five years. The nature of any organization is that it's difficult to individually acknowledge everyone for their efforts and contributions. I want each of you to know that I am truly grateful for your efforts, even when they might appear to go unseen. Each time I meet with the Board of Trustees, I try to express our collective gratitude to them for the opportunity we have been given for this stewardship. I also share with them the amazing and consecrated efforts of our BYU–Hawaii 'ohana, and how the many miracles that have come to pass in the last five years have been fueled by your faith and hard work. I am certain that the Board understands this and is deeply grateful for all that you have done and will continue to do.

## Prophetic Mandate

At my inauguration, President Jeffrey R. Holland shared powerful direction and testimony. Among those remarks, he reinforced the key mission of this university to serve the Asia, Asia North, Pacific, and Philippines areas of the Church as well as Hawaii. He also left us with a clear apostolic charge when he said, "What we have done in the past has led us marvelously to this day, but in no way is it sufficient

for the trajectory the Church and the university are now on. We need to do all we have done in the past but do it better, for more students, in less time.” [1]

This is a bold statement. “In no way sufficient.” So, if you had any feeling that what you were doing was good enough, President Holland made it very clear – “in no way sufficient.” Every one of us, in every aspect of what we’re doing, has something right now we can do to improve. This bold statement is not a critique of the past. We are deeply grateful for our foundation.

It’s the foundation on which we build.

We don’t take anything that we’re doing lightly. We know how important it has been and is. But we must elevate our efforts. We have to move into the future.

And this university, this community, is about building a future that’s prepared for the second coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ. A future where we bless others in more meaningful ways.

What President Holland shared is a mandate that we acknowledge the practices and traditions of the past are “in no way sufficient” for the future of this great university and the Lord’s Church.

This is why we have refined our focus to ensure that every action and every use of resources is aligned with the mission of the university. This is why our expectations for ourselves and everyone associated with this university are elevated. It is imperative that we prepare students to be disciples of Jesus Christ who will live and lead in Oceania and the Asian Rim.

This is a unique and pivotal time for BYU–Hawaii. The Church has grown in miraculous ways since we were founded in 1955. Across Oceania and the Asian Rim, we see the membership of the Church growing in both numbers and faith. Our own BYU–Hawaii ‘ohana has grown in strength

and qualifications. BYU–Pathway Worldwide has experienced stunning growth and success and now educates tens of thousands of students who are better prepared for a university academic experience. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—through the collective faith of millions of members—has invested unprecedented resources in improving the physical facilities of our campus for the future. These developments have positioned BYU–Hawaii to be capable of fulfilling our mission more perfectly for more students than ever before.

### **What the Lord and the Board Expect of Us**

In a recent meeting with a group of our employees, we discussed feeling pressure to perform in our roles. I understand that feeling! The Church is investing incredible resources in the future of BYU–Hawaii with the expectation that we will fulfill our mission with excellence. I am directly reminded of those expectations by our leaders each time I visit with the Board of Trustees in Salt Lake City.

It is natural to feel pressure when such a great stewardship has been placed upon you. Considering the Parable of the Talents [2] that Jesus Christ taught, like the five-talent servant we have been entrusted with a significant share of the Lord’s greatest gifts and opportunities—with some of His most faithful children and the resources to serve them. Our students are God’s children, children who are prophesied to go forward and be leaders that the whole world will hunger for. Surely, we feel some pressure when we think of this incredible stewardship.

Like the diligent servants in that parable, we must put forth our very best efforts. We must also trust the Master and be prepared to stand before Him, report on our stewardship, and know that He, in His infinite mercy and love, will accept our righteous offering. In that way, pursuing excellence at BYU–Hawaii is a spiritual imperative as much as it is an

academic or operational one. As we are engaged in the Lord’s work, we are entitled to revelation from the Holy Ghost to guide our efforts. We are entitled to seek, expect, and receive miracles [3] as we move His work forward. It is important to remember that excellence is not about being perfect; it is about striving, improving, and trusting the Lord with our best efforts.

Elder Holland taught that, “Those great purposes of BYU–Hawaii will demand the very best of us.” [4] Personal accountability is paramount to our pursuit of excellence. We must practice it in our personal lives, in our families, and in our professional responsibilities. We must teach it—formally and by example—to other employees and to students under our stewardship. This means that we love those we lead enough to share candid and constructive feedback with them. It also means that we sustain those who lead us enough to receive candid and constructive feedback and respond to it appropriately. I invite every member of the BYU–Hawaii ‘ohana to see your role—no matter what level of leadership or position you have—as vital to the success of the university and as requiring the same level of excellence as any other. Remember that your personal interactions with students are precious opportunities to teach, mentor, and build them; precious opportunities to help our students become disciples of Christ who are capable of living and leading in Oceania and the Asian Rim. Prepare yourself with personal righteousness and professional expertise so that you can bless the lives of our students and fulfill the mission of the university.

### **Strategic Direction**

It has been a wonderful five years together, but today’s message is not just a reflection—it is a roadmap for our work in the 2025–26 academic year.

We have three strategic priorities that are approved by the CES Board of Trustees:

### **Upgrade physical facilities**

- Increase access
- Provide a Capstone Experience
- Physical Facilities

Perhaps the most noticeable effort toward our strategic objectives is the ongoing construction effort on campus. This construction has been carefully planned, but it will still bring significant disruptions with road closures, building closures, and office moves required for nearly everyone on campus. I commend all those who have been involved in the planning process for their careful approach to this complex challenge.

I also commend each of you for your patience and your personal efforts to create a constructive environment (pun intended) amid these challenges. Remember what President Emily Belle Freeman shared with us at a previous ‘Ohana meeting—that the sounds of construction would be an anthem of progress for us in the coming years. [5]

### **Access**

*President Jeffrey R. Holland said, “We need to do all we have done in the past but do it better, for more students, in less time.” [6]*

Our efforts over the last few years to support students from the target area and enhance student preparation with BYU–Pathway Worldwide have drastically increased access to the university for students who are most aligned with our mission and purpose. We are now turning our efforts to increasing the number of students who can have a BYU–Hawaii experience.

One important way to align with President Holland's prophetic charge is to help students graduate with a high-quality education in a timely manner. Led by Ensign College and BYU–Idaho, more than five dozen universities have reduced elective credits necessary for a bachelor's degree. Here at BYU–Hawaii we have undergone an extensive review and refined nearly all of our programs to make it possible for students to complete core requirements, religion credits, two minors, and a major in 100 credits.

These refinements and coming adjustments to course scheduling will further facilitate students graduating in 10 semesters on campus. We are also moving forward with proposals to the CES Board and our accreditors to move our minimum credits required for graduation to 100. These efforts, along with expanding access to single student and married student housing, should allow us to increase from our current levels of about 700 graduates per year, to our goal of 1,000 graduates per year.

### Capstone Experiences

It is imperative that BYU–Hawaii provide every student with a capstone experience—a comprehensive experience that prepares them to live and lead in Oceania and the Asian Rim. The term “Capstone Experience” is nebulous, so we have worked carefully and prayerfully with CES leadership to define it.

We've been guided to five pillars that will position our students to be leaders, not just by title or calling, but true disciple leaders who can bless millions across Oceania and the Asian Rim. We believe that by strengthening these five pillars and measuring our results, we can prepare disciples of Jesus Christ who exemplify faith, intellect, purpose, resilience, and leadership. These leaders will bless their nations, their families, and the Church in remarkable ways.

Imagine how the church will be strengthened, as every graduate is committed to live and lead in Oceania and the Asian Rim with:

- A deeper faith in Christ and commitment to their covenants
- A sharpened mind prepared to think critically and creatively
- A purposeful life that aligns with their personal gifts and opportunities
- A tested and proven resilience that will anchor them in turbulent times
- A capacity to lead others to growth and excellence

Many of our students have these characteristics. But every graduate needs to be refined and elevated with this capstone experience. Now this doesn't happen automatically. It requires all of us. Every one of us—faculty, staff, and missionary—has a role to play.

My invitation to you as employees is to think about these five pillars and ask yourself:

- Am I sharing my testimony daily to help students grow spiritually?
- Am I creating opportunities for them to be challenged and grow intellectually?
- Does my mentoring prepare them professionally for purposeful careers and service?
- Do I model and encourage resilience when change and challenges arise?
- Am I teaching leadership skills with my words and example?

So today, I invite each of you, all of us, to reflect: How does my work connect to the faith, intellect, purpose, resilience, and leadership capacity of each student in my stewardship? What more can I do to guide a student to fulfill their capstone

experience? We will also be reaching out to discuss how each of you feels you can contribute more to each student’s capstone experience.

### **Stewarding Innovation: Using AI with Purpose**

As we seek to “do all we have done before, but do it better, for more students, in less time,” we must also engage proactively with the tools and technologies that can help us meet that charge. One such development is the rise of generative artificial intelligence.

Elder Gerrit W. Gong said, “We are not afraid of artificial intelligence, nor do we think it is the answer to every problem. As we work hard and smart, AI can be a valuable tool to enhance, but not replace, our own efforts.” [7]

Rather than seeing these tools as a threat to the in-person, spiritually grounded experience we offer, we are committed to using them to elevate our teaching, streamline our operations, and increase our capacity for personalized mentoring and ministering. Artificial intelligence, when used with prophetic priorities and moral clarity, can become a tool of consecrated labor. It will free us from the most menial aspects of our work and allow us to focus on better work.

We have already begun this effort. Tools like ChatGPT, when used appropriately, can significantly increase productivity and strengthen our educational and administrative work. A team is actively identifying areas where AI can make the biggest difference and helping implement those plans.

AI will not replace you or the personal mentoring and ministering you provide to our students. It should help free our time so we can focus on supporting our students in more personal,

meaningful, and effective ways. The Board of Trustees has made a significant investment in gathering spaces and in-person education here at BYU–Hawaii. This investment carries an expectation—we must make that gathering worthwhile.

### **“Lifelong Disciples of Jesus Christ”**

The influence we have on our student workers in non-classroom settings is a vital part of the BYU–Hawaii experience and an opportunity to teach—both directly and by example. In a recent CES Leadership meeting, President Johnson and Elder Rasband led us in a study of Elder Christofferson’s address to religious educators this spring. [8] They asked me to encourage you to study and apply his teachings to bless our students’ lives.

Elder Christofferson taught that lifelong discipleship requires agency—students must act for themselves to grow. Satan seeks to destroy agency by deception and coercion, by obscuring truth. Your role is to protect and nurture truth and teach students how to find it. Students must be taught to exercise agency—they must act, not just be acted upon. [9] He also taught us that we must teach like the Savior, using parables, asking inspired questions, and extending invitations. He urged us to invite our students to prepare to learn, encourage them to share and teach each other, and create opportunities for them to apply what they are learning. He reminded us that, “The students for which we are... “overseers” are infinitely precious, purchased with the Savior’s own blood.” And that, “We must help them learn truth, wise use of agency, and above all, deep and abiding love of the Father and the Son.” [10]

I encourage each of you to study it individually and, in your teams, and make specific goals for how you can better serve our students.

Consider that while attending BYU–Hawaii, nearly every student will have an on-campus job at some point. In many cases, their on-campus supervisor will be the person who spends the most time personally teaching and mentoring them. A student will learn more about family, Church, and professional responsibilities from that supervisor’s example than perhaps from anything else they experience during their time on campus. You should be aware of that and strive to provide that example, that mentoring, and that training with the purpose of enhancing each student’s capstone experience.

### **Conclusion**

In closing, let’s summarize the Strategic Priorities for 2025–26. Our shared focus is to:

- Execute our construction projects on time and on budget
- Maintain operational excellence through construction transitions
- Implement the 1,000 graduates, 100-credit, 10-semester model
- Guide every student through a capstone experience
- Use AI tools under prophetic priorities to enhance student education and mentoring
- Internalize and apply Elder Christofferson’s teaching principles across every role
- Align every action with our ultimate purpose: the gathering Israel and building Zion

I encourage you to return to this message often. Let it guide your team meetings, shape your mentoring, and define your goals.

Finally, I want to remind you that we are led by our Savior Jesus Christ through living prophets. It is an incredible blessing to have President Russell M.

Nelson as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees for BYU–Hawaii. I testify to you that he is a prophet of God. Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to take our construction project to the Board of Trustees for final approval of the budget allocation. I presented to the Board on February 12, 2025 – the exact 70th anniversary of the groundbreaking for the original Church College of Hawaii campus. Now, in a normal professional setting, I would have used that anniversary to “sell” our proposal for the budget and rebuilding of BYU–Hawaii’s campus. But my role as the president of BYU–Hawaii is not to sell the Board of Trustees on what I think should happen. My role is to carefully study each challenge and opportunity that the university has in front of it and bring it to The Board so that they might consider—by revelation—the path the Lord desires. So, I did not even mention this anniversary. I carefully presented the circumstances of our construction planning and project, the current budget projections, and the need for a budget allocation in the coming years. There was a brief discussion, and I was able to answer a few questions posed to me by members of The Board of Trustees. President Nelson then called for a vote, and there was unanimous approval to fund the renewal of BYU–Hawaii’s academic spaces for generations to come. That was an exciting moment!

But then President Nelson raised his hand and asked that the meeting not move on just yet. He told the Board that that day was the 70th anniversary of President David O. McKay breaking ground for the original Church College of Hawaii. He pointed out how beautiful and significant it was that we had just approved the renewal of this campus for the next 70 years on that very special anniversary. He then instructed that we move to the next item on the agenda.

I was overcome with the Spirit. The prophet of God, with all the responsibilities in his vast stewardship,

loves BYU–Hawaii enough to note that special anniversary. President Nelson and the other leaders on our Board of Trustees care deeply about this university and understand the steps we are taking. I am grateful for the keen interest they take in our efforts and for the constant counsel that I receive (and can share with you) as we work on this beautiful campus and serve our wonderful students. There is great trust placed in each of us by our Heavenly Father. I want you to know that our Board of Trustees has expressed their approval of, and excitement for, our efforts over the last five years and for our trajectory moving forward.

### Testimony

I bear my personal witness to you that we are engaged in the work of our Heavenly Father and our Savior Jesus Christ. I testify to you that we are led by prophets, seers, and revelators who care deeply about what happens on our campus and are anxiously engaged in our efforts. I express my personal gratitude to have the opportunity to serve with you here at BYU–Hawaii. Our future efforts will require the very best of us, but I have no doubt that we are the team that the Lord prepared for this time. In May of 2020, I said that “when we unite in prophetic purpose, miracles happen.”<sup>[11]</sup> In the last five years, we have indeed seen many miracles as we have worked together to fulfill the prophecies associated with this university. I am certain that as we continue to work in alignment with the apostolic charge that President Holland gave us, and as we seek and expect miracles in the service of God, those miracles will come to pass. The visions and prophecies that President David O. McKay had about BYU–Hawaii and the special community of Laie have come to fruition in many beautiful and powerful ways. But I testify to you that they are not yet fully fulfilled. I testify that many great and important miracles lie in the future for

this university and its graduates. We are the team the Lord prepared for this moment. Let us do His work better, for more students, in less time and with greater commitment to Jesus Christ and His teachings, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### Sources

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- [2] Matthew 25:14-30
- [3] Russell M. Nelson, “The Power of Spiritual Momentum,” *Ensign or Liahona*, April 2022, 99
- [4] Jeffrey R. Holland, “An Historic and Special Day at BYU–Hawaii” [Brigham Young University–Hawaii, October 19, 2021], [speeches.byuh.edu/inaugurations](https://speeches.byuh.edu/inaugurations)
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