

On the first day of classes in August 1973, then BYU president Dallin H. Oaks observed, “We are frequently asked why Brigham Young University is establishing a law school at this time.”¹ He did not answer that question directly but said, “The special mission of this law school and its graduates will unfold in time.”² Fifteen years later, founding dean Rex E. Lee remarked:

We’re here to teach and learn law just like any other school. . . . But there is also a plus factor at work here. We are just a little different from other schools.

*We are doing more than just turning out good lawyers. And it is in that “more” element that the mission of the Law School is to be found.*³



Last summer, in the midst of the pandemic, racial unrest, and political upheaval, I returned to President Oaks’s question: Why does BYU Law School exist? I appointed a mission committee composed of Law School faculty, staff, and students and charged it to develop a new mission statement that articulates our core values, identifies our unique strengths, and directs our future development. The committee fulfilled its charge, and a new mission statement and educational objectives were unanimously approved by the faculty in May 2021.

You can find the mission statement and objectives on page 35 of this issue and on the Law School’s website. I invite you to read and ponder those words in their entirety, but I would like to call attention to some specific language here.

First, the new mission statement declares: “[W]e seek to be and develop people of integrity who combine faith and intellect in lifelong service to God and neighbor.” The phrase “lifelong service to God and neighbor” alludes to the two great commandments: love of God and love of neighbor (see Matthew 22:37–39). In his BYU devotional on August 17, 2021, Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf said:

When we wonder where we should put our focus as parents, siblings, Church leaders, ministering brothers and sisters, and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, it is already decided:

- ① Love God.
- ② Love your neighbor.⁴

I am grateful that the Law School’s mission statement is focused on these essential ideas.

The mission statement also “recognizes the inherent dignity and equality of each individual” and proclaims our aspiration to welcome “people from the full range of human experience.” One of our greatest challenges as a community is to overcome the natural tendency to exclude those who are different, particularly when that difference is based on race, ethnicity, or LGBTQ+ status. I call on all members of the Law School community to reach for this aspiration, serving as examples of inclusion in our families and profession. For many of us, this will require some changes in our thinking and our actions. For our current students, the program of legal education at BYU Law School is designed to be a transformational learning process, and such a process can be painful or upsetting. I hope we can all navigate this process without a spirit of contention, which the Savior has told us “is not of [Him], but is of the devil, who . . . stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another” (3 Nephi 11:29).

The new mission statement also affirms, “We are committed to the teachings of Jesus Christ and honor His many roles, including healer, peacemaker, mediator, counselor, advocate, lawgiver, and judge.” The word *peacemaker* feels especially important today. Many are troubled by the breakdown in civil dialogue and the corresponding rise in polarization and discord. Now more than ever, compassion, collaboration, and cooperation among diverse individuals and groups are needed to contribute to healing the world.

Peacebuilding (which will be the focus of the 2022 Law and Leadership Conference) and the role of lawyers—especially lawyers seeking to exemplify the characteristics of Christ—in affirming the dignity of all, lifting the burdens of others, and building bridges across differences are recurring themes in this issue.

In another time of tumult and unease, the Savior comforted His disciples, saying, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27, New International Version). I urge all of us to follow the model of the Savior to become the sort of people described in the mission statement so that together we may magnify the “‘more’ element” and fulfill the “special mission” of this law school.

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NOTES

- 1 Dallin H. Oaks, in *Addresses at the Ceremony Opening the J. Reuben Clark Law School*, Aug. 27, 1973, 4.
- 2 Oaks, in *Addresses at the Ceremony*, 5.
- 3 Rex E. Lee, “Thoughts After 15 Years,” *Clark Memorandum*, Spring 1990, 17.
- 4 Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Five Messages That All of God’s Children Need to Hear,” BYU devotional address, Aug. 17, 2021.