



Elder Kim B. Clark

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## Insights from the CES Commissioner

ELDER KIM B. CLARK AND BARBARA MORGAN GARDNER

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This article is a four-part compilation of interviews with Commissioner of the Church Educational System, Elder Kim B. Clark, that Barbara Morgan Gardner performed from September 2015 to May 2017. In September of 2015, Elder Clark was just beginning his tenure as Commissioner of the Church Educational System. Therefore, the first interview focuses on his calling, experience, and expectations. In the second interview, held in August of 2016, nearly a year later, Elder Clark reflects on his first full year of service, new experiences, innovations, and student struggles. The third interview, conducted in February of 2017, was performed a couple weeks after the announcement of BYU-Pathway Worldwide (BYU-PW). In the final interview, recorded in May of 2017, Elder Clark invites all CES faculty to engage in deep learning with their students.

### 16 September 2015

*Gardner: How were you called as a Commissioner, and what orientation did you receive?*

**Clark:** I was called as a General Authority Seventy in December of 2014. In late January, President Eyring called and asked me to come and meet with him. At that time, he called me to be the Commissioner. I was sustained in the April general conference and set apart as a General Authority.

Following the sustaining, I was put into an intense two-month training in which I was given a firehose introduction to the whole Church. I spent time every day learning, hearing briefings, and participating in discussions. At the same time, Elder Paul Johnson, then serving as Commissioner, reviewed many aspects of the Church Educational System (CES) with me. I had an orientation which focused primarily on issues that were not discussed in board meetings, such as operations, history, background, expectations, and problems. We did a lot of processing, and he shared a lot of counsel. We spent probably fifty to sixty hours together. It was a fascinating experience.

**Gardner:** *What experiences have you had that have prepared you most for this assignment?*

**Clark:** The most important experience I had to prepare me for this assignment was serving as the president of BYU–Idaho for almost ten years. During that time, I became very familiar with the Board of Education as well as with CES. For ten years I sat every month in meetings of both the Church Board of Education and the Executive Committee of the Board and witnessed CES in action. I have sat in almost 220 meetings and have listened to presentations from every Church education institution multiple times, discussed many issues, and carefully watched Paul Johnson, as the Commissioner, and Chad Webb, as the administrator for S&I [Seminaries and Institutes of Religion]. I have also met with and come to know well all of the presidents of the Church’s institutions of higher education who attend the Board and Executive Committee meetings. I’ve seen CES from the vantage points of the Board, the universities, S&I, and the Commissioner. This has been a wonderful education.

In addition to these meetings, I have also been on all of the Church’s higher-education campuses many times and toured many of the institute and seminary buildings. I have participated in S&I faculty meetings, attended classes, enjoyed student presentations, and met with area directors. This has allowed me to get to know CES all over the world!

Being the president of BYU–Idaho also allowed me to get to know the members of the Board, which include the First Presidency, two members of the Quorum of the Twelve, a member of the Presidency of the Seventy,

the General President of the Relief Society, and Mark Woodruff, who is the secretary. I have had the opportunity to speak with them and talk privately with them about BYU–Idaho issues. Sometimes these meetings are formal, but often they are informal. It’s a wonderful thing to participate now as the Commissioner, having already built a good relationship with the Board members.

My experience at Harvard has also been beneficial for this assignment. Being the dean of the Harvard Business School is like running a college. I was responsible for every aspect of a college administrative system, including hiring faculty, promotions, and all the issues associated with students. We also had all the infrastructure, including our own endowment, our own development organization, our own public relations, communications, fund-raising, finance, buildings and grounds, food service, and housing. The only substantive things the central university did for us were payroll and legal support.

Sitting on the dean’s council was an important educational experience for me as well because deans at Harvard report directly to and counsel with the president of the university. The deans were also used as a policy- and strategy-making group, so I was heavily involved in all sorts of issues in different parts of the university, including the process of hiring the new president. I learned about the school of education, the law school, the school of public health, the medical school, the graduate school of arts and sciences, and the undergraduate college. I was involved in strategy discussions and received an education about how to run not only a college but a large research university.

**Gardner:** *What does the Commissioner do?*

**Clark:** The most important responsibility I have is to help the institutions understand the Board and what the First Presidency wants to accomplish in the Church and in CES and what their direction and guidance is. Sometimes I need to help people remember the importance of the way they face and guide them in the process. That’s extremely important.

Second, the Commissioner of the Church Educational System is a central part of a really interesting and important process that goes on in the decision making of the board. The Commissioner’s office serves as a witness for the institutions. It’s one of the most important things that we do. For example, it’s our role to know a lot about every institution and its budget and what it is trying to accomplish so we can both guide the institution and help shape its budget. We can attest to the Board that the budget has been put together carefully and that what the institution is proposing is closely aligned with the

mission, and the intent of the Board. The Board looks to us to certify that we have done that work and that we have thought it through. Our job is to tell the board what we think as witnesses to the process and the result.

We also act like a check and balance. We tell the Board what we think, but we also have a responsibility to make sure that the presidents and the institutions are getting help. We work with the presidents to help shape the proposals they bring forward to the Board, so that the institution can accomplish its purposes. We counsel with the presidents on many issues, and provide support and guidance.

The third role of the Commissioner is to look at the system as a whole and take advantage of every component for the betterment of all. The Commissioner has a vantage point to see all the institutions and schools and all the opportunities that we can take advantage of and then do things to improve them. There are some formal as well as informal processes to do that.

Unity is essential to the development of the kingdom and of CES. During the time of Elder Neal A. Maxwell, in 1970, for example, unity between CES and the Church was strengthened. It became Board policy that wherever the Church was in the world, there would be a seminary and institute. That was a huge decision. It took decades, but today, we have the seminary and institute programs around the world. We have tremendous people that have been trained and educated and are now deployed around the world and a whole infrastructure of human talent and organization to train and educate and develop people. There are almost fifty thousand called teachers around the world and people out there to train and organize them.

Because of that unifying decision, among other things, we were able to create Pathway. It would have been impossible without that established structure. That unifying relationship has blessed many, many people. We have a lot more people in institute in those areas that have Pathway and a lot more people studying the gospel and a lot more people blessed by education. That's a great example of the pieces of the CES working together in order to bless thousands of Heavenly Father's children. We will see more of that.

**Gardner:** *What is your emphasis as the Commissioner?*

**Clark:** This job is much more spiritual than operational. I have used the impressions and feelings I have been given and shared them with every organization within CES. The principles I share apply to S&I as well as all higher-education organizations of the Church. I have spoken to S&I, the deans and department chairs at BYU; I spoke at LDS Business College at its

annual conference; and I will continue to speak whenever there is an opportunity. The message is exactly the same, although slightly tailored to each group.

**Gardner:** *With your experience at Harvard, what do you think of people saying BYU is trying to become the Harvard of the West?*

**Clark:** I'm going to put it in terms that are a little stark. There is no way we would want to try, nor could we be, nor do we even have a desire to be the Harvard of the West. Harvard is the world's premier research university, with a strong undergraduate college, but that undergraduate college operates in a particular mode because it's a part of a great research university. Harvard has a 37-billion-dollar endowment. Harvard's undergraduate student body is much smaller, and teachers teach many fewer students and classes. Harvard has remarkable schools, programs, and professors, but they have a very different role to play and it's not for us. The entire mission of BYU is different than Harvard. Research is number four on the BYU mission statement. It's in a supportive role to the core mission, which is to educate undergraduates, to help our students become disciples of Jesus Christ. Well educated, and well trained, yes. But overarching everything, disciples of Jesus Christ. That's the real focus.

**Gardner:** *What would you say to CES teachers?*

**Clark:** If the only thing our students get out of our institutions is a degree, no matter how smart they are and how well they do, the Lord's resources have been wasted. The most important thing we do in CES—and that means BYU, BYU–Idaho, BYU–Hawaii, LDS Business College, and S&I—is we help young people become disciples of Jesus Christ, become converted unto the Lord, prepared to be leaders in their families, in the Church and in the world. Each of the institutions has its own role and approach, but the core missions of the institutions are the same. The different roles are very important. We are not trying to make the institutions all alike.

So to all the faculty and teachers at our institutions, I would say, “Go teach, and teach well, with the Spirit of the Lord! Love the students and inspire them and help them become disciples of Jesus Christ. Help them become converted to the Lord and well educated, well prepared, according to the mission and aims of your institution.”

## 17 August 2016

**Gardner:** *Now a year into your assignment, what have you enjoyed the most?*

**Clark:** I've learned that the Lord cares a lot about education, and therefore the Brethren, the First Presidency, and Quorum of the Twelve receive revelation regarding the Church Education System. I have sat and watched it happen before my eyes, and it's a really inspiring, wonderful, and humbling experience. I see the Brethren wrestling and pondering, counseling and thinking, praying and studying out the issues, evaluating data, and analyzing and looking at previous decisions. Then the revelation comes. It's amazing to see the Lord in the finest details and watch His work.

Being the Commissioner is different than I expected. It's an incredible experience that I thank the Lord for every day. It is also challenging because I have to think hard and communicate a lot and keep an eye on everything. It's imperative that we don't get ahead of the Brethren, that we be on track in terms of processes and that we follow their counsel. There is a clear and direct line that is powerful that runs from the prophet of the Lord and the First Presidency through the Board and all the way down through to the universities and S&I. It's our responsibility that that line never gets bypassed or never gets confused.

**Gardner:** *What has impressed you the most about S&I?*

**Clark:** First is the tremendous depth of gospel understanding among the teachers and administrators. When tied to their depth in pedagogy and curriculum development, that understanding is powerful. Second is the processes and people that it takes to run a global organization and to run it well. It is not only interesting but inspiring.

**Gardner:** *How would you describe your role as the Commissioner in regards to S&I?*

**Clark:** When I went to BYU-Idaho, the counsel President Eyring gave me was "don't mess it up." My responsibility as a Commissioner is exactly the same. I try to support Chad [Webb] and help him by talking with him, thinking and praying about the issues, and counseling with him, supporting him, and guiding him, especially when things need Board approval. Sometimes it's best to just get out of the way.

**Gardner:** *You will be speaking this year at the CES broadcast. Who is your audience?*

**Clark:** When I speak as the Commissioner, my audience is everyone who teaches at any of the institutions of higher education as well as Seminaries & Institutes. They are all part of the CES faculty. That includes professors in the

university and the college; not only those who teach religion, but all areas of instruction.

**Gardner:** *How did doctrinal mastery come about?*

**Clark:** Doctrinal mastery grew out of an assignment that came to us as we thought about how we might create learning experiences for the young people of the Church who are confronted every day with questions and issues and challenges to their faith. Chad Webb started the first piece by writing an essay about how to help students gain spiritual knowledge themselves, what to teach them and how to help them. Many of us helped along the way. The second piece grew out of the recognition that almost every issue that members of the Church confront has its roots in our belief in living prophets and revelation. From those experiences came the idea of doctrinal mastery. One day Chad said, "I have an idea!" He'd been thinking and praying; it came as a revelation. He said, "What would you think if we took the time that we had historically devoted to scripture mastery and we devoted it to something else and focused on doctrinal issues and questions?" That idea sparked a whole lot of work and conversation which led to doctrinal mastery.

**Gardner:** *Some students are struggling with the idea that they went through seminary, institute, or religion classes and never heard some difficult topics discussed. How would you address that?*

**Clark:** The whole emphasis on doctrinal mastery is designed exactly to address those questions. It's understandable why someone would feel that way, but what many don't understand is that the issues they are concerned about have been around a long time. When people wrote manuals in the past, they were focused on trying to teach basic principles of the gospel, and their view was that we need to help people come to an understanding of the plain and simple truths of the gospel and develop a strong testimony of that because that's the core of what they need. It's understandable that manual writers wouldn't address controversial topics that have been out there for years and that have been dealt with over and over.

However, the environment is different. The difference is the Internet. The Internet gives the critics and enemies of the Church a loud platform. Although these questions and information were out there many years ago, our students weren't confronted by them like they are today. No one was hiding them; they just simply were not central. The Internet was not omnipresent like it is now. That is why we have introduced doctrinal mastery. We are saying, "We need to discuss some of these issues so our students are armed with

the truth and know the history and doctrine.” This is also the main reason behind the cornerstone classes as well as the Gospel Topics essays. Leaders of the Church have responded to this concern and are instructing teachers and leaders to be open and clear and informed. Rather than trying to answer the one hundred most difficult questions of Church history, we realized that the right way is to teach students how to acquire spiritual knowledge. That way, we fortify our young students not only with the truth, but also [the ability] to handle difficult issues. I hope our seminary teachers will invite the students to come with questions, so that the teachers can create learning experiences. I feel bad for those who are struggling, but the plain truth is Joseph saw the Father and the Son, the Book of Mormon is true, and the Church is true. It’s all true.

**Gardner:** *What more can you tell us about the global initiative?*

**Clark:** It is clear that the Lord is hastening His work. This last year I have lived that, and you can see proof of it in the global initiative.

I had a feeling when I came that the Lord’s plan for His kingdom might include more education than we were seeing in the Church, that education was extremely important to the Lord. I recognized that we needed to work on this. We are the CES and, therefore, are responsible for the Lord’s system of education for His Church. In August, the university presidents, Chad Webb and I started to think about taking education, not just religious education, more broadly to Church members. We recognized that the need is great. We started hammering it out, talking about principles, and sorted things out. What became of it was the global initiative proposal that was taken to the Executive Committee in October and approved by the board in November. That’s fast! Clearly, the Lord is hastening His work.

## 20 February 2017

**Gardner:** *You’ve been the Commissioner now for over a year and a half. What are your thoughts?*

**Clark:** My job as Commissioner has evolved and changed. We work a lot more with other Church departments. It has gotten a lot more complicated and things are moving a lot faster. We now have a global initiative and a new organization, BYU–Pathway Worldwide, starting throughout the world. We are also working on pilot projects in secondary education in the Pacific Area of the Church.

**Gardner:** *BYU–Pathway Worldwide was just announced on 7 February 2017. Can you help us understand it a little better?*

**Clark:** BYU–PW oversees Pathway and coordinates all other CES online higher-education certificates and degree programs, including English language certification programs, technical- and skills-based certificates, and online degrees. It will be affiliated with all other CES institutions. The president of BYU–PW, Clark Gilbert, will report directly to the Commissioner, and the headquarters will be in Salt Lake City.

BYU–PW will not seek institutional accreditation, since the certificates, degrees, and programs they offer will be granted by one of the higher-education institutions already in place. When a certificate is granted, it is granted under the accreditation of the university that awards the certificate.

Many people have not pursued opportunities for higher education because of cost or fear that they could not do the work or because other responsibilities have made it impossible for them to access education. The most important thing about BYU–PW is that it gives people hope. Tuition will be kept low, so that it is accessible to everyone. Tuition will be tied to the income of the country.

**Gardner:** *What is the role, then, of BYU–PW?*

**Clark:** The new organization will focus on two main areas of educational activity: first, serving students through online courses and programs, and second, through managing local gathering activities and local student services, including career services. BYU–PW will create an online system for student services. The online system will help students receive information, apply, register, take courses, and provide other resources in one easy-to-use online location. This will evolve over time and with experience. One of the most significant roles is to assess needs throughout the local areas of the world and then to coordinate with the institutions and determine who will develop what.

Another important responsibility of BYU–PW is the management and care of the Pathway sites. There are already well over five hundred Pathway sites of varying sizes worldwide. The location is usually a meeting house or an institute. The site includes local leaders coupled with missionaries, students, and other advisors all working together. BYU–PW will manage that. A key feature of BYU–PW, therefore, is that students gather in approved Pathway sites for religious education as well as academic assistance and workshops and

other conferences. BYU–PW will work closely with Self-Reliance Services to advise students and help them find local internships and jobs.

**Gardner:** *What do you see as the big picture here? What do you envision?*

**Clark:** We have learned that education in the Church grows and changes and evolves in ways that are marvelous to behold. Although we plan and try to anticipate new opportunities, the Lord guides us a step at a time. BYU–PW felt like the next step we should take, and that decision has been confirmed by prophets of the Lord. There are many people who need hope and need the experience that comes from being involved in education that is sponsored by the Church. It is a really potent combination that changes people’s lives. It’s an exciting time.

**Gardner:** *Is there going to be a high school Pathway Worldwide program?*

**Clark:** BYU–Pathway Worldwide will not offer secondary education. However, we are working on pilot programs, directed by S&I, to help students who have dropped out of secondary school to get back in, and to help students to be successful in school. Our focus is on helping students be successful in their local schools by helping with homework, literacy, and math.

**Gardner:** *Is there a difference between how decisions are made at Harvard and at CES?*

**Clark:** The biggest difference is that the Church Board of Education is led by prophets, seers, and revelators. The Lord makes His decisions known. He has said He is hastening the work, and you can feel it and see it. It’s astonishing what has happened in the last two to three years!

### 18 May 2017

**Gardner:** *You are concluding your second full year as Commissioner. Is there anything you would like the faculty at the universities and CES to think about?*

**Clark:** Yes! Deep learning. It’s not very complicated, but extremely important, especially when we are trying to help our students gain spiritual knowledge. We need to get beyond the idea of transferring knowledge and get to deep learning. The first level of deep learning is knowledge of the mind and understanding of the heart. The students should be having a spiritual experience even at the first level. We want cognitive knowledge, but we should be aiming for something much deeper than that. The second level is effective righteous action, and the third level is becoming. That’s what I call deep learning.

If you establish from the beginning that deep learning is your objective, it should change how and what you teach. You should become more intentional about teaching in the Lord’s way, which is laid out in section 88 of the D&C, and other places.

The Lord does have a learning framework. It has three elements, the first is active, diligent, systematic study. The second element is teaching one another in the bonds of charity, attended by the grace of Christ. The Lord is very clear: have a teacher, but everybody ought to talk and everybody ought to interact. “Teach ye diligently,” He said, “and my grace shall attend you.” He also says that we should “clothe [ourselves] with the bonds of charity.” There is a lot of research that shows that students need to participate and be active, especially the youth but adults as well. They also need to feel psychologically safe. Therefore, as we teach with the bond of charity, the grace of Jesus Christ will attend us and our students and the Holy Ghost will come and teach.

**Gardner:** *What if you had a teacher that says this style doesn’t work for them?*

**Clark:** I know that this way of teaching may be hard for some, especially if you have taught a very different way for a long time. However, the real issue is: What is best for your students? Does this work for your students? This is a framework for learning, I would encourage teachers to pray about it. There is a place for the Sermon on the Mount, for times when a teacher lectures and shares ideas, but I don’t think a teacher should do that for the entire semester.

Teachers and professors need to always remember that it isn’t about them. It’s about students learning and becoming. The evidence is overwhelming if you look at the research. If you don’t engage your students—not just in having them listen to you, but giving them opportunities to connect and speak out loud and discuss—they simply will not learn as deeply. It is much easier to go in and lecture than it is to go in and conduct a class in which you, as the teacher, are the engaged listener and you try to help your students teach each other. Too many of us like to share what we know by lecturing.

**Gardner:** *What about the students who say they want to hear from the professor and not students?*

**Clark:** We are not here to have teachers stand up and lecture, and we aren’t here to have students talk to one another about things they know nothing about. The teacher’s responsibility is to create learning experiences. The teacher has to encourage students to prepare for class, and has to be able to assess and make sure what the students are getting is true. The teacher is not

absent, but rather has to be deeply engaged. The teacher cannot simply turn the class over to the students. The teacher creates learning experiences and is responsible to get students engaged in different ways.

If a teacher is really good at lecturing, I would make this suggestion: Record yourself giving a lecture. Then, have the students listen to the lecture before the class. When they come to class give them problems to work on, case studies, or pose a question for discussion. Listen to them, engage them, correct them if needed, guide them by your questions and your summaries. There will be way more learning than if you just lecture to them in class.

**Gardner:** *What is the third element for the Lord's way for teaching?*

**Clark:** The third element is revelation, inspiration, and the gifts of the Spirit that come through the Holy Ghost. The Lord has three things going on all the time at the same time. You learn deeply because you work and study hard. You learn deeply because you interact with one another attended by the grace of Christ, within the bonds of charity. You learn because you have lived your life to qualify for the companionship of the Holy Ghost; He will guide you and bless you with revelation. I have had some faculty express concern that calling the Holy Ghost the true teacher minimizes their own role and their own preparation. The reality is you have to know the Holy Ghost is the true teacher to be effective. The Holy Ghost knows way more than we do about everything we are trying to teach. Moreover, the Holy Ghost will teach us too. The Holy Ghost knows us, the students, and the subject perfectly, and we don't. Seeking the blessings of the Spirit is important for both the student and the teacher.

**Gardner:** *Is this a soft way of teaching? Is this really academic enough?*

**Clark:** Soft for whom? For your students? If I'm in a classroom and we read a passage in the Book of Mormon and then I ask, "Why is this? Why does the Lord do this?" and you have to answer, how is that soft? I am trying to get the student to think and search and seek. Of course we have to assess our students in the universities. The teacher chooses the assessment method, gives them an essay, a short answer, multiple choice, whatever the teacher feels is best. You have to choose the method of assessment based on what you are trying to achieve. There are three parts to deep learning. You can assess knowing and understanding pretty well, and you can assess the capacity to take action, to do. But the third element, becoming, is a life test.

I taught Teachings of the Living Prophets at BYU-Idaho with Phil Allred, a faculty member at BYU-Idaho. I will share with you what we did to

assess the students. We had the students write a weekly essay and we assessed class participation. Our classes were very interactive. We used a lot of different methods, including case studies, but our focus was on getting lots of engagement of the students. Our final exam was a longer essay.

For the weekly essays, we asked questions like, "How does the relationship between Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, illuminate the role of love in the plan of salvation?" "What is the relationship between repentance and suffering?" "Why is repentance a cause for true celebration?" "How can we use the gospel's covenants and ordinances to obtain the faith in Jesus Christ necessary to be happy in this life and achieve eternal happiness in the next?" "What is the relationship between the Atonement of Jesus Christ and the powers of godliness?" "Since we are agents and Satan can't compel us, why is he so effective? Answer it in 750 words." We also gave the students essay assignments in which we required them to use the Citation Index to find words of living prophets that addressed the assigned topic. I didn't think it was very soft. They wrote an essay every week, and we had an English major grade them, subject to faculty review. There was a tight rubric in which they were graded on grammar, organization, and argument, and then we wanted them to quote a certain number of prophets and draw from their teachings.

This is what I have learned from all my teaching experiences. When the students come prepared, having studied hard, when we engage them in class, using many different methods, when the students are involved and active in class, when the Spirit of the Lord is with us and with them, when we and our students bear testimony and we share with each other the things of our hearts, no matter what the discipline is, deep learning takes place. Both we and our students will become even more deeply converted to the Lord Jesus Christ, to His doctrine and to His Church. That is deep learning in the Lord's way, and that's what we should strive to do. **RE**