



Roger G. Christensen

The Church Educational System: A Conversation with Roger G. Christensen

CASEY PAUL GRIFFITHS

Roger G. Christensen (christensenrg@ldschurch.org) is assistant to the commissioner of the Church Educational System and is secretary to the Church Board of Education and Boards of Trustees for BYU, BYU–Idaho, BYU–Hawaii, and LDS Business College.

Casey Paul Griffiths (griffithscp@ldschurch.org) is a teacher at Alta Seminary in Sandy, Utah.

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Charged by the commissioner to serve as the corporate memory for the Church Educational System, Roger G. Christensen shares experiences from his years of working with the commissioner and the boards. This conversation with Casey Paul Griffiths took place on September 1, 2010, as part of a project to compile the history of the Church Educational System.

Griffiths: *It's a great opportunity to visit with you today. I know that you have a unique perspective on the Church Educational System and its work. What insights can you share with us?*

Christensen: There is a statement that I have made frequently over the years. When you think about what constitutes the Church Educational System, referred to by many as CES, it always amazes me that there are very few people within CES that really understand what the organization is; there is virtually no one outside of CES who understands it. There are a lot of people that think they know something about CES, but usually they only know a very small segment of it, or a certain perspective of it. And so I try to be an advocate whenever I have an opportunity to explain how it really works.

Griffiths: What are some of the things that you think people commonly get mixed up about when it comes to the Church Educational System?

Christensen: Part of the confusion that existed over the years was that the organization we now call Seminaries and Institutes of Religion was referred to by many as the Church Educational System or CES, but it was only one of the five components of CES. In other words, they thought all that CES included was Seminaries and Institutes. And so in order to clarify, in 2007 we officially had the board approve a name change from CES to Seminaries and Institutes of Religion. There are five operating entities within the Church Educational System: Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, which includes the elementary and secondary schools—there’s a fun chapter in history on how that came to be—and then there are the four institutions of higher education: Brigham Young University, BYU–Hawaii, BYU–Idaho, and LDS Business College. So collectively, those five entities are the Church Educational System. Now, there are five separate boards that govern each of those entities. For Seminaries and Institutes, it is the Church Board of Education. For the four other institutions, because they are separate legal entities, it’s a Board of Trustees. The membership on all five boards is the same. And so when we have a meeting, we have one meeting that comprises all five of those boards. But when we do the minutes of those meetings, we have to separate them out, so you have a meeting of the Board of Trustees of Brigham Young University, the Board of Trustees of BYU–Hawaii, the Board of Trustees of BYU–Idaho, the Board of Trustees of LDS Business College, and the Church Board of Education.

Griffiths: So then the Church Board of Education and the Board of Trustees for each of the entities are made up of the same individuals?

Christensen: Yes, and there’s some interesting history on the composition of the board. Many years ago the boards, collectively all five of the boards, were composed of the First Presidency, the entire Quorum of the Twelve, members of the Seventy, and the Presiding Bishop. Later, the general Relief Society president was added and then later the general Young Women president. One interesting note to point out is that when President Thomas S. Monson was called to the Twelve in 1963, he became a member of all those boards. He has served continuously on the board from 1963 to 2010. So he’s got a forty-seven-year history of being aware of the kinds of things that are being discussed: what the issues are, what the challenges are, what is taking place in the organization. There is no other institution, especially no other

university, in this country that has that kind of longevity with members of the board.

Griffiths: I would imagine so.

Christensen: Over time, things have changed, and today the board is officially composed of nine members, including the First Presidency and three members of the Twelve—and those assignments are rotated through different members of the Twelve from time to time. It has one member of the Presidency of the Seventy—and again that assignment is rotated from time to time—and then the general Relief Society president and the general Young Women president, and those assignments are changed as those individuals are called and released from those assignments. And then there is an Executive Committee—again, there are five committees, but they all meet as one body—and that’s just a subset of the board. So today, the Executive Committee has two members of the Twelve, the member of the Presidency of the Seventy, and the general Relief Society president.

Griffiths: Now, I was surprised to find out that when you mentioned the five entities that the elementary and secondary schools of the Church aren’t counted as a separate entity—that they’re under the umbrella of Seminaries and Institutes. Can you elaborate a little more on why that is?

Christensen: In 1970, when Elder Neal A. Maxwell was appointed to be the commissioner, he was thinking strategically about the future of the Church Educational System. One of the issues he faced created an interesting challenge. If I remember the data correctly, there were approximately 145,000 students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools at that time and about 175,000 students enrolled in Seminaries and Institutes. You can see by the relative magnitude of those two operations that we had an extensive elementary and secondary school system: throughout Mexico, Central and South America, and the Pacific Islands. And as he started evaluating, the board had created a policy that we would have elementary and secondary schools only where there was inadequate public education, and the adequacy was based on local standards, not on US standards. In 1976, President Henry B. Eyring, who was then serving as the president of Ricks College, was brought into the Commissioner’s Office as a deputy commissioner under Elder Holland, who was then serving as commissioner. One of President Eyring’s first assignments was to travel the world and visit all of those schools and help define what the final disposition should be with each one of them. But the initiative was actually started under Elder Maxwell’s direction when he was the

commissioner. The decision was made to start closing all of those schools. And concurrently that was the time that the decision was also made by the board to have Seminaries and Institutes go worldwide wherever the Church went. So whenever the Church was being established and new countries opened up, Seminaries and Institutes went with the growth of the Church. But elementary and secondary schools were being closed. In order to simplify the administration of a changing global organization, responsibility for the elementary and secondary schools was given to Seminaries and Institutes. Today there are seventeen schools remaining: two schools in Mexico and fifteen in the Pacific—in Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, and Kiribati. And there used to be a Church College of New Zealand, which is now closed.

Griffiths: *When it comes to schools in the Pacific, we have an extensive educational system. Can you explain some of the reasons why those schools have been retained and how that fits into the work of Church education?*

Christensen: Again, there's a great tradition. We talk a lot in Church history about the missionary efforts after the organization and founding of the Church. The Prophet Joseph started sending missionaries out particularly to Great Britain and to the European continent and Scandinavia. And a lot of the early converts of the Church came from Scandinavia and Great Britain and immigrated to the United States. We don't talk so much in some of our historical circles about the great missionary work that was taking place in the Pacific Islands. I had the opportunity to visit Tahiti probably in about 1994 or 1995 and noticed on the lawn of one of the chapels that there was a plaque commemorating the sesquicentennial of missionary work in the island of Tahiti. So there had been missionaries going to places like Tahiti, Tonga, Samoa, and New Zealand for well over 150 years, since the earliest days of the Restoration. As a percentage of the total population, the largest percentage of members of the Church, outside of the state of Utah, is in some of those islands. Again, I don't know the exact number, but I think about one-third of the population in Samoa is Latter-day Saint. About 30 to 40 percent of the population in Tonga is Latter-day Saint. So because of the large concentration of members of the Church and because of the lack of really good public educational systems, historically, the Church has retained those schools there.

Griffiths: *And as I understand, once upon a time those schools were staffed mostly by Americans. One of the moves made by Elder Maxwell was to employ natives in the schools. Is that correct?*

Christensen: Yes. There were for many years a lot of expatriate teachers, and it was very expensive to operate those schools, even more expensive if you had to pay for expatriates, primarily Americans, to go staff those schools and live overseas, pay them commensurate with the US pay scale. And so they started making the transition to hire qualified local teachers. That continues to be a challenge and a problem—to find adequately qualified teachers for elementary and secondary schools in the islands.

Griffiths: *So are there times occasionally when an American is still sent there if there is a need?*

Christensen: Not typically anymore. There has been an extensive effort with the Seminaries and Institutes program working with BYU–Hawaii developing what they call the ITEP program, or the International Teacher Education Program. They have missionary couples that work at BYU–Hawaii and at the various schools in the islands to train and better prepare local teachers. Occasionally, they also will take teachers from those schools that don't have an adequate educational background and have them go to BYU–Hawaii to get a degree, then have them go back to teach at one of the schools.

Griffiths: *I've also heard that people in different areas around the world come to you and say, "We need to establish a school over here, a center." Could you address briefly the forces that have led the board to make the Seminaries and Institutes program the international vehicle?*

Christensen: As the Church continues to grow, there are many areas of the world where having Church-operated schools might be seen as a blessing to our members. Even in developed areas, the moral climate in some countries leads parents to suggest a need to have Church schools. However, the board has had a long-standing policy not to expand the number of elementary or secondary schools and to consider closing existing schools if adequate public education is available. Also, with enrollment caps on our current higher education institutions there's a perceived need for more Church-owned universities, and many wonderful people say, "You know, it would really bless the lives of our students in—" fill in the blank: Southern California, the Midwest, the East Coast, Europe, Mexico, Brazil, Africa, wherever there are large numbers of members of the Church. They would like the Church to consider creating a new BYU campus somewhere. In 1999, President Gordon B. Hinckley gave a great talk in a general priesthood meeting entitled "Why We Do Some of the Things We Do." At the beginning of his talk, he specifically addressed why the Church sponsors BYU and by extension any secular

higher education. He commented in that talk that we wish we could provide that opportunity for all the worthy young Latter-day Saints who deserve to have a college education. But a university is very expensive, so he said it's not likely that we'll have more campuses. We will continue to support BYU, and at that time he mentioned Ricks College (now BYU–Idaho), BYU–Hawaii, and LDS Business College; and then we continue to support the Seminaries and Institutes program, which is a great support structure for those students who can't come to the Church universities.

Griffiths: Why has the Church moved to build more institutes rather than more universities?

Christensen: It's much more cost-effective to have an institute program. The students are able to get the same spiritual strength through an institute program that they could by going to BYU. There was an interesting study done about this. Some researchers wanted to measure the value of a BYU education. The cohort that they looked at was those students who were kind of right on the bubble, students that were equally qualified with some that were admitted to BYU and some that weren't admitted to BYU. They then tracked to see what happened to them over time. Their conclusion was that those students who got into BYU over time were more active in the Church and were more likely to get married in the temple, to serve, to be full-tithe payers, and so forth. When that presentation was made to the board, the administrator for Seminaries and Institutes at the time, Stan Peterson, thought it would be interesting for them to look not just at those who did not get into BYU but those who went to some other university *and* graduated from institute. What was the impact of that experience? So he had the same sociologists do a follow-up study. And their conclusion was that if a college-age Latter-day Saint student attended institute, no matter what university he or she went to, the outcomes looked almost identical to those who had gone to BYU—their Church activity, their temple marriages, their service in the kingdom, their being full-tithe payers—all those factors were nearly identical. And we've done some follow-up studies on some other things that show this is the case.

Griffiths: That's fascinating. Now, it seems like there hasn't been a huge expansion, but there has been some expansion in higher education. For example, Ricks College was changed to BYU–Idaho and turned into a four-year institution. If the outcomes are the same, then why not invest that money into furthering Seminaries and Institutes; why do something like expand BYU–Idaho?

Christensen: Well, there is an interesting chapter relative to BYU–Idaho. We’ll touch on that and then we’ll talk about the relative experience of the institute program. President Eyring has told this experience, so I don’t think it inappropriate to discuss in this setting. Before he was the president of Ricks College in the early 1970s, President Eyring was on the faculty at the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University. When he was identified to be the president of Ricks College, he said he was told in no uncertain terms, and on more than one occasion, that Ricks College was a two-year institution, it would always be a two-year institution, and he should not try to change it into a four-year institution. Each succeeding president following President Eyring was basically given the same message. So following President Eyring you had Bruce C. Hafen, Joe J. Christensen, Steven D. Bennion, and then David A. Bednar. The timing is just further evidence of the Lord’s hand micromanaging the details of our lives and the organizations much more than we might fully appreciate. David Bednar was an organizational behavior professor at Texas Tech and subsequently at the University of Arkansas. His expertise was organizational change, so when he was appointed to be the president, he was told that they understood what his background was, but he was not to try to change Ricks College. It was a two-year institution, and it would continue to be a two-year institution. But in a rather remarkable revelatory experience, President Hinckley, as chairman of the Board of Trustees for Ricks College, came into a board meeting. We took care of business as we normally would. And then following the meeting, he asked the commissioner (Henry B. Eyring) to join him in his office. He stated, “Hal, do you think it’s time to make Ricks College a four-year institution?” And the commissioner, having a business background, a doctorate of business administration, and teaching experience in a graduate school of business, said, “President, it will cost you more.” Now, President Hinckley, you have to understand, was an English major. He wanted to become a journalist. He had graduated from the University of Utah and after his mission was hoping to go to graduate school at Columbia University. And yet the man, in addition to being a prophet, seer, and revelator, was a genius; he had already been processing and calculating marginal cost. He probably didn’t know what it was called, but he knew what he was talking about. He said, “No, it will cost me less per BYU graduate.” He had already decided he was going to call the school BYU–Idaho.

Griffiths: That’s fascinating.

Christensen: Now for the interesting chapter that I was involved in. I was not aware of the first conversation at the time. President Hinckley was always a man who wanted to get multiple inputs; he was always learning from whomever he possibly could. Since I was the secretary to the board and assistant to the commissioner, having responsibility for budgets and finance and the financial reporting part of the organization, he called me one day and said, “Roger, I want you to come and see me.” I met him in his office. He said, “Now, we’re planning on making Ricks College a four-year institution. How much is that going to cost me? You can’t talk to anybody, but just go figure out what the additional incremental costs are going to be and come back and let me know.” I did not know at the time that he had also called President Bednar and had given him the same assignment. So after a couple days of running a bunch of calculations, doing some estimates, not having a whole lot of input other than the fact that I knew what was going to happen, I went back to meet with the President and said, “Now, President, this is what the current operating cost is. To get these additional programs, it is going to cost this, this, and this, so your operating budget is going to go up this much. You’re going to have to have some additional facilities up there, so we’re estimating about this much in additional space.” I made my presentation. He then opened up his drawer, pulled out a sheet of paper that he had made some notes from the same conversation with President Bednar and compared my data with his data. He said, “It looks good; let’s go forward.”

Griffiths: How smoothly did the transition occur from a two-year college to a four-year university?

Christensen: One of the poignant points is watching the Lord’s hand in all of this. When he inspired the prophet to make the change to transition from a two-year school to a four-year university, he had in place a president that was a world-renowned expert in organizational change. And yet he is also very humble, and—using Ammaron’s terminology from the Book of Mormon—he was one who was “quick to observe” (Mormon 1:2). He had a great set of skills, and the Lord had put in place around him a marvelous group of vice presidents and faculty. As they started going through that transition, it was amazing how the Lord had put in place people that could do things that no one else could do to help with that transition. I participated in their last accreditation visit as a junior college in 1999. In 2000, when the announcement was made, the university had to go through another extensive accreditation process. I don’t think there has been any other institution

in the country that has tried to be accredited in one fell swoop from being a two-year school to a four-year university. It's usually program by program over a period of time. And the administration, the board, and the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities that accredited that institution were amazed at how well and how quickly the transition took place.

Griffiths: *So where does the institute program fit into this picture?*

Christensen: When we talk about the expansion of the institute program, it is important to understand the context. It was established in 1926 to help combat secularism. In 1926 a lot of the students were getting inundated by worldly modernistic kinds of philosophies. So the purpose of an institute was to provide a religious foundation for them in order to compare what they were learning at the university and gospel doctrine. As the Church continued to grow, and under Elder Maxwell's tenure as they were looking at the growth of the Church internationally, a lot more young adults who were non-students wanted to participate in institute. It's one of the best mechanisms we have to help teach this rising generation the doctrine of the kingdom. So it was expanded, particularly internationally, to include the young adults. The definition of what is a student is another item that we wrestle with a lot. For example, you have somebody who is a college student, and then they go on a mission. When they come back and they're not enrolled in school but they're planning on going to school, are they students or not if they're not enrolled? Well, they're young adults. They were students, they're planning on being students, but what are they today? Well, they're institute students. And so the definition of those that the institute serves has been modified over time, and continues to evolve. And I think because it is more efficient and more cost-effective to help those students, wherever they happen to be, there are a lot of resources being channeled into the institute program.

Griffiths: *What other changes have surprised you during your service with the boards, particularly with Seminaries and Institutes?*

Christensen: In 1998 and 1999, Seminaries and Institutes ran a pilot to test the concept of teaching English and computer skills at an institute building in São Paulo, Brazil, and one in Monterrey, Mexico. The concept was that if we could provide these two skills to the students and members of the Church, it would enhance their ability to get employment locally. And so under the direction of Stan Peterson, that pilot program was run for a year or two. They then came back and reported the results. It was a great success. The recommendation from Seminaries and Institutes was to expand that program

into other institutes in other countries. The board considered it and said, in effect, “Thank you very much. We appreciate the report. We recognize the success. We’d like you to shut it down.”

Griffiths: *After the programs had been successfully piloted?*

Christensen: Right. People in Seminaries and Institutes were scratching their heads, saying, “How is it that you could have a wildly successful pilot program and then have the board say, ‘No, we don’t want you to do that?’” Apparently, there were discussions taking place in other venues about what could be done to expand beyond just this particular group. It was shortly thereafter that the Perpetual Education Fund was announced. And so it was taking lessons learned from these pilot programs in Mexico and Brazil and then the lessons learned from Seminaries and Institutes through the International Education Fund and combining that together and creating the Perpetual Education Fund.

A lot of the things that are done in the Church lay the groundwork for other things that the Lord has in store in the future.

Griffiths: *I’d like to go back to something that you mentioned just in passing, and that’s the Church Board of Education and Boards of Trustees being made up of a group of men and women that come from diverse backgrounds. It’s not the same as a Board of Trustees per se at a secular university, where most of them have educational backgrounds. Can you comment on how this sort of more diverse set of people, at least when it comes to the background they come from, affects the decisions that the board makes?*

Christensen: You bet. Again, we recognize that among the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, the Lord identifies, qualifies, and calls those men that he wants to serve in those positions. They come from very diverse backgrounds, and because of that diversity, they bring a very rich discussion into all the various conversations that they would have in whatever setting they are in. As it relates to education and the board currently, let’s talk about some of the background of those who are currently on the Board: President Monson has a publishing background, President Eyring has an education background, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf was an international pilot. And then Elder Russell M. Nelson, who is the chairman of the Executive Committee and the senior member of the Twelve on the board, is an internationally renowned cardiologist/heart surgeon. Elder M. Russell Ballard is a businessman. Elder Bednar is an educator. Elder Steven E. Snow, from the Presidency of the Seventy, is an attorney. And Sister Julie B. Beck and Sister

Elaine S. Dalton both have college degrees but basically are wonderful mothers. They are both very bright and very capable and are very articulate women.

Because of their unique backgrounds, when we have discussions there are different things that are brought up that come to bear in our conversations that are very insightful. But probably the best way to describe the interaction of how the board works is to quote Elder Bednar when he was the president of BYU–Idaho. He would frequently say to his staff, “We have the most unique Board of Trustees of any institution in the world because we have prophets, seers, and revelators. So our responsibility is to let prophets be prophets.” And so you do your homework the very best you can, you make your presentation to them so they understand the issues, and then you listen. Sometimes there are questions of the President, questions of the commissioner, questions of me sometimes as a support staff. But then they talk about what they really want to have, given everything else, because education is only a narrow portion of the portfolio of everything that’s going on in the Church. As they sit in counsel together, those brethren know all the other ramifications and implications and try to say, how does the educational component fit into everything else that we’re doing in the Church? So it’s just a very rich and very interesting dynamic. The transitions from President Ezra Taft Benson, when he was President of the Church, then President Howard W. Hunter, then President Hinckley, and now President Monson—just the dynamics of the personalities of leadership make a big difference. There’s such great respect for seniority that there’s a lot of deference to the chairman of the board, but there is often a lot of rich discussion about different issues and how things will fit together.

Griffiths: *What is it like to work so closely with the leaders on the boards?*

Christensen: Let me share just a couple of highlights. Working with President Eyring was probably one of the most wonderful blessings of my life because he is a unique blend of brilliance and humility, and I had a very close working relationship with him when he was the commissioner. Because of his role as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, he had a lot of other responsibilities and demands, so he and I would be together regularly so that I could keep him apprised of educational matters. A couple of specific memories that I think would be relevant here: We were planning a trip up to BYU–Idaho to review their budget information. Spending three and a half to four hours, just President Eyring and me in a car driving up to Rexburg and having him tutor me, was a remarkable experience.

Another time we were headed to Idaho to be with the administration at BYU–Idaho, but it happened to be the same day that they normally have their devotionals in Rexburg, which is Tuesday afternoon. There was someone who had already been invited to be the speaker. As we got close to Rexburg, we would have arrived in time to go to the devotional. Brother Eyring’s comment at the time was, “It wouldn’t be fair to the person who has prepared the talk to have a member of the Twelve sitting there on the stand. Let’s just go find something else to do for a while, and then we’ll go up after the devotional is over.” So we pulled into a seminary building in Idaho Falls and visited four classes. Obviously the principal and the teachers who were there were somewhat overwhelmed. As he walked into a classroom, the teacher was standing up in the middle of a lesson; his jaw dropped, and you could tell he was wondering, “Well, now what do I do?” So he invited President Eyring to come up and speak. President Eyring then said, “Well, I don’t want to take very much time because you have a wonderful teacher who has prepared for the lesson today. I’m just curious to know what it is you’re talking about.” The curriculum that year happened to be New Testament. So in one of the classes, he said, “What is the lesson on today?” One of the students said, “Well, we’re just learning about Jesus calling the Twelve Apostles.” President Eyring said, “I happen to know a little bit about how that works today,” and then he shared a little about his calling to be a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, which means to be a special witness of Christ. To see the impact that that had on the lives of those kids! We went into another class and he asked the same question, “What are you learning today?” And they said, “We’re learning about some of the miracles Jesus performed.” And he asked, “What do you think the greatest miracle was?” Some young lady sitting on the back row raised her hand and said, “I think that was the Atonement.” As we walked out of the building, he turned to me and said, “The Church is in good hands because there are some real believers in our seminary classrooms.”

Griffiths: What else have you learned about how the Brethren operate?

Christensen: One thing sticks out that I think is important to remember. This was unique to President Hinckley, but I think the concept applies to all of the senior Brethren. President Hinckley always looked through two sets of eyes whenever any decision was being made: as it related to the Church ecclesiastically—he always wanted to see the world through the eyes of a stake president and how decisions the Brethren were making would impact the role of the stake president and the flock that he was shepherding, what his

responsibilities were and the members of the Church, how it impacted them in their day-to-day lives. And then, significantly, through the eyes of a faithful, humble widow—whether it was in Piute County, Utah, or the Altiplano of Bolivia, in the Ukraine, or anywhere else in the Church. He was always cognizant of being true and faithful to that faithful tithing payer anywhere in the world and utilizing the resources of the Church appropriately. Now, when it comes to education, he would also look through two sets of eyes, but they were slightly different. The first set of eyes was the same widow, because he wanted to make sure we were using the resources appropriately. The second set of eyes was an eighteen-year-old freshman, and we ask, are we doing anything in seminary, in institute, or in higher education that will in any way undermine the faith and testimony of that young person who is now just getting out of their parent's tutelage and stewardship and maybe for the first time in their life getting out on their own and having to make some very critical decisions that will affect the rest of their life and generations to come? Are we doing anything that would not be uplifting and strengthening and building to that individual? If we are doing something that would undermine their testimony, we would be in deep trouble in the Church. Because, as President James E. Faust and others have said, "We are just one generation away from extinction in the Church if we don't build the faith of the rising generation."

Griffiths: You have a wider perspective on Church education than most. You've probably traveled a lot. Where have you traveled and been able to see in person the impact of Church education?

Christensen: In my assignments, I've had the remarkable privilege of being on every continent of this planet with the exception of Antarctica. If we ever have a Seminary and Institute program there, someday I may get there as well. But I don't know of many penguins currently enrolled in institute! But I have been able to visit every continent and have had some interesting experiences. I think maybe the most touching to me personally was traveling in both West Africa and South Africa. It was amazing to go on a Saturday morning at six o'clock in the morning to a humble 8 × 8 or maybe 10 × 10 room and see the teacher standing with her back to the wall with a blackboard in the doorway and having benches fill the space and every seat occupied and then to see the faces of humble seminary students that were anxious and willing to spend their time learning the doctrine of Christ. That happened in Ghana. It happened in Nigeria. It happened in Zimbabwe. It happened in South Africa. Everywhere I have been and seen a seminary class, it is amazing to see the

remarkable blessing that it is in the lives of students of any race, any color, any creed, any country. Once they have embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ, they want to come to know the Savior and are willing to do whatever it takes, even at six o'clock on a Saturday morning when there is no transportation except by foot, to get to a seminary classroom.

Griffiths: *We started our discussion with you saying most people don't grasp what the Church Educational System is exactly. From your perspective, what would you want a teacher in the field—whether it's a teacher like the one you spoke of in Africa or a teacher in released-time seminary or a teacher at a university—to understand about the big picture if you could sit down and talk with them?*

Christensen: I think the real message is that the First Presidency and the Twelve recognize the challenges that young people are facing in the world today. From the perspective of the board, as we talk about different things, they seriously consider what's going on in the world and they want to know that we are building faith. Every teacher has a different style, and recognizing that the Lord has blessed everybody with different talents, they need to use their talents to teach effectively. But the purpose of teaching in Church education, particularly in religious education—Seminaries and Institutes and the departments of religion at the higher education institutions—it's not about trying to entertain the students; it's about keeping them coming back. There's a lot of entertainment in the world. We cannot keep up with the technology and the media and everything that the world is throwing at them. You can't compete with that for entertainment. What you need to do is teach them the doctrine and make sure they are firmly rooted in doctrine, because you're affecting their lives and the lives of generations to come. So don't do anything that would undermine the faith of these precious sons and daughters of God.

Griffiths: *Thank you. Is there anything else you would like to add?*

Christensen: There is one additional comment I would give to teachers about the role of the board. I think it is important for those who spend their time from day to day teaching in the classroom to know that of all the things the board considers, the one they consider of greatest importance is the approval of faculty. They rely heavily on the information provided through the General Authority interview process, but they then review and consider each name individually and approve the employment of each teacher. They recognize that faculty in Seminary and Institute classes typically have more contact time with students than other youth leaders, including Young Men

and Young Women leaders, bishops, and so forth. The influence of a great (or not-so-great) teacher is long lasting, and the board wants to make sure we have the best people available teaching and strengthening the rising generation.

***Griffiths:** Well, thank you. This has been really enlightening, and you've given me lot of wonderful information. Do you want to conclude with your testimony?*

Christensen: I'd be delighted to, thank you. One of the unique blessings and privileges that I have had in my life is, on a regular basis, to interface with men and women of God. That's students, that's faculty, that's administration, but most significantly for me in my role it is with members of the board. And because of the sacred settings that I've been able to sit in and interface with these good men and women that are on the board, I know that God works through his prophets, that he is guiding the work in the last days. And we are blessed to live in a time when there are prophets, seers, and revelators on the earth. God lives, and Jesus is the Christ. We are about God's business. As Sister Dalton has consistently taught in her service as the general Young Women president, we all need to be living virtuous lives so that we can qualify for the gift of the Holy Ghost to know what we should do and what we should say in order to bless and strengthen the rising generation, because we are living in a time when Satan is buffeting all of us and we need to be worthy to have the presence of the Holy Ghost with us. I know that it is real. I know that Joseph Smith saw what he said he saw and that God lives and that we are fortunate to live in a day when priesthood power is on the earth and when there is a prophet who sits at the head of the Church and, in our case, fortunately, as the chairman of the Church Board of Education and the Boards of Trustees.