

“The Pioneer’s Heart: BYU-Pathway at Year 10”

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Introduction

I’m standing near the mouth of Emigration Canyon, where the first pioneers entered the Salt Lake Valley. “Those early pioneers brought a spirit of [humility and] frugality, a faith and optimism for the unknown, a longing for prophetic direction, and a spirit of personal sacrifice to their trek west.”ⁱ Today I would like to talk about how the Pioneer’s Heart shaped the development of BYU-Pathway and how it can shape you on your own educational journey.

The Creation of BYU-Pathway

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the creation of BYU-Pathway Worldwide. Launched in 2009 as a simple pilot in three locations with just 50 students, BYU-Pathway now touches the entire Church with over 45,000 students in more than 100 countries.

It was not by accident that BYU-Pathway would grow out of BYU-Idaho, an institution with its own pioneering heritage.ⁱⁱ The earliest concepts for Pathway were focused on building a bridge to college through life skills courses and job-focused certificates. Elder Kim B. Clark, then president of BYU-Idaho, sought counsel on those early impressions from the Church Board of Education. Approval was granted to run limited pilots in Mesa, Arizona; Nampa, Idaho; and New York City.

The Board’s decision to limit the early pilot sites proved providential because our early assumptions were a little bit right and a little bit wrong, and we needed time (and the humility) to learn and adapt.

Part of that learning included who BYU-Pathway would serve. It became clear there was an unmet need for adult learners across the Church. In June of 2011, the Board approved PathwayConnect for 31+ students. Similarly, the lower cost and online structure of BYU-Pathway opened the possibility to expand beyond the United States. Following Board approval, BYU-Pathway launched its first international location in Accra, Ghana, in January 2011.

Eventually, the number of students in PathwayConnect and in online degree programs would exceed the number of students on BYU-Idaho campus. On February 7, 2017, the First Presidency announced the creation of BYU-Pathway Worldwide, with the responsibility for the PathwayConnect program and the coordination of online degree programs across the Church Educational System.

As the announcement of BYU-Pathway Worldwide was proceeding, the Pathway employees at BYU-Idaho found out via a livestream that they would be asked to relocate their families to Utah to help establish this new organization. Nearly 50 families exercised faith in that prophetic announcement and answered the call.

ⁱ Clark G. Gilbert, “A Pioneer’s Heart, A Disciple’s Future” (Brigham Young University-Idaho Inauguration, Sept. 15, 2015), http://www2.byui.edu/Presentations/Transcripts/Inauguration/2015_09_15_Gilbert.htm

ⁱⁱ Clark G. Gilbert, “Know Ye Not That Ye are The Temple of God?” (BYU-Pathway Worldwide Inauguration, Nov. 16, 2017), byupathway.lds.org/speeches

Last year, in a BYU-Pathway devotional, Elder Holland said, “We’re part of a monumental moment in Church education in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” We continue to see the Lord’s hand in this effort. Additional developments include virtual gatherings and an announcement that all returning missionaries will receive pre-approval letters for admission into BYU-Pathway.

As we look back at these first 10 years of BYU-Pathway Worldwide, we see the blessings of the Pioneer’s Heart with its spirit of humility and frugality, faith and optimism for the unknown, longing for prophetic direction, and spirit of personal sacrifice.

Just Like Them

As a BYU-Pathway student, you too are just like those early pioneers. You too will need to draw on the characteristics of the Pioneer’s Heart as you complete your educational journey. Let me share with you the story of Raul Hidalgo, a BYU-Pathway student from Mexico. He felt stuck in his career. Although he’d already received some higher education, he felt the need to improve his English and gain additional education. Learning in another language took humility and joining PathwayConnect required sacrifice as he travelled four hours each week to the closest gathering. After completing PathwayConnect, he finished two certificates and his bachelor’s degree in business management. He also received promotions at work and eventually went to law school. At first Raul wasn’t sure where PathwayConnect would lead, but he followed the promptings he received and *moved forward in faith*.

Raul’s story is like so many other pioneering BYU-Pathway students who act in faith and optimism even in the face of sacrifice and struggles. From returned missionaries starting PathwayConnect right after their missions to young mothers returning to school as an example to their families to students of all ages pursuing certificates and degrees to better their employment, BYU-Pathway students carry the Pioneer’s Heart.

Closing

At BYU-Pathway Worldwide, we love the painting by Minerva Teichert entitled “Handcart Pioneers.” I love how this pioneer sister is standing on the edge of the valley. As she looks forward, she sees the goal she has so long been pursuing. As she looks back, she is almost beckoning others to follow her and “come and see” what the Lord has in store. As you progress through PathwayConnect and on to your certificates and degrees, I invite you to cultivate the Pioneer’s Heart in all your studies. As you do, I promise the Lord will guide you to the valleys He has prepared for you. Of this I testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.