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Matt Easton responds to Elder Holland: Diversity is not divisiveness

My sexuality is not antithetical to my divine identity — in fact, it is an essential characteristic of it.



Matt Easton poses for a photograph as he sits in a park Monday, April 29, 2019, in Cottonwood Heights , Utah. Easton, A gay student who came out during a valedictorian speech at Mormon-owned Brigham Young University is earning applause and admiration from fellow students and figures like actress Kristin Chenoweth and the husband of gay Democratic presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg. (AP Photo/Rick Bowmer)

By Matt Easton | Special to The Tribune | Aug. 27, 2021, 1:00 p.m. | Updated: Aug. 28, 2021, 12:34 p.m.

Comment

Dear Elder Holland,

I'm writing to you today in response to [your recent remarks at Brigham Young University's 2021 University Conference](#). During your speech, you mentioned your disapproval over certain events at the university, including a "student commander[ing] a graduation podium intended to represent everyone getting diplomas in order to announce his personal sexual orientation."

While you didn't name me specifically, I am the only BYU valedictorian to come out as gay during commencement, so I think it's safe to say you were referring to me.



You mentioned your heartache at receiving discouraging letters from members who feel confused and betrayed by BYU faculty showing support for LGBTQ+ students. I understand the pain that comes from knowing people are hurting, although I am glad to hear that you "don't get many of those letters."

I, too, have received many letters and messages, though I am not fortunate enough to say they are few and far between.



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Within days of giving my 2019 graduation speech, I received hundreds of letters and private messages from members across the globe who were feeling lost and afraid.

One came from a young gay student at BYU-Idaho. I was the first person he ever came out to; he was terrified of his roommates finding out about his sexual orientation and facing possible retaliation, ridicule, and even violence from them.

Another was penned by a faithful member in Peru, a woman struggling deeply with her sexuality and faith, who expressed hope for the first time in seeing that it might be possible to embrace both a belief in God and an acceptance of self.

This past Monday, I experienced another flood of messages. Within an hour of your remarks, three current BYU students expressed to me how unsafe and scared they felt knowing that church leaders instructed the university's faculty to use metaphorical "musket fire" to defend the "doctrine of the family" and push back against LGBTQ+ inclusion.

I don't personally know most of the people who have reached out to me, but I do know what it feels like to be in their shoes.

