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# A Conversation with Roger R. Keller

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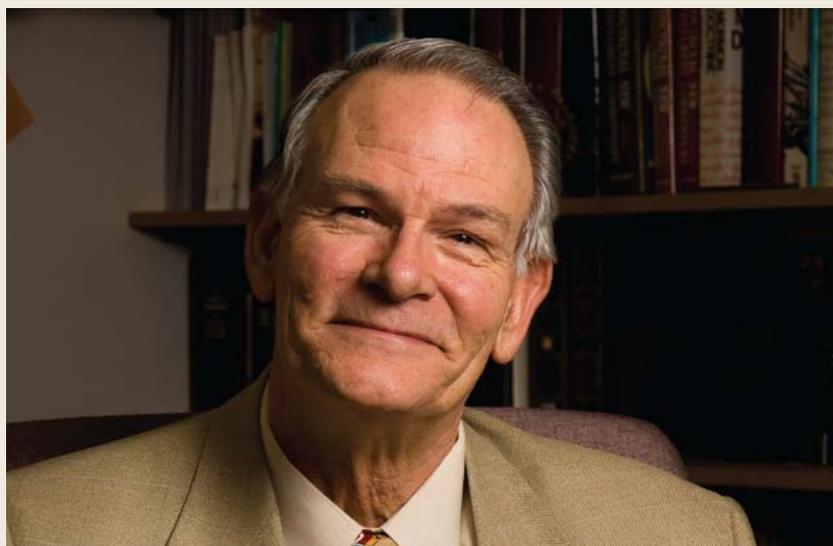
# Q&A

## A Conversation with Roger R. Keller

*Interview by Kenneth L. Alford*

ROGER R. KELLER (*roger\_keller@byu.edu*) IS A PROFESSOR OF CHURCH HISTORY AND DOCTRINE AND DIRECTOR OF THE CHAPLAIN CANDIDATES PROGRAM AT BYU.

KENNETH L. ALFORD (*ken\_alford@byu.edu*) IS AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF CHURCH HISTORY AND DOCTRINE AT BYU AND A U.S. ARMY COLONEL (RETIRED).



**Professor Roger R. Keller, director of the Chaplain Candidates program at BYU.**

**Q: What is the Chaplain Candidates program at BYU?**

**A:** The Chaplain Candidates program is a two-year master of arts graduate program administered by Religious Education at BYU. It is designed to help Latter-day Saint chaplain candidates become grounded in LDS doctrine and at the same time develop understanding, empathy, and the ability to minister to individuals from other faiths.

The Department of Defense requires a minimum of thirty-six hours of graduate religion and seventy-two total graduate hours to be considered for the chaplaincy. This program will fill those requirements. Students attend year round and combine religion classes with courses in family therapy, military ministry, counseling, and family issues. I believe this program can help LDS chaplains enter military service better trained than in the past.

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**Q: What are your responsibilities with the Chaplain Candidates program?**

**A:** For the most part, my role, first and foremost, was to bring it into existence. I'm currently serving as the program director. When I came to BYU more than twenty years ago, I wrote a program, at the request of the Church, called military ministry to give LDS chaplain candidates an idea of what it would be like to become a military chaplain. It was a good start, but it has not been enough.

One of my other roles is to help students demonstrate tolerance and understanding. As I often tell my classes, nobody believes anything stupid. They may believe something different than we do, but it makes sense; it gives order, meaning, and purpose to their lives. The military ministry course requires students to visit churches and talk with pastors about how they prepare their sermons and why they are in the ministry—things of that nature. So

built into this program are a number of opportunities to open student's hearts and minds to persons of other faiths and traditions, recognizing, as I firmly believe, that God works in those traditions.

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**Q: Why was the chaplain program started now?**

**A:** It is due, in large part, to the efforts of Elder Robert C. Oaks, chair of the Church's Military Advisory Committee. For many years we've been struggling with how to qualify LDS chaplains, and the results were anything but coherent. Elder Oaks had the vision of what an LDS chaplain needs to be, and he also had the authority to make something happen. BYU was already training students in the CES graduate program. Elder Oaks asked if we could use that program to train chaplains. The decision was made that students interested in the chaplaincy could be admitted to the Religious Education

master's program. Last summer we admitted the first class with ten CES graduate students and seven chaplain candidates.

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**Q: How will this program help military service members and their families?**

**A:** I personally cannot think of a place that religious ministry is needed more than in the military. In recent years, multiple combat deployments have placed incredible stress on both the soldiers and their families. Chaplains minister directly to spouses and family members as well as military service members.

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**Q: How has working with this program affected your life?**

**A:** I have often wondered how all the streams of my life would come together, and this has been the answer to that question. In retrospect, I have seen the Lord working in my life. My

Presbyterian ministry and my military service have been drawn together into this program where I can share those experiences for the benefit of others. This program has certainly brought together all of the experiences I have had over time. Why would you hire an ex-Presbyterian minister at BYU? It may be that I need to teach these students how to preach, how to read texts, and how to appreciate the pluralistic military environment. I think it has affected me primarily in the sense of seeing my life lived for a particular purpose. I probably couldn't have set it up without that experience.

I am very excited about this program and so is the Church. The Brethren feel like we finally have something that will lead to coherent preparation for chaplains. LDS chaplains are supposed to be rooted in the Restoration even though they will serve in a pluralistic environment. My hope is that we will be able to give these students a running start. ✂

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## The Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament: A Conversation with D. Kelly Ogden

*Interview by Camber Agrelius*

D. KELLY OGDEN ([dko@byu.edu](mailto:dko@byu.edu)) IS A PROFESSOR OF ANCIENT SCRIPTURE AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY, WAS AN ADMINISTRATOR AND TEACHER AT BYU'S JERUSALEM CENTER FOR FOURTEEN YEARS, AND HAS SERVED MISSIONS IN ARGENTINA, CHILE, AND GUATEMALA. HE IS THE CHAIR OF THIS YEAR'S OLD TESTAMENT SPERRY SYMPOSIUM.

CAMBER AGRELIUS ([cambarnichole@hotmail.com](mailto:cambarnichole@hotmail.com)) IS A SENIOR IN PSYCHOLOGY AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY.

**Q: For people who are not familiar with the Sperry Symposium, how would you describe its purpose?**

**A:** There are so many symposia all over campus, but this one is unique. Every four years, we have a cycle of the study of the scriptures, so every year the Symposium focuses on one

of the books of scripture just before we study it worldwide in Sunday School. It's a good venue for scholars to present things that they have been working on and to teach other people.