
Three Presiding High Priests

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Of the Seventy

Wisdom and strength will come to us as we look to the First Presidency as our ideal and our pattern of leadership.



What a blessing and privilege it is for us to sustain President Thomas S. Monson, President Henry B. Eyring, and President Dieter F. Uchtdorf as the new First Presidency of the Lord's Church.

I first learned the importance of the First Presidency as a boy growing up in Western Canada. When I would go to Grandma and Grandpa Walker's home, I was greeted in the entry by a framed photo of the First Presidency of the Church. I remember it well. It seemed that they stood as sentinels, greeting all who entered.

The beautiful color photo was of President George Albert Smith with his counselors J. Reuben Clark Jr. and

David O. McKay. The photo showed them standing together by a large world globe. I loved the picture. They were such handsome and dignified men; I knew them as the prophet of God and his counselors.

That picture hanging in the front foyer of my grandparents' home had a powerful influence on me. I lived in the small prairie town of Raymond, where my grandparents lived. I could walk to their home, so I visited often. I remember frequently standing quietly alone in the foyer, reverently looking at that picture of the First Presidency. I remember thinking about why my grandparents thought it was so important to honor the First Presidency and have that picture prominently displayed in their home. All who entered would see it. Perhaps most importantly, for their children and grandchildren it was a constant reminder of what was deeply important in the hearts and lives of Grandma and Grandpa.

Years later I concluded that displaying the picture of the First Presidency was equivalent to Joshua's beautiful expression: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

All who entered the home of James and Fanny Walker knew that written



upon their hearts were the words “As for us and our house, we will serve the Lord.” As their grandson, I knew it, and I have never forgotten it.

As a boy I didn’t understand so well the significance of there being three in the First Presidency rather than having one President. I knew, of course, that Jesus had selected Peter, James, and John, not just Peter. I knew that my father was one of three men in the bishopric, serving as a counselor to Bishop J. O. Hicken. I knew my grandfather was the stake president and that he had two counselors who stood beside him (President John Allen and President Leslie Palmer).

In every case—a *presidency*—not just consisting of one man as the leader but as three who led together.

In Primary I had learned the Articles of Faith and grew to love them. The Articles of Faith give our youth comfort and confidence as they learn the fundamental doctrines of the Church. I then knew that “a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof” (Articles of Faith 1:5).

In 1835 the Lord revealed to the

Prophet Joseph Smith the proper order of presidencies in the Church:

“Of necessity there are presidents, or presiding officers. . . .

“Of the Melchizedek Priesthood, three Presiding High Priests, chosen by the body, appointed and ordained to that office, and upheld by the confidence, faith, and prayer of the church, form a quorum of the Presidency of the Church” (D&C 107:21–22).

“A quorum of three presidents” (D&C 107:29)—not a president and two vice presidents but three presiding high priests. A quorum of three presidents—the First Presidency of the Lord’s Church.

The world does not organize itself this way, but this is how the Lord organized and structured His Church.

It brings to mind the scripture:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9).

At about the time of my seventh birthday, I learned a little about succession in the Presidency when President George Albert Smith passed

away. Sometime later the picture in Grandma and Grandpa’s foyer was replaced by a beautiful picture of President David O. McKay and his counselors Stephen L Richards and J. Reuben Clark Jr.

As a boy I certainly didn’t understand the deep significance or the process of succession in the Presidency—but I knew that the prophet had died and that we were led by a new prophet of God, with two counselors at his side.

At age 13 I was called into Bishop Murray Holt’s office, and he extended a call to me to serve as the president of the deacons quorum. He told me I needed to go home and pray about who my counselors should be. He taught me that the Lord would help me decide. He did. I then learned about counselors, and I began to see why the Lord has His Church directed by presidencies, not just presidents. I loved my counselors in the deacons quorum, and we prayed and worked hard to help the boys in our quorum. Bishop Holt taught me the pattern of presidencies and taught me how a presidency should operate and function in the Lord’s Church.

When I later served as president of other quorums, I already knew the importance of counselors, and I knew that the Lord would help me choose them—just as my bishop had taught me.

As a deacons quorum president and later as a bishop and stake president, I knew that whatever wisdom, understanding, or capacity I had, it would be magnified considerably when I included my counselors in any decision that needed to be made. I learned that the benefits of serving together as a presidency were magnificent and magnifying.

I came to understand why the Lord appointed that His Church should be led by three presiding high priests and why that form of leadership would be prescribed

throughout most of the Church.

The Lord said, “I will give unto you a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived” (D&C 52:14). He has given us the pattern of leadership. President Gordon B. Hinckley taught: “Every organization in the Church is presided over by a presidency of three, except the Seventies [and the Twelve]” (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* [1997], 94).

Additionally, the auxiliaries at all levels are led by a president and two counselors. All the blessings and benefits of serving together as a presidency apply to auxiliaries as well as to the priesthood quorums.

Every one of us who serve in presidencies anywhere in the Church should look to the First Presidency as our pattern and the example that we seek to follow as we carry out our stewardships. We should strive to be like them and to work together in love and harmony as they do.

President Gordon B. Hinckley often spoke of the importance of counselors. He said, “The Lord put [counselors] there for a purpose” (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*, 94).

President Hinckley further instructed us: “Every morning except Monday, the First Presidency meets, when we are in town. I call on President Faust to present his business and we discuss it and make a decision. Then I call on President Monson to present his business and we discuss it and make a decision. Then I present the items which I wish to present and we discuss them and make a decision. We work together. . . . You can’t be a one-man operation in a presidency. Counselors—what a wonderful thing are counselors. They save you from doing the wrong things, they help you to do the right things” (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*, 95; see also “In . . . Counsellors There Is Safety,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, 48–51).

A counselor to President Joseph F.



Smith once described how the First Presidency deliberated: “When a case came before [the President of the Church] to judge, he and his counselors would talk it over and give it their *careful consideration until they came to the same conclusion*” (Anthon H. Lund, in Conference Report, June 1919, 19; emphasis added).

That should be our pattern in presidencies.

The revelations teach us to make our decisions in quorums and presidencies “in all righteousness, in holiness, and lowliness of heart, meekness and long suffering, and in faith, and virtue, and knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity” (D&C 107:30).

The Lord has given us the pattern. We have sustained today the new First Presidency of the Church. They

will teach us and show us the pattern that we should follow. Wisdom and strength will come to us as we look to the First Presidency as our ideal and our pattern of leadership.

Great blessings will come to our families as we teach our children and grandchildren to love and sustain the leaders of the Church. As a young boy standing in my grandparents’ home, I knew that we were led by men of God, whom the Lord had placed there to guide us.

And I know it now. I bear witness that this is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and that we are led by His apostles and prophets. I bear witness that the senior apostle, President Thomas S. Monson, has been called of God and that with his two noble counselors at his side, they will lead us in accordance with the mind and will of the Lord, whose Church this is. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■