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Relief Society History:

A LOOK AT THE LORD'S VISION FOR HIS DAUGHTERS

As daughters of God seeking eternal life, we can go forward with confidence inspired by examples of those who have gone before us.

When we were called as a new Relief Society general presidency, we were given a history of the Relief Society to study. We prayerfully did so, searching to know what the Lord wanted us to learn and then do as a result of that study. Our study revealed a heritage rich in the spiritual power and contribution of Latter-day Saint women. It was an impressive record of the Lord's dealings with His daughters and His expectations for them. Through our study and the inspiration that came with that effort, we came to know the purposes of Relief Society. We learned that in our preparation for the blessings of eternal life, the Lord wanted His daughters to *increase faith and personal righteousness, strengthen families and homes, and seek out and help those in need*. As sisters today prayerfully read their history, they will receive insights, answers, and inspiration just as we did.

Our hope is that as we study the history and work of Relief Society we will see how our Heavenly Father helped sisters in the past. As we

learn how He helped them, we will gain a testimony that He will also help us today. We will learn that if, through the Holy Ghost, God could guide a woman more than a hundred years ago, He can do the same for women in our day.

Sister Eliza R. Snow, our second Relief Society general president, was a strong and faithful early leader. She understood that the Spirit "satisfies and fills up every longing of the human heart, and fills up every vacuum." Through different seasons in her life, she struggled with poor health and loneliness. However, she was strengthened, as she was able to receive and act on personal revelation. To her, personal revelation and the constant companionship of the Spirit were like a fountain. She said, "And is it not our privilege to so live that we can have this constantly flowing into our souls?"¹

Examples such as this throughout our history help us remember that the ability to receive and act on personal revelation is the single most important skill we can acquire in this life. With it we cannot fail; without it we cannot succeed.



Increase Faith and Personal Righteousness

great capacity in the women of the Church, which come from their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His restored gospel. This faith has given women the ability to make correct choices and overcome challenges and difficulties. It has enabled them to call upon the fire of their faith and the power of their covenants to be exemplary in their mortal experiences. In every country, there is found a legacy of faith among the women who have helped to establish the Church and strengthen the homes of the Latter-day Saints.

Silvia H. Allred, first counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, has told of her mother, Hilda Alvarenga, who was called to serve as Relief Society president in a branch in El Salvador when she was a convert in her 30s. She told the branch president that she

Relief Society history is important for sisters throughout the world today.

Our history reveals a long line of strong, righteous, faithful, dedicated women. This legacy began with Eve, and the stories of these women belong to each of us and give us vision for our future. If we are going to continue this legacy of righteous, dedicated women, it will be because we build upon what they have done. Through our study of history we learn that there is strength and

was inexperienced, unprepared, and inadequate. But the branch president called her anyway. While serving, she learned leadership skills and developed new gifts, such as teaching, public speaking, and organizing meetings, activities, and service projects. She helped others in the branch become builders of the kingdom.² Today, as in our past, Heavenly Father expects His daughters to have a leadership role in every ward or branch. Sisters such as Hilda Alvarenga are becoming pioneers and role models for future generations.



Strengthen Families and Homes

their lives by doing those things that would be most enduring, thus ridding themselves of less rewarding activities.³ Her counsel is still valuable today. A study of our history helps us gain the perspective we need to keep our focus on the essential things that will bless our lives eternally.

Increasing faith, strengthening families, and serving others are as important today as they were when Relief Society was organized.

Our history teaches us that strong faith is a propelling and stabilizing force in the lives of righteous women. Faith in the Atonement of Jesus Christ not only heals us, but it also enables us to do difficult things and live in an exemplary way. Our history teaches us that charity, the pure love of Christ, which never fails, has helped women endure beautifully through some very

History can help today's women, who have many pressures in their lives.

As our presidency has traveled throughout the world, we have been in the homes of the sisters. We have seen their struggles and know the heartbreaking troubles they deal with. Many sisters feel overwhelmed. Some of them find it hard to make time for daily prayer and scripture study and to do the things that will help them feel the Spirit in their lives. We live in increasingly challenging times and are surrounded by beliefs and practices that could detract us from our eternal goal. Because we as women have great influence on those around us, we must do all we can to keep ourselves spiritually strong.

Our Relief Society history helps us focus on what is important and prioritize what we do. Every day we are given the opportunity to make choices that will increase our faith and strengthen our families. Over 60 years ago, Belle S. Spafford, our ninth Relief Society general president, asked sisters to appraise their interests, evaluate their activities, and simplify

difficult trials. We increase our faith and personal righteousness when we make choices to align our will with God's will. As we do, we feel peace. When we are misaligned, we feel guilt. That is the Spirit telling us we need to repent and realign ourselves with God's will. Repentance is a principle we use daily to remain spiritually strong.

We learn from our history that strong families are not an accident. Living the Lord's plan with precision, intention, and determination is a conscious faith-filled choice in today's world. It is a faith-filled, charitable service to strengthen those around us and nurture all families.

Our history is rich with role models of sisters who embraced the charge to "relieve the poor" and to "save souls."⁴ Amy Brown Lyman served as the eighth Relief Society general president during World War II. She counseled the sisters to strengthen their faith and hold on. She turned their focus to making their homes a safe place and a priority in their lives.⁵

Upon entering Relief Society, every sister becomes part of a great worldwide sisterhood, united in discipleship. This

Seek Out and Help Those in Need

is when she begins to participate with others who also are determined to keep their covenants and to give all they have to building the Lord's kingdom.

Our history helps us understand our inseparable connection to the priesthood.

The Lord has important work for His sons and for His daughters. Priesthood quorums and Relief Societies do the Lord's work. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "I will organize the women under the priesthood after the pattern of the priesthood."⁶

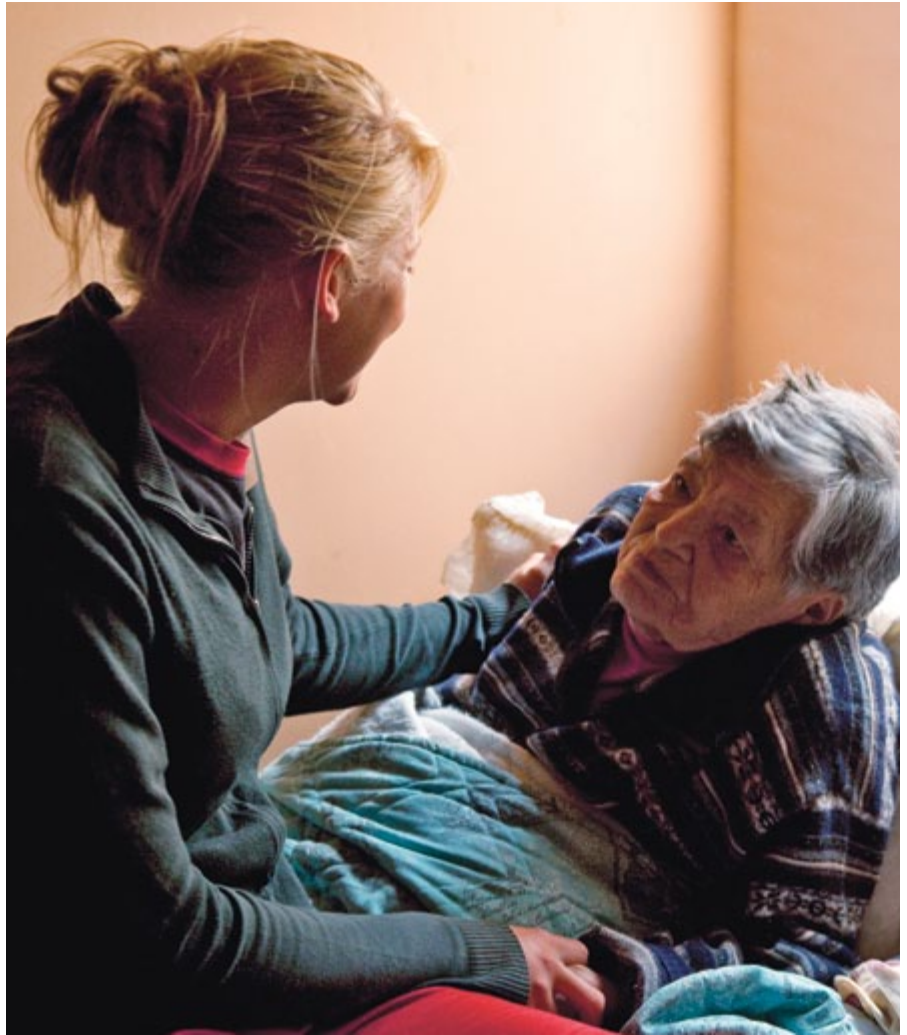
Now as in the past, the Relief Society president functions under the direction of the bishop or branch president, who holds the keys of the priesthood to lead the ward or branch.

Barbara W. Winder, our 11th Relief Society general president, said, "I want so, and desire so, that we be unified, one together with the priesthood, serving and building the kingdom of God here today."⁷

Additionally it is no small thing to know that each sister has access to all of the ordinances of salvation and can make covenants that enable her to fulfill her earthly and eternal mission. Each sister can have the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost to guide her, bring her comfort, and affirm her righteous actions. She also has full access to spiritual gifts that enhance her ability to live her life with confidence and protection. Our history teaches us how the women of the past utilized these blessings.

Knowing our history helps us prepare for the blessings of eternal life.

In the past we learn that Relief Society sisters faced difficult times, but today we are also battling a determined



enemy who wants to destroy our faith and families and leave us alone and suffering. Our Relief Society history provides context for everything we do. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Savior gave women of this dispensation a call to help carry out His work.

We learn through our history who we are and our vital role in our Heavenly Father's plan. We can't delegate our responsibilities to someone else. Because our Heavenly Father knows us and loves us, He will sustain us as we seek to align our will with His. "Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life" (2 Nephi 31:20). ■

NOTES

1. Eliza R. Snow, quoted in *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (2011), 46.
2. See *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 91–92.
3. See *Daughters in My Kingdom*, xiii.
4. See *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 17.
5. See *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 67–68.
6. Joseph Smith, quoted in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 12.
7. Barbara W. Winder, quoted in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 140.