

VITAL TO THE KINGDOM: Single Adult Sisters

Single adult sisters called to leadership positions discover their gifts and potential as they bless others.



Widow Marie Brown (far left), who was in her 70s when she was called as ward Young Women president, has developed close friendships with the young women.



Having served as Primary president, Sister MarLyn Williams (right) is now the ward's early-morning seminary teacher.



By Alissa Voss

At first, Sister MarLyn Williams wasn't sure she had heard her bishop right. She had entered the bishop's office unsure of which new calling might be extended to her, but she had never anticipated this. Had he really just called her to serve as the Owego Ward Primary president?

Sister Williams considered her situation for a moment. In her mid-30s, she had yet to marry and have children of her own. Surely, she thought, there must be others in the ward more qualified for this position.

Walter Knudsen, bishop of the Owego Ward in New York, USA, remembers that day well. He says, "We discussed how Sister Williams could help the children over whom she would have responsibility. She came to see her potential in meeting their needs."

Sister Williams discovered the truth of his words firsthand when she accepted the calling of Primary president. As she began to serve the approximately 20 children in Primary, she grew to love each of them. Through her calling, she found herself developing friendships with families in the ward—families she otherwise might never have come to know. The association with the children, their

families, and her counselors helped Sister Williams feel more a part of the Owego Ward family.

Sister Williams quickly gained a testimony that the call to serve she had initially feared was inspired. As she opened her heart to serve the children, the worries surrounding her personal circumstances faded away and her own spirit grew stronger. Her confidence to interact with the children and youth of the ward grew, and she now serves devotedly as the ward's early-morning seminary teacher.

Calling the Right Person

In a Church that places a strong emphasis on eternal families, some members—including sisters who have never married, have never had children, or are divorced or widowed—may wonder how they fit in. But the Church benefits from the talents and skills of all its members, and single sisters called to leadership positions have the opportunity to bless not only the lives of those they serve but their own lives as well. The Church is exactly the place for these sisters to share their gifts.

Bishop Knudsen never excluded single sisters when calling people to serve in the ward. Nor were they chosen

merely because they weren't married. He says, "These sisters were not called because they were single but because we, as a bishopric, felt that they were the right people for the callings. After prayer, consultation with my counselors, and confirmation by the Spirit, I extended calls to these sisters and helped them see their own potential." He adds, "We discussed their individual circumstances and the time commitment that would be required to fulfill their callings and whether they could make that work in their lives. They all agreed that they would make the time necessary to serve as called. They, and the ward, have been blessed for their service."

President James E. Faust (1920–2007), former Second Counselor in the First Presidency, said, "Remember that we have all been single, are now single, or at some time may again be single; so being single in the Church is not extraordinary."¹ He also said, "Many faithful, righteous sisters have not had the opportunity for marriage, yet they have always been a vital and necessary part of this sacred work. These wonderful women have a distinct errand of influence. . . . In the Church there are endless opportunities to love and nurture."²



CALLING SINGLE ADULT SISTERS TO LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES

"We see wise bishops and stake presidents calling you single adult sisters to leadership responsibilities in wards and stakes. We see you in the presidencies of Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary organizations, where your talents and abilities are being fully utilized.

"We see you as a vital part of the mainstream body of the Church. We pray that the emphasis we naturally place on families will not make you feel less needed or less valuable to the Lord or to His Church. The sacred bonds of Church membership go far beyond marital status, age, or present circumstance. Your individual worth as a daughter of God transcends all."

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994), "To the Single Adult Sisters of the Church," *Ensign*, Nov. 1988, 96.

Serving across Generations

A call to serve may be daunting if we are called to serve those of a different age. Sister Marie Brown was in her 70s and recently widowed when she was called to serve as Young Women president in the Owego Ward. Though some might imagine that an older widow and a group of seven teenage girls would not have much in common, Sister Brown has developed close friendships with the young women she serves.

One of her favorite parts of the calling is sharing her life experiences with the young women during her lessons. In

an era marked by electronic communication, Sister Brown has taught the girls that there can still be value in old-fashioned letter writing. Each month the young women make approximately 30 cards for less-active ward members, widows and widowers, missionaries serving from the ward, and young women who have left for college. These cards, which include messages written by the young women, are touching and meaningful to those who receive them.

Sister Brown also loves attending the temple. Three times a year she drives the young women the 95 miles to the Palmyra New York Temple to

Sister Judy Woodard, who lives alone, finds joy in the company of children as she serves as the new Primary president.





Sister Susan Brandt (center) enjoys the sisterhood of other women as she serves as Relief Society president.

demonstrate her love for them and for temple ordinances. The drive is two hours each way, but it seems a short time as they get to know each other and share in their love for temple service.

Sister Brown and the young women quickly discovered that the difference in their ages and life experiences is no barrier to having a wonderful time together. This friendship across the generations has come to bless and enrich all their lives, thanks to Sister Brown's willingness to accept the call to serve.

Serving after Divorce

Sister Susan Brandt is another sister who has blessed many lives through her service. Sister Brandt was divorced later in life, after raising five children with her former husband, and continued to serve in many capacities, including as a missionary in the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. She currently serves as Relief Society president in the Owego Ward.

Sister Brandt loves reaching out to find the sisters in her ward who may feel lonely or distant during activities. She knows what it is like to be alone, so she goes out of her way to pay special attention to those who do not have a companion who is active in the Church. One way she does this is through an activity on the first Thursday of every month, when Sister Brandt and her counselors meet with other sisters at a local restaurant and spend time getting to

know each other in a non-Church environment (pictured left). Her natural love and compassion for the sisters in the ward have helped many feel more included.

Now that Sister Williams is serving as a seminary teacher, Sister Judy Woodard has become Primary president in the Owego Ward. After raising four children, Sister Woodard and her husband divorced. Though Sister Woodard now lives alone, she diligently serves the children in Primary and blesses many of their lives with her kindness and love.

All Here to Help Each Other

Bishop Knudsen has seen many blessings come to these sisters and the ward as they have served in their callings. He says, "Our ward has a large percentage of single members as well as part-member and less-active families, and these sister leaders are here to help participate in the rescue and reach all of our members. We are all on a pathway back to our Heavenly Father, and we are all here to help each other, no matter what our circumstances in life."

Whatever our personal situations may be, we can take comfort in knowing that we have a caring ward family and loving Father in Heaven to help us through. President Thomas S. Monson has said: "We were not placed on this earth to walk alone. What an amazing source of power, of strength, and of comfort is available to each of us. He who knows us better than we know ourselves . . . has assured us that He will be there for us to provide help if we but ask."³

The single adult sisters serving in the Owego Ward have certainly found this to be true. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. James E. Faust, "Welcoming Every Single One," *Ensign*, Aug. 2007, 5.
2. James E. Faust, "You Are All Heaven Sent," *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 112.
3. Thomas S. Monson, "We Never Walk Alone," *Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 121.

CALL FOR EXPERIENCES FROM SINGLE ADULT BROTHERS

Please send us your experiences as a single adult brother in a family ward. To submit, go to the "Submit Your Work" section at [ensign.lds.org](https://www.lds.org).