

EXTENDING THE BLESSINGS OF THE PRIESTHOOD

God loves all of His children and has provided a way for each of us to return to Him.

Editors' note: Rarely is an event so significant that everyone remembers where they were when they heard about it. The 1978 revelation on the priesthood had that kind of impact on an entire generation of Saints. It is impossible in the space available to adequately explore the history of the revelation or its profound influence on the family of God, but in celebration of the 40th anniversary of the revelation, the Ensign offers this short collection of articles and personal essays.

The Book of Mormon teaches that “all are alike unto God,” including “black and white, bond and free, male and female” (2 Nephi 26:33). Because God loves all of us, He has provided a way for each of us to return to Him (see Moses 5:9; Articles of Faith 1:3). Throughout the history of the Church, people of every race and ethnicity have been baptized to that end and have lived as faithful Latter-day Saints.

The First Presidency stands during the October 1978 general conference, when members unanimously accepted Official Declaration 2.

The revelation regarding the priesthood blessed families and opened the door to temple blessings. Far right: A family walks the grounds of the Accra Ghana Temple, one of eight temples announced, under construction, or in operation in Africa.



PHOTOGRAPH OF FIRST PRESIDENCY IN 1978 COURTESY OF CHURCH HISTORY LIBRARY



From the mid-1800s, the Church did not ordain men of black African descent to the priesthood or allow black men or women to participate in temple endowment or sealing ordinances.¹ No known records exist that explain the origin of the practice, and Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has emphasized that any theories given in an attempt to explain the restrictions are “folklore” that must never be perpetuated: “However well-intended the explanations were, I think almost all of them were inadequate and/or wrong. . . . We simply do not know why that practice . . . was in place.”²

Many prophets and Presidents of the Church, including Brigham Young, had promised that the day would come when all men who were worthy would receive the priesthood. Knowing these promises and witnessing the faithfulness of black Latter-day Saints, Church leaders in the mid-20th century “pleaded long and earnestly . . . supplicating the Lord for divine guidance.”³

Revelation from God

That guidance came to President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) “after extended meditation and prayer in the sacred rooms of the holy temple.” On June 1, 1978, the Lord revealed to His prophet and to the members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles that “the long-promised day ha[d] come when every faithful, worthy man in the Church may receive the holy priesthood, with power to exercise

its divine authority, and enjoy with his loved ones every blessing that flows therefrom, including the blessings of the temple.”⁴

In announcing the revelation, the First Presidency stated, “We declare with soberness that the Lord has now made known his will for the blessing of all his children throughout the earth.”⁵

During the next general conference, the First Presidency presented the revelation to Church membership, who accepted it as “the word and will of the Lord” and unanimously sustained Official Declaration 2 as part of scriptural canon.

The Revelation’s Result

The impact of the revelation was profound. Not only had God extended the blessings of the priesthood and the temple to all worthy members regardless of race, but temple ordinances could be performed for everyone who has ever lived.

With the revelation came opportunities to expand missionary work, and membership flourished among many nations, kindreds, tongues, and people.

A young man teaches during a quorum meeting in Paris, France, where most wards have members from a wide variety of countries around the world.



Church Teachings

As the work of the Lord has continued to spread across the world, members of the Church have enjoyed an era of greater unity. As Church members increasingly interact with others from many nationalities and cultures, Church leaders have emphasized the importance of loving and strengthening one another and eliminating prejudice and racism of any kind.

“We need to embrace God’s children compassionately and eliminate any prejudice, including racism, sexism, and nationalism,” taught President M. Russell Ballard, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. “Let it be said that we truly believe the blessings of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ are for every child of God.”⁶ Speaking of God’s eternal family, President Russell M. Nelson taught: “Only the comprehension of the true Fatherhood of God can bring full appreciation of the true brotherhood of man. That understanding inspires desire to build bridges of cooperation instead of walls of segregation.”⁷

Moving Forward Together

While we don’t know everything, there are a few things each of us can know. We can know that God loves us and has a plan for all of us to be a unified, eternal family. We can know that this is the Lord’s restored



Church and that He leads it through His prophets. Having a personal witness of these truths can help as we move forward together through the opportunities and challenges we face on the path to becoming like Him (see Moroni 7:48). ■

NOTES

1. See “Race and the Priesthood,” Gospel Topics, topics.lds.org.
2. In “The Mormons” (interview with Jeffrey R. Holland, Mar. 4, 2006), pbs.org/mormons/interviews; see also Dallin H. Oaks, in “Apostles Talk about Reasons for Lifting Ban,” *Daily Herald*, June 5, 1988, 21.
3. Official Declaration 2.
4. Official Declaration 2.
5. Official Declaration 2.
6. M. Russell Ballard, “The Trek Continues!” *Ensign*, Nov. 2017, 106.
7. Russell M. Nelson, “Teach Us Tolerance and Love,” *Ensign*, May 1994, 70.