

Church Courses Aim to Strengthen Marriage and Family Relationships

By Eric Eames, Church Magazines

With shifting societal values undermining the traditional family, the Church is committed to help “maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102).

While worldwide divorce rates fell slightly in 2007, a rise in the incidence of cohabitation and unmarried child-raising demonstrate society’s failing faith in traditional marriage and family.

Among its efforts to combat these trends, the Church has three courses and accompanying manuals aimed at helping members understand the doctrines regarding the importance of families. These resources will help them build and maintain enduring family relationships.

Courses Provide Resources

Revised in 2000, the *Marriage and Family Relations* manual gives special emphasis to the

proclamation on the family. The manual is divided into two parts: Part A, “Strengthening Marriage,” and Part B, “Parents’ Responsibilities to Strengthen Families.” The course is usually taught during Sunday School, and members may attend one or both parts of the course, depending on individual needs.

In 2006 LDS Family Services produced two new course manuals—*Strengthening Marriage* and *Strengthening the Family*. These courses are

being taught in LDS Family Services agencies and in some wards and stakes, though they are taught outside of the Sunday meeting schedule.

The Sunday School and the Family Services courses are similar in that they can help both those who are already married and those who are preparing to wed. The family sections assist parents in learning the importance of their roles in raising children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

There are also some key differences between the manuals. The *Marriage and Family Relations* manual addresses mainly members, focusing heavily on doctrines and principles found in the scriptures and taught by latter-day prophets and apostles to help members find answers for their own circumstances.

“A person who goes through this course would come away with a better understanding and testimony of the divine principles that are fundamental to happy marriages and family relations,” said David Marsh, manager of Curriculum Development for the Church.

While also centered on gospel principles, the Family Services manuals provide additional insights from professionals such as family counselors and therapists, explain pertinent research findings, and provide training to help participants (members or not) improve relationship skills through role-playing exercises.



Couples can learn important gospel principles and relationship skills through Church classes created to strengthen marriages.

Endorsing Marriage and Strengthening Family

The courses are particularly helpful in teaching newlyweds and converts the importance of eternal families and how to fortify families against societal influences.

“We have a lot of families coming into the Church from different cultures, traditions, and backgrounds,” Brother Marsh said. “The *Marriage and Family Relations* manual helps them learn what the Lord teaches about families.”

The couples in Sergio Navarro’s class in the Puebla Mexico Cholula Stake said the *Strengthening Marriage* manual gave them a desire to become better husbands and wives, and the role-playing exercises helped them develop skills to solve relationship problems.

Each lesson in the Family Services manuals contains three or more learning activities to help participants set goals and integrate gospel teachings. For example, in the “Communicating with Love” chapter in the *Strengthening Marriage* manual, the trained instructor helps participants practice responding to a spouse’s accusation without being defensive.

Brother Navarro said he has seen couples on the verge of divorce decide to stay together after learning these important gospel principles related to families. “It has been a wonderful experience to see how these marriages have benefited,” he said.

Prophets Encourage Couples to Continue Dating

The relationships of many LDS couples are in less danger from a blowup than they are from relationship burnout. Burnout occurs when the flame of love in a marriage dims because of neglect. The *Marriage and Family Relations* course teaches the importance of continued dating within a marriage—that is, making time for each other and showing affection in small ways.

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) said, “Love . . . cannot be expected to last forever unless it is continually fed with portions of love, the manifestation of esteem and admiration, the expressions of gratitude, and the consideration of unselfishness” (“Oneness in Marriage,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2002, 40).

Finding Strength as Parents and Participants

The *Strengthening the Family* manual and the parenting section of the *Marriage and Family Relations* manual build on the marriage lessons by helping spouses to become united in how and what to teach their children. Sister Marta Tilley, a Family Services missionary in the Lakeland Florida Stake, said differing parenting styles produce a feeling of distrust and discord between parents and lead to chaos in the home.

Both manuals help parents to be united in their efforts and describe positive parenting skills, such as having family home evenings and family

For More Information

The *Marriage and Family Relations* manual is available through Distribution Services (LDSCatalog.com in the U.S. and Canada) in 38 languages, with production scheduled for 17 additional languages.

The LDS Family Services manuals are currently available in English, Portuguese, and Spanish, with translations

underway for German, Japanese, Russian, Swedish, and Ukrainian.

Ward and stake leaders interested in sponsoring a course should contact their local LDS Family Services office for more information.

Those in areas without a local Family Services office should contact Sharon Parr at parrsd@ldsfamilyservices.org. ■

meetings. The *Strengthening the Family* manual specifically helps parents understand children better so problems can be resolved with love and patience.

“These programs give you skills you can implement within the gospel standards and help you become a more successful parent,” Sister Tilley said.

Instructors have found that the real strength of

each program comes from the commitment and active involvement of participants. Each course encourages open discussion and interaction so couples can learn new skills from one another.

Ultimately, participants finish the courses with a better awareness of Heavenly Father’s love for them and how He is involved in every aspect of their lives. ■

Mesa Easter Pageant Kicks Off Season of Church Productions

After months of preparation and hard work, participants and viewers of the Mesa Arizona Easter Pageant will experience through music, dance, and drama the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

The Easter pageant, titled *Jesus the Christ*, is held on the lawn of the Mesa Arizona Temple Visitors’ Center. More than 400 participants reenact the King James Version of the Bible’s account of the

Savior’s birth, ministry, death, and Resurrection.

“I see over and over again the cast experiencing a joy that they have never felt before as they share their testimonies in a direct way with so many people,” said Nanci Wudel, director of the pageant.

Preparations for the pageant begin months previous to the performance. Volunteers of all ages, including individuals and families, participate as cast



An actor portrays the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Nauvoo Pageant.

Upcoming Pageants

The following pageants will be held throughout the United States in coming months.

The **Manti Pageant**, *A Testament of Jesus Christ*, performed adjacent to the Manti Utah Temple, incorporates stories of the Restoration, the Book of Mormon, and the local history of pioneers traveling to the Sanpete Valley.

Originating as a small performance in 1967, the Manti Pageant has developed into a performance with more than 500 cast members. There will be eight evening performances June 18–20 and 23–27, 2009.

The **Nauvoo Pageant**, *A Tribute to Joseph Smith*, held in Nauvoo, Illinois, celebrates the sacrifice, faith, and courage of the early Latter-day Saints who, because of their faith, built a city and temple for their God. The

pageant includes dances, hymns, and words taken from journals and historic records of the people who lived during this period. The pageant will run July 7–August 1, Tuesday through Saturday.

The **Hill Cumorah Pageant**, *America's Witness for Christ*, held in Palmyra, New York, includes scenes from the Book of Mormon and Church history.

Some of the scenes portrayed in the pageant include the account of Lehi's family and their travel from Jerusalem to the Americas as well as the account found in 3 Nephi 11 of Christ appearing in ancient America. Also in the pageant is the depiction of Joseph Smith's discovery of the gold plates and other events of the Restoration.

The pageant was first presented at a conference by a group of missionaries in the early 1920s and has grown

and evolved over the years into the large production it is today. The pageant will run July 10–11 and 14–18, 2009.

The **Clarkston Pageant**, held in Clarkston, Utah, showcases the life of Martin Harris and the contribution he made to the early Church. The performance shows the journey of trial and testimony that Martin Harris went through as he participated in the Restoration.

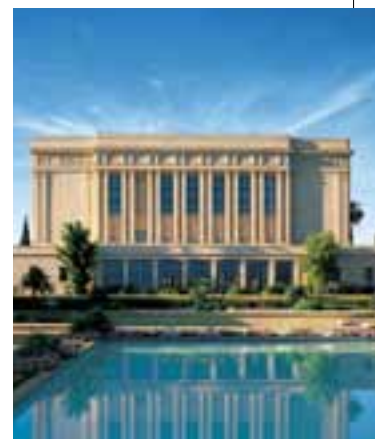
Sacred events that Martin Harris experienced—including being one of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon, who were allowed to handle the gold plates—are depicted, along with the charge he felt to declare his witness throughout his life. The pageant, titled *Martin Harris: The Man Who Knew*, will run August 7–8, 11–15, and 18–21, 2009. ■

members, offer backstage support, and join in work crews to help put on the production. Casting for the 2009 production began in November 2008.

The Mesa pageant started as a sunrise service in 1928 and has since grown into one of the world's largest annual outdoor Easter pageants.

"I hope every person in our cast and audience leaves the pageant with his or her burdens lightened, a feeling of deep peace, and a strong desire to know more about the Savior and His plan of happiness for us," Sister Wudel said. "Everything we do for the pageant is to bring people closer to the Savior."

The Mesa Arizona Easter Pageant is set to begin with a public dress rehearsal on March 31, 2009, and will run April 1–2 and 7–11 in English and April 3–4 in Spanish. It is the first of many official Church pageants to be held in 2009. ■



The Mesa Arizona Temple grounds are the scene of the annual Mesa Arizona Easter Pageant.

Aid Organizations Winning Measles Battle

Measles deaths worldwide decreased by 74 percent from 2000 to 2007, according to health and relief organizations fighting the disease. The number of deaths dropped from 750,000 in 2000 to 197,000 in 2008. The significant decrease in measles deaths was due to extensive vaccination efforts.

The Measles Initiative is behind the vaccination effort that has saved millions of lives. The initiative is led by the American Red Cross, the United Nations Foundation, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is also a partner.

“It is gratifying to know

that, due to the generous donations of time and means of selfless individuals, millions of lives have been saved,” said Bishop H. David Burton, Presiding Bishop of the Church. “The Church praises the work that has been done by all organizations involved to eradicate measles and is proud to be a partner in this effort.”

The Church first became involved in the measles campaign in 2003. Using 54,784 Latter-day Saint volunteers, the Church has contributed to measles campaigns in 28 countries. In total, 189,261,345 children have been vaccinated in the campaigns where Church members participated, according to Church Welfare Services. The Church has also donated



An African boy receives a measles inoculation.

millions of dollars to the effort.

“We have provided financial support, but even more important, we’ve had thousands of members of the Church involved in helping with these campaigns,” said Garry Flake of Church

Welfare Services.

The United Nations’ goal is to reduce measles deaths by 90 percent from 2000 to 2010. The Church will continue to be a partner in helping to meet that goal. ■

Deseret Industries Serves Local Agencies

When members of the Driggs Second Ward, Driggs Idaho Stake, were looking for a service project, their local Deseret Industries helped connect them with the Family Safety Network, a nonprofit organization that serves abused children. The members prepared the organization’s backyard property for a fence, a community garden, and a safe place for children to play.

When young women in the Bountiful Utah Orchard Stake wanted to serve, through their local Deseret Industries they found the

Davis County Children’s Justice Center, another organization serving abused children. The young women donated 102 fleece blankets, several pairs of decorated flip-flops and books.

The Family Safety Network and the Davis County Children’s Justice Center are just 2 of nearly 400 agencies in seven states that participate in the Church’s Community Partnership Program.

“These partnerships forge a stronger link between members of the Church and the community in which

they live,” said Elder Vaughn Wilson, a missionary who is serving as a Community Partnership Coordinator with his wife, Sister Gwen Wilson. “A lot of people are looking for service project opportunities, but they often overlook their own communities. Agencies in their areas can certainly use the help.”

Members can call their local Deseret Industries store to find out which agencies the Church has partnered with and what kind of help those agencies need. If there is no Deseret Industries store in the area,

Elder Wilson hopes local leaders will encourage members to help established agencies within their own communities.

Aside from connecting agencies in need with volunteers willing to help, the Community Partnership Program provides selected agencies with a certain number of vouchers, which can be used like gift certificates at the Deseret Industries’ stores. Each organization is allowed to use the vouchers at its own discretion, helping families and individuals in a way the agency is not normally equipped to do.

For instance, the River



The Community Partnership Program allows Deseret Industries to aid other agencies as well as individuals.

Oak Center for Children in Carmichael, California, is nationally recognized for its programs that help children meet life's challenges.

However, the center relies on community support to meet the material needs of low-income families trying to keep their children or get them back. Child protection

laws in the area will not allow children to stay in homes that are without basic household items such as beds, seasonal clothes, blankets, and so forth.

So when a mother came to the River Oak Center in these very circumstances recently, they offered her vouchers to

the Sacramento, California, Deseret Industries, where she picked out the needed furnishings and blankets. Shortly after that her children returned home.

"Working together, we can give parents the strength to address the children's needs more fully," said Alice Gentry, community affairs manager for the River Oak Center.

In 2007, the partnership program helped 18,863 individuals, who redeemed more than \$700,000 worth of vouchers. Elder Wilson said the program helps the Church respond to local needs and provide for people in a variety of circumstances, including released prisoners, foster care families, teen mothers, and the disabled.

Other service includes helping refugee families

in Phoenix, Arizona, obtain furnishings and dishware and helping homeless people in Seattle, Washington, get clothes for job interviews.

The partnership helps meet a broad spectrum of needs by dealing with established agencies that have the local experience to help, Elder Wilson said. ■

Flooding Damages BYU-Hawaii

Flooding on the island of Oahu, Hawaii, on December 11, 2008, damaged homes in Laie, Waianae, and Mililani, as well as several Church-owned buildings. Up to 12 inches of rain fell in about four hours, shutting down major roads and causing a rockslide. No evacuation orders were given but several schools closed. No Church members or missionaries were harmed.

The Brigham Young University-Hawaii campus suffered an estimated \$1.5 million in damages from the flood. Several campus buildings were flooded—the General Classroom Building, the Social Sciences Building, and 36 married-student housing apartments.

Church members teamed with the Red Cross to provide shelter and food on the BYU-Hawaii campus for those displaced by the flood. University students and Church members helped to clean up after the flooding. ■

WORLD BRIEFS

First Presidency Announces New Temple in Peru

A new temple in Trujillo, Peru, will bring the number of temples worldwide to 146 and the number of temples in South America to 17.

Two other temples are currently under construction in South America—Manaus, Brazil, and Córdoba, Argentina.

The Trujillo Peru Temple will be built on the site of the existing meetinghouse on Teodoro Valcárcel Street in Urbanización Primavera, Trujillo. It will serve more than 88,000 members.

FamilySearch Adds 25,000th Title

FamilySearch.org celebrated the addition of its 25,000th digitized title on December 15, 2008. The book, a history of Lewis County in the state of New York, was published in 1860. FamilySearch digitally archives titles that are unique, limited-run, out-of-print, or high-demand. The documents come from a variety of genres, locations around the world, and languages. To access the searchable digital documents at no cost, visit FamilySearch.org and click on **Historical Books** under **Search Records**.

Members Serve in Hospitals on Holiday

On November 27, 2008, Thanksgiving Day in the United States, members of the Beaverton Oregon West Stake prepared and served turkey dinners in three local hospitals. While food service to patients is not interrupted during holidays, the cafeterias of most hospitals are closed, leaving medical staff and visitors to fend for themselves. Members served dinner in the Doernbecher Children's Hospital, the Legacy Emanuel Hospital, and the Veterans Administration Hospital in Portland, Oregon. ■