

Focusing on the Lord's Work of Salvation



In an interview with Church magazines, Julie B. Beck, Relief Society general president, shared her testimony of Relief Society.

What is the role of Relief Society in furthering the work of the Savior?

Sister Beck: As Relief Society sisters, we are united first and foremost because of our faith in Jesus Christ. He is our leader and exemplar. I bear testimony of the reality of His Atonement. I testify that He lives and that His power is real.

As Latter-day Saints, we want to come unto Christ. When the Prophet Joseph Smith organized the Relief Society, he said that the women were not only to look after the poor but also to save souls.¹ This is still our purpose. We are to assist in the Lord's work of salvation, which is "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39).

We can start by strengthening ourselves spiritually through prayer and becoming self-reliant in scripture knowledge. We embrace the ordinances, covenants, and commandments the Lord has provided us.

We can then help gather scattered Israel. We have a duty to help prepare missionaries, to share the gospel, and to help retain those who are baptized. We have a responsibility to get ourselves and family members prepared for the temple. We can collect our





family history and help the Lord's children to be sealed in eternal families.

Step by step, in Relief Society we can help each other come unto Christ by doing the work we were organized to do.

How can busy Relief Society sisters do all this?

Sister Beck: The wonderful women of this Church are capable of doing this and more—we just can't do it all at once. That is why it is so important to prioritize and use our resources and time where they will do the most good—assisting in the Lord's work.

Each sister should seek to have the Holy Ghost guide her. If she is helping the Lord with His work, she is entitled to His help.

What helped you learn the importance of Relief Society?

Sister Beck: When I was a young girl, my father served as president of the only mission in Brazil. There were fewer than 4,000 members—most of whom were full of potential yet not prepared to lead. Only a handful of branches had a Relief Society.

My mother was called to organize Relief Societies in the mission. She spoke no Portuguese and had no manuals. What she did have was a testimony of the gospel and of Relief Society. She and her counselors began by helping sisters learn how to be visiting teachers.

They started their training in a small branch in São Paulo. Seven humble women attended the meeting. My mother's counselor, a Brazilian, greeted the sisters. After the prayer, she stood with trembling hands and read a message explaining visiting teaching. Then my mother stood. She knew four sentences in Portuguese: "I know that God lives. I know that Jesus is the Christ. I know that we have a living prophet. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen." The meeting ended. She hugged the women and bade them good-bye.

What a humble beginning to such a great work! Eventually, a Relief Society was established in every branch in Brazil. The sisters worked to prepare for a stake and the first temple in South America. They learned about ordinances and covenants and how to save souls.

In part, because the Relief Society sisters helped further the Lord's work, the Church in Brazil now numbers over one million members. Like these sisters in Brazil, we must do our part. No one can do it for us. We cannot delegate

our responsibility for building the kingdom to anyone else. It is our work. Let us embrace it and excel in building faith, strengthening families, and giving relief.

What are the blessings of focusing Relief Society activities on the Lord's work of salvation?

Sister Beck: As we carry out the Lord's work of saving and blessing lives, we become unified and can call down the blessings of heaven. I have a vision of the women of this Church uniting in powerful ways. I believe that when we focus on the important and forgo the frivolous, we gain confidence and our spirits are lifted. We cope better and feel less burdened. We will, of course, still be busy, but we will be busy doing the work of salvation.

How can Relief Society help us keep the proper perspective in this troubled world?

Sister Beck: Relief Society helps provide defense in these perilous times. Sunday lessons, Relief Society activities and meetings, and visiting teaching are how we do the Lord's work and strengthen individuals and families.

Though we are confronted with issues such as divorce, disobedience, debt, depression, apathy, and addiction, we cannot forget that we also live in a day when the Lord's Spirit is poured out upon us. This is a day when the gospel is being preached throughout the world, when the children of Israel are being gathered, when temples are upon the earth, and when we have the protection of priesthood covenants and ordinances.

We must ask for a broader vision to see what the Lord sees. This work is bigger than we realize. We *can* be successful against a deceitful and determined enemy. Our homes *can* and should become places of refuge.

What is the role of Sunday lessons in Relief Society?

Sister Beck: The purpose of our Sunday meeting is to study the doctrines of the gospel together. Women who are called to serve in Primary, Young Women, and other areas also learn doctrines of the gospel in their callings. Because our curriculum is so important, we must keep the opening portion of



Relief Society brief and dignified in order to establish the Spirit for the gospel study that follows.

In Relief Society we study *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, which is a series of manuals that provide prophetic teachings and a personal library of those teachings to the men and women of the Church. The words of the prophets are clear and inspired. We cannot—we *must* not—be passive and nonchalant in our study of them.

We are studying the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith from the best compilation of his works ever produced. This manual is the result of years of research and careful review. While the scriptures and Church magazines can enrich a

discussion, we do not need to supplement the words of prophets with other sources, especially non-Church sources.

We call upon our teachers to ask insightful questions and encourage open sharing. The Spirit is the teacher, and we must prepare in such a way that He will be in attendance at every Sunday lesson.

What is the role of Relief Society weekday meetings?

Sister Beck: In Relief Society weekday meetings, we apply the doctrines of salvation. Our unity and sisterhood will come naturally as a result of working together. For example, we can learn skills for sharing the gospel and preparing missionaries. We can learn about each other through family history. As we improve our homemaking skills such as cleaning, organizing, cooking, sewing, and gardening, we learn to create a climate of nurturing and spiritual growth in our homes.

We must also learn to be self-reliant in temporal things such as education, career development, and keeping up with technology. We should be storing up a supply of food, and we should know how to budget our money. We should also be working to improve physical and mental health.

When planning these meetings and activities, we need to assess our precious resources of time, energy, and consecrated funds. Use them only to help us live the gospel in our homes and further the Lord's work.

How can we help young women make the transition into Relief Society?

Sister Beck: Our talented young women are crossing the bridge from youth to adulthood, and Relief Society sisters have the charge to see that not one of them is lost.

Young women have been taught to keep their baptismal covenants, and in Relief Society we help them prepare to make temple covenants. Eighteen-year-old Relief Society sisters can chair committees, teach skills, help with missionary work, serve as visiting teachers, participate in family history and temple projects, and be full participants in the work of saving souls.

What is the role of visiting teaching?

Sister Beck: Visiting teachers minister in behalf of the Savior. Our hands are His hands, our love is His love, and our service is His service.² Good

visiting teachers know the sisters they visit. They love them, serve them, and help them learn the gospel by the Spirit. They focus on fortifying homes and lives. There is no greater privilege than to watch over and strengthen another person—it is truly the business of salvation.

How does Relief Society make a difference in the world?

Sister Beck: I met with a group of women cabinet ministers and parliament members from West Africa who asked me how we help African women. I explained that in their countries we have many organized groups of women, called Relief Societies.

We send the *Church Handbook of Instructions* to the president of each group. The women gather together often to study the gospel and to learn how to care for their families.

The president divides the Relief Society women into pairs that visit the women in their homes, where they assess needs. Is anyone sick? Do they have enough food and clothing? Do they have the education they need? After the visits the women report what they found. Someone needs shoes, someone is having a baby, and one of them needs work. They ask if within their group they have the needed

resources. Most of the time they do. That is what we do for our women in Africa.

As I talked, these women nodded their heads and smiled. One said to me, “That model would work for our women.”

I believe that Relief Society is a model that works throughout the world and that our sisters are the finest, most capable, greatest force for good on the earth today. I have confidence in our ability to further the Lord’s work of salvation together. ■

This interview was conducted by LaRene Porter Gaunt of the Church magazines staff.

NOTES

1. See *History of the Church*, 5:25.
2. See Henry B. Eyring, “Rise to Your Call,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 76.



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