

## GENERAL RELIEF SOCIETY MEETING

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# Relief Society: A Sacred Work

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*Ours is a work of salvation, service, and becoming a holy people.*



This is a beautiful gathering of Relief Society women. Since our last general meeting, I have been blessed to visit many of you. Thank you for your faithful lives and dedicated service. In recent general Relief Society meetings, we have been taught how strong and immovable Latter-day Saint women know and fulfill the purpose of Relief Society.<sup>1</sup> Tonight I hope to enlarge our testimony and understanding of Relief Society as a faith-based work. I will speak of the purpose of this work and the way we accomplish it.

We know that the purpose of Relief Society as established by the Lord is

to prepare women for the blessings of eternal life by helping them:

1. Increase their faith and personal righteousness.
2. Strengthen their families and homes.
3. Serve the Lord and His children.

The history, purpose, and work of Relief Society are unique among all women's organizations. In 1942, for the centennial of the Relief Society, the First Presidency of the Church said:

"No other woman's organization in all the earth has had such a birth. . . .

"Members [of Relief Society] should permit neither hostile nor competitive interests of any kind to detract from the duties and obligations, the privileges and honors, the opportunities and achievements of membership in this great Society."<sup>2</sup>

If our membership in Relief Society is so important, we need to know what sets us apart from every other woman's group or organization. Everything we do in Relief Society matters because Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, visited Joseph Smith and, through him, the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ was restored to the earth. Relief Society is part of that restoration. The Prophet Joseph Smith defined the purpose of



the Relief Society and instructed the sisters in their purpose, just as he taught priesthood leaders in Kirtland and Nauvoo their priesthood purpose and work. Ours is an organization that continues to be led today by prophets, seers, and revelators.

Relief Society is unique because it was organized after the “pattern of the priesthood”<sup>3</sup> and we operate on a general and local level under the direction of priesthood leaders. We work in partnership with priesthood leaders, who hold keys which give them authority to preside in the name of the Lord. We operate in the manner of the priesthood—which means that we seek, receive, and act on revelation; make decisions in councils; and concern ourselves with caring for individuals one by one. Ours is the priesthood purpose to prepare ourselves for the blessings of eternal life by making and keeping covenants. Therefore, like our brethren who hold the priesthood, ours is a work of salvation, service, and becoming a holy people.

President Boyd K. Packer has taught that “the Relief Society has very broad responsibilities.

“Attendance at the Sunday meeting is but a small part of your duty. Some of you have not understood this and have set aside much of what Relief Society has meant over the years—the sisterhood, the charitable and practical parts of it.”

He explained:

“The Relief Society, the Prophet [Joseph] told us, is organized after the pattern of the priesthood. When a man holds the priesthood, . . . it requires full dedication and loyalty. . . .

“Membership in the priesthood magnifies the man and the boy. Wherever he is, whatever he does, no matter with whom he associates, he is expected to honor his priesthood. . . .

“If you sisters follow after that pattern, . . . you will serve your organization, your cause—the Relief Society. . . .

“Service in the Relief Society magnifies and sanctifies each individual sister. Your membership in Relief Society should be ever with you.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Working in the Lord’s Way**

When our purpose is clear, it naturally follows that there is an appropriate way to carry out our responsibilities. Let us review how the faith-based work of Relief Society is to be administered. One of the most precious commodities we all have is time. Most women have many responsibilities and never have sufficient time to do everything their hearts and minds want to do. We show respect for the Lord and the sisters when we use Relief Society time in an inspired way.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf taught: “A wise man once distinguished between ‘the noble art of getting things done’ and ‘a nobler art of leaving things undone.’ True ‘wisdom in life,’ he taught, consists of ‘the elimination of non-essentials.’” President Uchtdorf then asked: “What are the nonessential things that clutter your days and steal your time? What are the habits you may have developed that do not serve a useful purpose? What are the unfinished or unstarted things that could add vigor,

meaning, and joy to your life?”<sup>5</sup> We can apply his questions to all Relief Society meetings and work.

### **Relief Society Sunday Meetings**

We hold the weekly meeting of our society on Sundays as part of our regular three-hour block of meetings. It is amazing to contemplate that every Sunday, all around the world, thousands of groups of sisters are gathering to increase their faith, strengthen their families, and coordinate their efforts to provide relief. Our Sunday meetings are only 50 minutes in length, so we begin those meetings by taking care of essential business that will help us be more unified and effective in our Relief Society work. We keep our business brief, dignified, organized, and in keeping with who we are and what we are to do.

Just as the sisters in the first Relief Society meetings received instruction from prophets and apostles, we study the words of Church leaders today. What a blessing it is to have correlated resources that teach doctrine and principles to help us live the gospel in our personal lives and homes. Because this work is based on faith, Relief Society lessons are most effective when inspired teaching takes place and “[she] that preacheth and [she] that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Additional Relief Society Meetings**

All of our meetings and activities are meetings of Relief Society sisters. For the past number of years, we have called additional Relief Society meetings home, family, and personal enrichment meetings. In response to concerns about the complexity of that title and the different interpretations about the purpose of those meetings, a decision has been made that the name “home, family, and personal enrichment” will be discontinued effective now. In counsel with the First

Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, it was determined that rather than give these additional Relief Society meetings a new title, all such meetings and activities will now be referred to simply as Relief Society meetings. Individual Relief Society meetings that are held during the week can be called whatever they are: Relief Society service, classes, projects, conferences, or workshops.

These additional meetings can be valuable supplements to Sunday instruction, especially for sisters who serve in Primary or Young Women or who are unable to attend Sunday meetings. These meetings also provide a wonderful place to bring our friends of other faiths and to include Relief Society sisters who do not actively participate in the Church. All Relief Society members and their friends are invited and welcome. However, sisters should not be made to feel that attendance at these meetings is mandatory.

Under the direction of the bishop, the ward Relief Society presidency can use these meetings to address spiritual and temporal needs of individuals and families in the ward and to strengthen sisterhood and unity.

When sisters meet for Relief Society meetings during the week, they have the opportunity to learn and accomplish the charitable and practical responsibilities of the Relief Society. This is where they learn and practice skills that will help them increase their faith and personal righteousness, strengthen families and homes, and provide service to those in need. These meetings are meant to be instrumental in teaching the skills and responsibilities of womanhood and motherhood in the Lord’s plan. It is here that women learn and apply principles of provident living and spiritual and temporal self-reliance, and they also increase in sisterhood and unity as they teach one another and serve together.

The ward Relief Society president

oversees all Relief Society meetings. As part of this responsibility, she counsels regularly with the bishop regarding how these meetings can help meet the needs of individuals and families in the ward.

The Relief Society presidency prayerfully considers how often they should hold Relief Society meetings during the week and where they should hold them. They then make a recommendation to the bishop, taking into consideration the time commitments of sisters, family circumstances, travel distance and cost, financial cost to the ward, safety, and other local circumstances.

These meetings are usually held at a time other than on Sunday or on Monday evening. They are generally held monthly, but the Relief Society presidency may recommend that the meetings be held more often or less frequently. Efforts should be made to meet at least quarterly. At least one member of the ward Relief Society presidency should be in attendance at every meeting. Under the direction of the stake presidency, the stake Relief Society presidency may plan and carry out one or two stake Relief Society meetings each year for all Relief Society sisters in the stake.<sup>7</sup>

Relief Society leaders prayerfully counsel together about the topics that will strengthen sisters and their families and about the best ways to teach those topics. The Relief Society president ensures that these plans are approved by the bishop. She also ensures that the plans are consistent with current policies about activities, including policies about finances. Although the Relief Society president oversees these meetings, she may ask her first or second counselor to assist her. She may also recommend another sister in the ward to be called to serve as the Relief Society meeting coordinator to help the presidency plan and carry them out.

Meetings can focus on one topic or be divided into more than one class or activity. Generally, teachers at these meetings should be members of the ward or stake. Each year, one meeting may commemorate the founding of the Relief Society and focus on its history and purposes.

In planning Relief Society meetings held during the week, leaders give priority to topics that will fulfill Relief Society purposes, such as marriage and family, homemaking, provident living and self-reliance, compassionate service, temple and family history, sharing the gospel, and other subjects requested by the bishop.<sup>8</sup>

When we plan, we ask what the Lord needs us to learn and become in order to be prepared for eternal life. In the wisdom of the Lord, every ward has its own unique characteristics, which no other ward shares. This can be compared to the DNA that identifies every human being as unique. Every bishop has the responsibility for his specific ward. Each ward Relief Society president has a calling to assist one bishop. Each bishop and Relief Society presidency have had hands laid on their heads to receive inspiration for their particular responsibilities and not for any other ward or group of Relief Society sisters.

If we work with this understanding, we will seek revelation and work in companionship with a bishop to fulfill the purposes of Relief Society in our own wards. As a result of operating in this way, if sisters and families need to be prepared for emergencies, the Relief Society can organize, teach, and inspire that preparation. If sisters and families need to prepare for the temple, the Relief Society can organize, teach, and inspire sisters to do that. If a bishop needs young single adult women to share the gospel and bring their friends back into activity, the Relief Society can organize, teach, and inspire that work. If mothers need to learn how



to nurture and care for their children, the Relief Society can organize, teach, and inspire that work. If sisters need to learn and improve homemaking skills that will help their homes become a center of spiritual strength, then the Relief Society can organize, teach, and inspire that work. As has happened throughout our history, if priesthood leaders need to accomplish something significant, they can call upon the Relief Society to help them.

Using Relief Society meetings appropriately will increase the ability of the Relief Society to work in powerful ways with priesthood leaders in every ward. As Joseph Smith said in the Doctrine and Covenants:

“Let no man count them as small things; for there is much which lieth in futurity, pertaining to the saints, which depends upon these things.

“You know, [sisters], that a very large ship is benefited very much by a very small helm in the time of a storm, by being kept workways with the wind and the waves.”<sup>9</sup>

Relief Society and priesthood leaders, this message will serve as your current official policy regarding

additional Relief Society meetings. Should you have questions regarding anything we have taught here after studying this message, please counsel together in your own wards and stakes to discover the solutions you need.

### **Visiting Teaching**

Much of the essential Relief Society work we do doesn't happen in meetings. Let's focus now on learning about visiting teaching. Because we follow the example and teachings of Jesus Christ, we value this sacred assignment to love, know, serve, understand, teach, and minister in His behalf. This is one duty we have in the Church where we are certain to have the help of the Lord if we ask for it. This is one responsibility that is certain to increase our faith and personal righteousness and strengthen our own homes and families as we become partners with the Lord. A sister in this Church has no other responsibility outside of her family that has the potential to do as much good as does visiting teaching.

Because this is the Lord's program of individual watchcare for His daughters, the policies regarding visiting



teaching are approved by the First Presidency as outlined in the *Church Handbook of Instructions*. Because visiting teaching focuses on individual sisters, Relief Society leaders do not organize women into groups for the purpose of visiting teaching.

The bishop, who is the ordained shepherd of the ward, cannot possibly watch over all of the Lord's sheep at one time. He is dependent on inspired visiting teachers to help him. We know we should each choose to be a friend to everyone in our ward, but the bishop and Relief Society president have the responsibility to receive revelation as to who should be assigned to watch over and strengthen each individual sister. Ideally, every sister should watch over and strengthen at least one other sister in her ward. It is our blessing to pray for another sister and receive inspiration as to how the Lord would have us care for one of His daughters.

Visiting teaching becomes the Lord's work when our focus is on people rather than percentages. In reality, visiting teaching is never finished. It is more a way of life than a task. Faithfully serving as a visiting teacher is evidence of our discipleship. We demonstrate our faith and follow a pattern established by the Lord as we report on our assignment every month. If our watchcare were primarily about reporting that every sister in the ward heard the Visiting Teaching Message printed each month in the *Ensign* and *Liabona*, it would be much more efficient to read it aloud to everyone in a sacrament meeting. Our reports are most helpful to the bishop and the Relief Society president when we inform them of the spiritual and temporal well-being of sisters and how we have been able to serve and love them.

How grateful I am for all of my visiting teachers who, over the years, have demonstrated their faith as they



have served, taught, strengthened, and loved me in inspired ways.

### Welfare and Compassionate Service

Our compassionate service and assistance with the welfare needs of individuals and families are an outgrowth of visiting teaching. A Relief Society president learns of the needs of people in her ward through visiting teachers and her own visits to ward members. Sometimes she organizes us to help others, and at other times we serve "according to [our] natures,"<sup>10</sup> following the promptings of the Holy Ghost. Many years ago I learned from Sister Camilla Kimball, wife of President Spencer W. Kimball, to "never suppress a generous thought." By following her counsel, we can know with certainty that our Father in Heaven knows us personally because He sends us to be His hands and heart to those in need. As we do so, our faith in Him is strengthened.

### Conclusion

We live in a happy and exciting time of growth in the history of the Church, and Relief Society is part of making that history. Joseph Smith said, "Let every man, woman and child realize the importance of the

work, and act as if success depended on his individual exertion alone; let all feel an interest in it, and then consider they live in a day, the contemplation of which animated the bosoms of kings, Prophets, and righteous men thousands of years ago—the prospect of which inspired their sweetest notes, and most exalted lays, and caused them to break out in such rapturous strains as are recorded in the Scriptures."<sup>11</sup>

I rejoice to know that the Lord loves us enough to guide us in this work through prophets, seers, and revelators and that we belong to a Church that operates with continuing revelation. I feel a certainty that as each sister does her part to ensure that the purposes of Relief Society are fulfilled, angels will be our associates and we will be participants in amazing miracles. We celebrate and give thanks for the essential, sacred work we have been given, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

### NOTES

1. See Julie B. Beck, "Fulfilling the Purpose of Relief Society," *Liabona and Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 108–11; "What Latter-day Saint Women Do Best: Stand Strong and Immovable," *Liabona and Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 109–12.
2. First Presidency, "To the Presidency, Officers, and Members of the Relief Society," in *A Centenary of Relief Society, 1842–1942* (1942), 7.
3. Joseph Smith, quoted in Sarah M. Kimball, "Auto-biography," *Woman's Exponent*, Sept. 1, 1883, 51.
4. Boyd K. Packer, "The Circle of Sisters," *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 109–10.
5. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "As You Embark upon This New Era," in *Brigham Young University 2008–2009 Speeches* (2009), 2; see also Lin Yutang, *The Importance of Living* (1937), 162, 10.
6. D&C 50:22.
7. These meetings may include service, classes, projects, conferences, and workshops. One of them may be held in conjunction with the general Relief Society meeting. The stake Relief Society presidency may form committees to help as needed.
8. See [reliefsociety.lds.org](http://reliefsociety.lds.org) for additional guidance regarding these topics.
9. D&C 123:15–16.
10. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 451.
11. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 144.