



Faith • Family • Relief

The History and Heritage of Relief Society

Study this material and, as appropriate, discuss it with the sisters you visit. Use the questions to help you strengthen your sisters and make Relief Society an active part of your own life.

Eliza R. Snow recalled the Prophet Joseph Smith teaching that “although the name [Relief Society] may be of modern date, the institution is of ancient origin.”¹

Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, visited Joseph Smith and, through him, restored the fulness of the gospel to the earth. Relief Society was part of that restoration. The organization of the Church was not complete until the sisters were organized.²

In the coming months, each Visiting Teaching Message will give us the opportunity to learn more about the history of Relief Society and its part in the restored gospel. For many reasons, understanding our history is not only important but *essential*.

First, an understanding of our history inspires us to be the women of God we need to be. By following the examples of noble Latter-day Saint women, we can learn from the past how to face the future.³

Second, our history teaches that the same principles that existed in the early Church are our foundational principles today. This knowledge and our purposes—to increase faith and personal righteousness, strengthen families and homes, and help those in need—draw a connection between our past and our present.

Third, as we value our history, we can better share our spiritual heritage. President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, said: “You pass the heritage along as you help others receive the gift of charity. . . . The history of Relief Society is recorded in words and numbers, but the heritage is passed heart to heart.”⁴

Finally, understanding our history helps make us an effective part of the future of Relief Society. President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) explained, “We know that women who have deep appreciation for the past will be concerned about shaping a righteous future.”⁵

Julie B. Beck, Relief Society general president.

What Can I Do?

1. What can I do to help the sisters I visit receive the gift of charity?
2. What can I begin to do this month to help shape a righteous future for myself? for my family? for others?

For more information, go to www.reliefsociety.lds.org.

From Our History

“Relief Society is the Lord’s organization for women.”⁶ In his capacity as a prophet, Joseph Smith organized the Relief Society on March 17, 1842. The small, diverse group at that first meeting were dedicated women, similar to Relief Society sisters today. “The youngest were three teenagers, and the oldest, a woman in her fifties. Eleven of the women were married, two were widows, six were unmarried, and the marital status of one is unknown. Their education and backgrounds varied greatly, as did their economic circumstances. Their diversity would be magnified many times as the organization’s membership continued to grow, but they were and would continue to be one.”⁷

NOTES

1. Eliza R. Snow, “Female Relief Society,” *Deseret News*, Apr. 22, 1868, 81.
2. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 451.
3. See L. Tom Perry, “The Past Way of Facing the Future,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2009, 73–76.
4. Henry B. Eyring, “The Enduring Legacy of Relief Society,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2009, 124–25.
5. Spencer W. Kimball, “Privileges and Responsibilities of Sisters,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1978, 104.
6. Spencer W. Kimball, “Relief Society—Its Promise and Potential,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1976, 4.
7. Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant* (1992), 28.

From the Scriptures

Esther 9:28–29;
Romans 16:1–2;
Alma 37:8;
Moroni 7:45–47

