

How Can We Sustain Our Leaders?

By Sarah Jane Weaver and Jason Swensen

Church News

By choosing to sustain the Twelve Apostles, Church members demonstrate their confidence in each Apostle's pledge of obedience to the Savior.

In the tearful days after a wildfire devastated entire neighborhoods in California's Sonoma County in October 2017, Elder Ronald A. Rasband of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles traveled to affected communities to be with the Latter-day Saints.

He was on a mission of ministering. He and Sister Melanie Rasband comforted fire-weary members in their meetinghouses and at the edges of their charred homes.

And wherever he went, members came forward to shake his hand. It was a gesture of appreciation. They thanked the Apostle for his support. But each handshake communicated a common sentiment: "I sustain you."

An Act of Faith

Sustaining is a sacred action that connects membership of the Church to Church leaders, says Elder Gary E. Stevenson. With more than 16 million members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, relatively few Church members will ever speak face to face with an Apostle or shake an Apostle's hand. But every member has the opportunity to make a personal connection with these and other Church leaders through his or her formal sustaining vote and daily sustaining actions, says President M. Russell Ballard, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve.

"We sustain with our raised arm but also with our hearts and our actions," says Elder Gerrit W. Gong. "We sustain Church leaders in the same way we sustain each other. We know we are bound by covenant."

Praying for the Apostles remains a priceless element of sustaining, says Elder Ulisses Soares. "We are regular people, and the Lord has called us to something above our capacity. But we feel we can reach that capacity because people are praying for us."

Faith precedes and follows the sustaining, adds Elder Soares. "By sustaining the Apostles, you are helping the Savior accomplish His work. Your faith helps the Lord accomplish what He communicates through His prophets and revelators."

"I love the imagery of arms to the square and the meaning behind that," says Elder Jeffrey R. Holland. For the Apostles, being sustained by the members of the Church is spiritually akin to receiving life-giving food, he adds. "Every voice counts and every helping hand looked to. No one has to serve alone in the Church, whatever our calling."

Elder Rasband in India; Elder Stevenson in Hong Kong; Elder Renlund in Brazil; Elder Gong in Shanghai, China; Elder Soares at Brigham Young University



A Long-Standing Practice

Sustaining the Apostles is a latter-day practice that dates back to Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. From the first day, early Saints were invited to consent to the calling of Church leaders and to sustain them in that calling.

On April 6, 1830, Joseph Smith and his newly baptized followers gathered in a small log farm home belonging to Peter Whitmer, Sr., in Fayette, Seneca County, New York.

Joseph stood and asked those participating if they desired the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Exercising the principle of common consent, the new members raised their hands and consented by unanimous vote. Next they consented to accept Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery as their teachers and spiritual advisers.

“Membership in the Church is a very personal matter,” notes Elder Holland. “Every individual counts. That is why we function on the principle of common consent. We want everyone to have an opinion, to express him or herself, and to be united in going forward.”



An Act That Elevates Us All

When accepting the call to the apostleship, members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles “are constrained” to follow the Lord’s will, says Elder Dale G. Renlund. By choosing to sustain the Twelve, members demonstrate their confidence in each Apostle’s pledge of obedience to the Savior.

Latter-day Saints who give their sustaining vote to an individual Apostle are simultaneously sustaining the consolidated Quorum, says Elder Quentin L. Cook.

That sacred vote lifts and blesses the Apostles—but it also lifts the sustainers, adds Elder Cook. “It empowers them and blesses them and gives them guidance.”

This means that just as members deeply impacted by the Santa Rosa fires offered sustaining support to Elder Rasband, members worldwide can be lifted even as they lift each member of the Twelve. ■

