

“CHARITY NEVER FAILETH”: A DISCUSSION ON Relief Society



Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and his wife, Patricia T. Holland, share insights into the role of Relief Society.

I can't imagine living life without Relief Society," says Patricia T. Holland in an interview with Church magazines staff about the importance of Relief Society. "That is because I can't imagine living life without the gospel, and Relief Society has been one place where I have personally learned so much about the gospel."

Sister Holland and her husband, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, both acknowledge the power of the gospel in their lives. They also appreciate the influence of Relief Society in building a strong home. "Relief Society has always been a strength to the Church," says Elder Holland. "It has always helped provide what was needed in each stage of the Church's development. Today its contribution becomes more poignant because of the difficult times in which we live. It's not a program per se. It is the gospel—the gospel in action in the lives of our remarkable women. In difficult times we realize it offers its members, and by extension the whole Church, just what we need to help us right now."

Here Elder and Sister Holland share their thoughts about Relief Society and the strength that comes to families

and to wards and branches when priesthood and Relief Society leaders work together.

What is the role of Relief Society in strengthening faith and families?

Sister Holland: Relief Society is needed now more than ever before because of the challenges we face in the world today. The women of the Church have a greater need to be righteous, to live close to the Spirit, and to be faithful. And women need each other too, in order to keep and sustain their faith.

Elder Holland: What the Relief Society is doing is helping teach the gospel in a uniquely powerful way, with a special women's voice. Relief Society is one of the vehicles for bringing gospel doctrines and values into the lives of women. Remember, however, that gospel principles are not restricted to gender. Love, charity, and compassion as well as strength, leadership, and decisiveness are all gospel virtues. We should all be embracing as many of these virtues as we can, men and women alike.

Each one of us who makes the journey down the gospel path is an individual—a daughter or a son of God. As individual members, we must be absolutely rock solid. No organization is going to be any stronger than its people, no home any stronger than its foundation.

Sister Holland: When I think of all the blessings we as Latter-day Saints share in our temples, our wards and branches, our marriages, and our families, I realize it all comes back to how the priesthood and Relief Society—men and women—



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work together in a home as well as in the Church.

Elder Holland: Women go home from Relief Society each week and share with the men in their lives what they have learned. Likewise, my wife and daughters have been blessed over the years by priesthood instruction our sons and I have received and shared.

Sister Holland: I think it could be said that, given the challenges facing women and families, no other organization in the world is going to be more helpful in the future than Relief Society. We need to rally the women of the Church to their calling as leaders and as “captains” of the welfare of children, especially now as we see families crumbling. We have to march together, hand in hand, to be able to get the work done.

How has Relief Society strengthened you and your family?

Sister Holland: The influence of Relief Society on me began even before I was born because both my mother

and grandmother served in Relief Society. When I was a child, I learned from them. I wanted to be like them. They told me stories of my great-grandmother Elizabeth Schmutz Barlocker, who served as a Relief Society president for 40 years. She gave everything she had, including her own food and clothing, for her sisters in the gospel. She had the faith that God would protect and bless her in this service, and He did. The example of these three women and their service in Relief Society still inspire me today.

Elder Holland: I haven’t attended



Relief Society, but I grew up with it shaping my life. My mother served in our ward Relief Society presidency for most of my teenage years. It was a great thing for a young boy to watch. Certainly those blessings can come from our ancestors to us and bless our children and our grandchildren.

But my testimony of Relief Society has also come through my wife. I’m proud to be married to a former Relief Society president. I’ve been blessed directly because of her devotion. I knew when I married Patricia Terry what kind of a woman she was because I had seen her in the service of the Lord. She had stepped up and shouldered the responsibility of the kingdom. To me she was larger than life. Now those values and virtues bless our marriage and our children. So, has Relief Society blessed me? Absolutely!

How can priesthood and auxiliary leaders work together to strengthen a ward or branch?

Sister Holland: Relief Society was organized after the pattern of the priesthood. This shows a lovely parallel

LEFT: PHOTOGRAPH BY WELDEN C. ANDERSEN © RI; PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS BY MATTHEW REIER AND CRAIG DIMOND

between the priesthood and Relief Society and reinforces the idea that men and women energize the righteousness within both. Men need the blessings of women, and women need the blessings of men. We learn that powerfully in the temple. Wards and branches will be stronger the more priesthood and auxiliary leaders work together. We have seen the power of ward council meetings in every place we have lived.

Men and women are all members of the body of Christ, and what a great



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membership that is! We learn in the scriptures that “if ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27) and “the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee” (1 Corinthians 12:21).

Elder Holland: With the complex issues of the day, ward or branch leaders need to work together. The bishop is the one who has the priesthood keys to lead the ward. The ward or branch council meeting is the place where the necessary coordination takes place. The better the council works, the better the Church works. This is true in every ward or branch.

The bishop can use ward council meeting as a time when he and other ward leaders analyze the needs of the ward. Are there members in need of temporal welfare? Is a young man getting ready to go on a mission? Are couples preparing to go to the temple? What can we do as a ward council to help?

Remember that the concerns of a mother cannot be separated from the needs of her children and her husband. Through visiting teachers, the Relief Society president sees the needs of the whole family as well as those

of individual members. That’s a powerful resource that can be drawn upon in ward council.

How can Relief Society help the Church meet the challenges of the 21st century?

Elder Holland: The present economic malaise covering the whole globe has reshaped the face of the earth financially. Yet teaching the principles of relief and provident living has always been a part of Relief Society. The world may think it



old-fashioned to bottle fruit or make quilts in the 21st century. Yet right now

there are people who are hungry and cold. To them, some bottled fruit and a warm quilt are literally god-sends. Provident living will never be out of fashion. This is not a retreat back to the 19th century but the direction we need to go as we move headlong into the 21st. The same skills and ideas for which Relief Society has always stood hold many of the answers to the challenges we are facing worldwide.

“Charity Never Faileth” is a flag under which the whole human family can unite. It is not a program—it is a clarion call of the gospel (see 1 Corinthians 14:8–10). The gospel will never fail, so it is appropriate that “Charity Never Faileth” is the Relief Society motto (1 Corinthians 13:8). It reinforces the fact that Latter-day Saint men and women are working toward the same goal—striving to become disciples of Christ.

And if the winds blow, the winds blow. If the storms come, the storms come. The gospel is always the answer,



whatever the question. It will always prevail. We are built on the rock that is Jesus Christ, and it is His solid rock-ribbed gospel that will get us through tough times.

Sister Holland: I think in the hearts of women is the desire to serve others in need. It doesn't matter if a woman is young or old, married or single. Relief Society provides the perfect opportunity for her to serve because there are always others in need. Likewise, every woman at some time or other will need to be served. Truly "Charity Never Faileth" is an eternal principle with a powerful message by which anyone can live.

Elder Holland: Remember that Relief Society service is not limited to serving members of the Church. We all try to take care of our own, but the great sisterhood of Relief Society—and specifically compassionate service—knows no borders. That helps us engage with the family next door who are not of our faith or join in an activity to help an inner-city school or assist in maintaining the clean, safe environment of our neighborhoods and communities.

What role will Relief Society play in the future?

Sister Holland: Obviously, Relief Society will play an essential role in the future. The darker the world gets, the brighter the gospel light will shine. Relief Society is key in teaching the doctrines of the gospel to our sisters. Most important among those teachings is that God, our Heavenly Father, sent His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to the earth. His Atonement, Resurrection, and example teach us to have faith in Him, repent, make covenants, and

WARD COUNCILS: WHERE LEADERS WORK TOGETHER

The ward council includes the bishopric, ward clerk, ward executive secretary, high priests group leader, elders quorum president, ward mission leader, and presidents of the Relief Society, Young Men, Young Women, Primary, and Sunday School. . . .

"Council members are encouraged to speak honestly. . . . Both men and women should feel that their comments are valued as full participants. . . . The viewpoint of women is sometimes different from that of men, and it adds essential perspective. . . .

"Ward council meetings should focus on matters that will strengthen individuals and families" (*Handbook 2: Administering the Church* [2010], 4.4; 4.6.1).

love one another. Jesus Christ is the light that never faileth—the bright light that will pierce the darkness.

Elder Holland: Matthew 7:16 says, "Ye shall know them by their fruits." For example, even when our children were very young, they could recognize their mother's devotion to the gospel and the role that a woman plays in it. They were often with her as she served her Relief Society sisters. Sometimes they had to pray that our old car would start. They saw her in an old coat trudging through the snow to care for Relief Society sisters in New England. They were only little, but they've never forgotten that. They saw their mother's sacrifice and faithfulness, and as a result our daughter is a Latter-day Saint woman deeply committed to service, and our sons have deep respect and admiration for the commitment and devotion of our daughters-in-law. It is clear from their mother's example that our children know the crucial, exalted place of women in their lives and in the kingdom of God.

Likewise, others are going to look to the example of the "fruits" of Latter-day Saint lives—the fruits that come as

we work to become disciples of the living God. This is the brightness that can never be darkened. The future of Relief Society is bright because the gospel is bright. The light of the kingdom of God will never go out. And as human need increases, the clarion call of the gospel will ring true. In the forefront of those bearing that message and providing their charitable contribution will be righteous priesthood men and Relief Society women of the Church. ■

This interview was conducted by LaRene Gaunt and Joshua Perkey of Church magazines.