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And the Lord Called His People

ZION

May we fulfill the prophetic charge to build Zion—to be of one heart and one mind, dwell in righteousness, and strive to have no poor among us.

Editors' note: As a member of the Relief Society General Presidency and president of Latter-day Saint Charities, Sister Eubank shares here her unique perspective on how the purpose and organization of the Church can help us work together to eradicate poverty in our communities and in our hearts.

When people visit the Church's Humanitarian Center in Salt Lake City, I often ask them to read aloud a statement made by Joseph Smith that hangs in the lobby: "[A member of the Church] is to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to provide for the widow, to dry up the tear of the orphan, to comfort the afflicted, whether in this church, or in any other, or in no church at all, wherever he finds them."¹

The statement was made at a time when the Church was severely in debt, leaders were settling converts into a new country, and the Nauvoo Temple was under construction. How could the Prophet Joseph possibly consider providing for the poor in *this* Church, let alone any other? But even under those dire circumstances, Joseph understood that the care of those in need must *always* be a central focus of the Lord's covenant people.



A Vision of Zion

One of the first tasks Joseph undertook after organizing the Church in April 1830 was an inspired translation of the Bible. I have often wondered why. At this critical juncture in the Church's history, why would he work on retranslating Genesis? That book was already so well-known. But part of that translation work eventually became the book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price, with precious details of critical doctrinal importance to the modern Church.

These chapters revealed the experiences of Moses and Enoch, which are in some ways remarkably similar to Joseph's own experience. Each prophet was called by the Lord to do a great work. The Lord showed each of them His creations so they could better envision their part in the plan (see Doctrine and Covenants 76; Moses 1; 7). A summary of their overarching task could be stated as follows: **Gather Israel as a priestly nation, build Zion, and prepare to welcome Jesus Christ.**

But how is such a thing to be accomplished? Enoch gives a succinct answer: "And the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of *one heart* and *one mind*, and *dwelt in righteousness*; and there was *no poor among them*" (Moses 7:18; emphasis added).

A central part of the latter-day mission of the Church is to eradicate the poverty that exists in our communities

and in our hearts; establish a unified Zion; and prepare the people for the return of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Providing in the Lord's Way

Trillions of dollars have been expended by governments and organizations in the last century to eradicate poverty. Yet for all of the well-intentioned work, a great deal of it has been unsuccessful and wasted. Why? Because it inadvertently created dependency instead of ability.

The Lord's way is to build both givers and receivers, to allow people to be agents for themselves, and to exalt the poor in "that the rich are made low" (Doctrine and Covenants 104:16). We sometimes call this *self-reliance*, but it really means unleashing the divine power inside every individual to solve his or her own problems with the help of God, enabling them to in turn serve others.

Examples Old and New

Joseph Smith cheerfully practiced serving others in the Lord's way. James Leach and his brother-in-law, after looking for work in Nauvoo many days without success, determined to ask the Prophet for help. James recalled:

"I said, 'Mr. Smith, if you please, have you any employment you could give us both, so we can get some provisions?' He viewed us with a cheerful countenance, and



with such a feeling of kindness, said, ‘Well, boys, what can you do? . . . Can you make a ditch?’ I replied we would do the best we could at it.

‘. . . When it was finished I went and told him it was done. He came and looked at it and said, ‘. . . If I had done it myself it could not have been done better. Now come with me.’ He led the way back to his store and told us to pick the best ham or piece of pork for ourselves. Being rather bashful, I said we would rather he would give us some. So he picked two of the largest and best pieces of meat and a sack of flour for each of us, and asked us if that would do. We told him we would be willing to do more work for it, but he said, ‘If you are satisfied, boys, I am.’

“We thanked him kindly and went on our way home rejoicing in the kindheartedness of the Prophet of our God.”²

A modern example of the same delicate balancing of generosity and self-reliance occurred in 2013 when Typhoon Haiyan swept through the central Philippines, damaging or destroying over a million homes. Rather than just handing out aid indiscriminately, which could result in dependency and waste, the Church applied self-reliance principles to help affected residents develop the skills needed to rebuild. Housing materials were purchased, and local Church leaders contracted with construction mentors. Residents in need of housing were provided with tools, materials, and training, while they furnished the labor to construct their own shelters. They then assisted their neighbors to do the same.

In the end, each participant received a vocational certificate attesting to their newly learned skills and qualifying them for key employment opportunities. This combination of aid coupled with on-the-job training not only built shelters—it built capability. It did more than just restore housing—it restored the people’s confidence in themselves.³

Small Contributions Matter

We don’t need to be wealthy to assist. A young man wrote about his experience with Joseph Smith: “I was at Joseph’s house . . . and several men were sitting on the fence. Joseph came out and spoke to us all. Pretty soon a man came up and said that a poor brother who lived out some distance from town had had his house burned down the night before. Nearly all of the men said they felt sorry for the man. Joseph put his hand in his pocket, took out five dollars and said, ‘I feel sorry for this brother to the amount of five dollars; how much do you all feel sorry?’”⁴

I recently met a 10-year-old boy from a rural community who was



spending his own meager amount of money to buy a voucher that would provide a polio immunization for a child. The boy had read about children who were paralyzed by polio, and he didn't want others to suffer from this disease. I was amazed at how much he had studied and how thoughtful he was about his small contribution.

Clearly each of us has something to give, regardless of our circumstances, and the true significance of our contribution cannot be measured solely by its monetary value.

The Power of Combining Hearts

If we are serious about our covenants, we will each strive to be of one heart and one mind, to live in righteousness, and to have no poor among us. This will knit our hearts together and help to reduce the inequities in the world. But there is an even greater power when people of the covenant combine their efforts: families, quorums, Relief Society, Young Women classes, and stakes can organize to address specific needs in their communities to tremendous effect.

The Church's humanitarian organization, Latter-day Saint Charities, combines many small efforts to aid people in emergencies around the world.⁵ Members of the Church generously contribute time, money, and expertise. Most of these contributions are modest: a small monetary donation or a few hours of volunteering. This becomes a modern parallel to the widow's mite (see Mark 12:41–44); these seemingly minor contributions show the world what widows and farmers and 10-year-old boys can do when they pool their resources and then ask the Lord to add His increase (see 1 Corinthians 3:6).

We have come a long way since the early days of the Church in building the conditions for Zion, but there is much yet to do. May God bless each of us to seek out those in need and do what we can to alleviate their burdens and strengthen their capacity. And may He also bless His Church to coordinate and magnify the individual efforts of its members and thereby fulfill the prophetic charge to build Zion—to be of one heart and one mind, dwell in righteousness, and strive to have no poor among us—until the Savior comes again. ■

NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 426.
2. James Leach, in "Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith," *Juvenile Instructor*, Mar. 1, 1892, 152–53; punctuation modernized; paragraph divisions altered.
3. See "Mormon Volunteers Building Homes for Typhoon Haiyan Victims," Feb. 21, 2014, newsroom.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
4. Andrew J. Workman, in "Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith," *Juvenile Instructor*, Oct. 15, 1892, 641.
5. See latterdaysaintcharities.org.