
The Twelve

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For the Church to be His Church, there must be a Quorum of the Twelve who hold the keys.



Shortly after the death of President Gordon B. Hinckley, the 14 men, Apostles, who had had conferred upon them the keys of the kingdom, gathered together in the upper room of the temple in order to reorganize the First Presidency of the Church. There was no question about what would be done, no hesitancy. We knew that the senior Apostle was the President of the Church. And in that sacred meeting, Thomas Spencer Monson was sustained by the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as the President of the Church. He nominated and named his counselors. They likewise were sustained, and they were each ordained and given authority. President Monson was specifically given the authority to exercise all of the priesthood keys of authority. Now, as the scriptures provide, he is the

only man on the earth who has the right to exercise all of the keys. But we all hold them as Apostles. There is one man among us called and ordained, and he becomes the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Already he was and had been sustained for years as a prophet, seer, and revelator.

With President Uchtdorf being called to the First Presidency, there was then a vacancy in the Twelve, and so yesterday we sustained a new member of the Quorum of the Twelve, Elder D. Todd Christofferson. He now joins that sacred brotherhood in that sacred circle, and the circle now stands filled. The calling of an Apostle goes back to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We also sustained a number of Seventies. They have taken their place now. The scriptures provide that it is the responsibility of the Quorum of the Twelve to direct all of the affairs of the Church, and when they need help, they are “to call upon the Seventy . . . instead of any others.”¹ And now we have eight Quorums of Seventy scattered across the world, more than 300 Seventies, all holding the necessary authority to do whatever the Twelve direct them to do.

The Lord Himself set in motion this pattern of administration:

“He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

“And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them



Following his sustaining, Elder D. Todd Christofferson takes his place with the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles.”²

Andrew had heard John speak and ran to his brother Simon and said, “We have found the Messias. . . .

“ . . . He brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.”³

Simon and his brother Andrew were casting nets into the sea; James and John the sons of Zebedee were mending their fishing nets; Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew, a publican, or tax collector; Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus; Simon the Canaanite; Judas the brother of James; and Judas Iscariot—they made up the Quorum of the Twelve.⁴

He bid them all, “Come, follow me.”⁵

He said to Peter, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”⁶

And He told the Twelve, “He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.”⁷

He gave His Apostles “power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick . . . every where.”⁸

And He said, “[The] Twelve hold the keys to open up the authority of my kingdom upon the four corners of the earth, and after that to send my word to every creature.”⁹

Jesus once asked His disciples, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? . . .

“And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”¹⁰

When Jesus taught in the synagogue, many disciples said, “This is an hard saying; who can hear it? . . .

“From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

“Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?

“ . . . Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.”¹¹

After the Crucifixion, the Apostles remembered He had said they should stay in Jerusalem.¹² Then came the day of Pentecost, that great event when they received the Holy Ghost.¹³ They received “a more sure word of prophecy”¹⁴ and “spake as they were

moved by the Holy Ghost.”¹⁵ And so they were complete.

We know little of their travels and only where and how a few of them died. James was killed in Jerusalem by Herod. Peter and Paul died in Rome. Tradition holds that Philip went to the East. Much more than this we do not know.

They scattered; they taught, testified, and established the Church. And they died for their beliefs, and with their deaths came the dark centuries of apostasy.

The most precious thing lost in the Apostasy was the authority held by the Twelve—the priesthood keys. For the Church to be *His* Church, there must be a Quorum of the Twelve who hold the keys and confer them on others.

In time came the First Vision and the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood by Peter, James, and John.¹⁶

The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve were later told:

“Verily I say unto you, the keys of the dispensation, which ye have received, have come down from the fathers, and last of all, being sent down from heaven unto you.

“ . . . Behold how great is your calling. Cleanse your hearts and your garments, lest the blood of this generation be required at your hands.”¹⁷

The restored Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was young when the First Presidency was organized, followed by the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, which was made up of ordinary men, and then the Quorums of the Seventy. The average age of that first Quorum of the Twelve was 28.

There has been an unbroken line of authority. The priesthood keys given to the Apostles have always been held by members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve.

Yesterday Elder D. Todd Christofferson became the 96th Apostle to serve in the Twelve in this dispensation. He will be ordained an

Apostle and given all the priesthood keys conferred upon the other 14 prophets, seers, and revelators—Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In 1976 an area general conference was held in Copenhagen, Denmark. Following the closing session, President Spencer W. Kimball desired to visit the Vor Frue Church, where the Thorvaldsen statues of the *Christus* and of the Twelve Apostles stand. He had visited there some years earlier and wanted all of us to see it, to go there.

To the front of the church, behind the altar, stands the familiar statue of the *Christus* with His arms turned forward and somewhat outstretched, the hands showing the imprint of the nails, and the wound in His side very clearly visible. Along each side stand the statues of the Apostles, Peter at the front to the right and the other Apostles in order.

Most of our group was near the rear of the chapel with the custodian. I stood up front with President Kimball before the statue of Peter with Elder Rex D. Pinegar and Johan Helge Benthin, president of the Copenhagen stake.

In Peter's hand, depicted in marble, is a set of heavy keys. President Kimball pointed to those keys and explained what they symbolized. Then, in an act I shall never forget, he turned to President Benthin and with unaccustomed firmness pointed his finger at him and said, "I want you to tell everyone in Denmark that I hold the keys! We hold the *real* keys, and we use them every day."

I will never forget that declaration, that testimony from the prophet. The influence was spiritually powerful; the impression was physical in its impact.

We walked to the back of the chapel where the rest of the group was standing. Pointing to the statues, President Kimball said to the kind custodian, "These are the dead Apostles." Pointing to me, he said,



"Here we have the *living* Apostles. Elder Packer is an Apostle. Elder Thomas S. Monson and Elder L. Tom Perry are Apostles, and I am an Apostle. We are the living Apostles.

"You read about the Seventies in the New Testament, and here are two of the living Seventies, Elder Rex D. Pinegar and Elder Robert D. Hales."

The custodian, who up to that time had shown no emotion, suddenly was in tears.

I felt I had had an experience of a lifetime.

"We believe in the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church, namely, apostles, prophets,

pastors, teachers, evangelists, and so forth."¹⁸

When the Seventy are ordained, although they are not ordained Apostles nor do they hold keys, they have authority, and the Twelve are "to call upon the Seventy, when they need assistance, to fill the several calls for preaching and administering the gospel, instead of any others."¹⁹

Today there are 308 Seventies in 8 quorums. They represent 44 countries and speak 30 languages.

We do not hear of the priesthood keys being exercised in other Christian churches. It seems odd that we are described by some as being



The two newest members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Elder D. Todd Christofferson (left) and Elder Quentin L. Cook, exchange greetings.

non-Christian when we are the only ones who have the authority and the organization that He established.

The present Twelve are very ordinary people. They are not, as the original Twelve were not, spectacular individually, but collectively the Twelve are a power.

We come from a variety of occupations. We are scientists, lawyers, teachers.

Elder Nelson was a pioneer heart surgeon. He performed thousands of surgical operations. He told me he gave every heart surgery patient a lifetime guarantee on his work.

Several in this Quorum were military men—a sailor, marines, pilots.

They have held various positions in the Church: home teachers, teachers, missionaries, quorum presidents, bishops, stake presidents, mission presidents, and of most importance, husbands and fathers.

They all are students and teachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. What unites us is our love of the Savior and

His Father's children and our witness that He stands at the head of the Church.

Almost to a man, the Twelve come from humble beginnings, as it was when He was here. The living Twelve are welded together in the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When the call came, each has put down his nets, so to speak, and followed the Lord.

President Kimball is remembered for his statement, "My life is like my shoes—to be worn out in service."²⁰ That applies to all members of the Twelve. We also wear ourselves out in service of the Lord, and we do so willingly. It is not an easy life for us or our families.

It is not possible in words to describe the contribution, the service, the sacrifice given by the wives of priesthood leaders all across the world.

Some time ago, my wife and also Sister Ballard underwent consummately painful back surgery. Both are doing well; neither has complained.

The nearest my wife came to complaint was, "This is no fun!"

"It is the duty of the Twelve"—under the direction of the First Presidency—"to ordain and set in order all the other officers of the church, agreeable to the revelation."²¹

We now have means by which we can teach and testify to leaders and members all over the world electronically. But in order to confer the keys of authority in that unbroken line upon the priesthood leaders, "by the laying on of hands,"²² wherever they are in the world, one of us must be there every time.

The Lord said, "And again, I say unto you, that whosoever ye shall send in my name, by the voice of your brethren, the Twelve, duly recommended and authorized by you, shall have power to open the door of my kingdom unto any nation whithersoever ye shall send them."²³

The scriptures describe the Twelve as "traveling councilors."²⁴

I am no different from the Brethren of the Twelve and the Seventy and the Bishopric with whom I have served for these 47 years when I tell you that the records show I have been in Mexico and Central and South America more than 75 times, in Europe over 50 times, Canada 25 times, the islands of the Pacific 10 times, Asia 10 times, and Africa 4 times; also China twice; to Israel, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the Dominican Republic, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Indonesia, and many, many other places around the globe. Others have traveled even more than that.

While the Apostles hold all of the priesthood keys, all leaders and members alike may receive personal revelation. Indeed, they are expected to seek it through prayer and to act on it by faith.

"For through him we . . . have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints,

and of the household of God;

“And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.”²⁵

Now Elder Christofferson may wonder, as I did, why one such as I should be ordained to the holy apostleship.

There are many qualifications that I lack. There is so much in my effort to serve that is wanting. There is only one single thing, one qualification that can explain it. Like Peter and all of those who have since been ordained, I have *that* witness.

I know that God is our Father. He introduced His Son, Jesus Christ, to Joseph Smith. I declare to you that I know that Jesus is the Christ. I know that He lives. He was born in the meridian of time. He taught His gospel and was tried. He suffered and was crucified and resurrected on the third day. He, like His Father, has a body of flesh and bone. He made His Atonement. Of Him I bear witness. Of Him I am a witness. This I bear in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. D&C 107:38.
2. Luke 6:12–13.
3. John 1:41–42.
4. See Luke 6:12–16.
5. See Matthew 4:19; 16:24; Mark 6:1; Luke 9:23; see also John 21:19; D&C 112:14.
6. Matthew 16:19.
7. John 14:12.
8. Luke 9:1–2, 6.
9. D&C 124:128.
10. Matthew 16:13, 16.
11. John 6:60, 66–68.
12. See Acts 1:4.
13. See Acts 2:1–4.
14. 2 Peter 1:19.
15. 2 Peter 1:21.
16. See D&C 27:12; Joseph Smith—History 1:72.
17. D&C 112:32–33.
18. Articles of Faith 1:6.
19. D&C 107:38.
20. In Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Gift of Self,” *Tambuli*, Dec. 1986, 4; “He Is at Peace,” *Ensign*, Dec. 1985, 41.
21. D&C 107:58; see also D&C 107:33.
22. Articles of Faith 1:5.
23. D&C 112:21.
24. D&C 107:23.
25. Ephesians 2:18–20.