

Now Let Us Rejoice

BARBARA THOMPSON

Second Counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency

Participation in Relief Society is part of our glorious heritage and blessing as women in the Lord's Church.



My dear sisters, how blessed we are! Not only are we members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but we are also members of Relief Society—"the Lord's organization for women."¹ Relief Society is evidence of God's love for His daughters.

Doesn't your heart thrill as you recall the history of Relief Society and remember our very exciting beginnings? On March 17, 1842, at the first Relief Society meeting, the Prophet Joseph Smith declared that "the Church was never perfectly organized until the women were thus organized."² He then organized the sisters "under the priesthood after the pattern of the priesthood."³ The small, diverse group of women assembled at that first Relief Society were dedicated women, similar to Relief Society

members today. There were young women and older women, women who were formally educated and women with no formal education. There were married women, mothers, and single women. There were wealthy women and some who were very poor. They each had a love for one another, a love for the Lord, and a desire to serve. By remembering what Relief Society sisters did in the past, we can better understand and be guided today.

At the first Relief Society meeting, the sisters were asked by Joseph Smith to assist the Brethren "in looking to the wants of the poor—searching after objects of charity, and in administering to their wants."⁴ He further admonished the sisters to act "according to those sympathies which God has planted in your bosoms."⁵

The sisters took this charge to heart and became a society dedicated to serving the poor and needy. Sister Emma Smith said, "We are going to do something extraordinary. When a boat is stuck on the rapids, with a multitude of Mormons on board we shall consider that a loud call for relief. We expect extraordinary occasions and pressing calls."⁶

In the early days of the Church, sisters provided relief as they went from house to house. Doing what we now call visiting teaching, the sisters went about ministering to all—caring for and attending to the needs of others and ensuring that people had food,

clothing, shelter and providing relief when needed. If a sister had something to share, she would contribute it to the visiting sisters. If she was in need, the sisters would help provide for her.⁷

Let's devote ourselves to Relief Society, as advised by President Boyd K. Packer: "Service in the Relief Society magnifies and sanctifies each individual sister. . . . When you devote yourself to the Relief Society and organize it and operate it and participate in it, you sustain the cause that will bless every woman who comes within its influence."⁸

Just as Emma described the boat stuck on the rapids and the people needing help, we can liken that to our day when we see such things as a neighbor who is ill, a child who needs instruction, a teen needing a friend, or a family who has lost their income and needs assistance to get back on their feet. We hear of calamities, storms, or personal tragedy in the lives of our sisters everywhere. We need not rush about trying to find things to do or causes to take up.

Remember, most often the help needed is in our own homes, neighborhoods, and communities. A kind word of encouragement, a note of thanks, a phone call, a loving smile, a helpful deed, and a reminder that God loves us are often what is needed most. We can lift and bless others in so many ways.

Relief Society is not just a class on Sunday. It isn't just a place we go if we are not teaching in the Primary or Young Women organizations. It is the Lord's organization for women. Participation in Relief Society is part of our glorious heritage and blessing as women in the Lord's Church.

In those early meetings of Relief Society, Joseph Smith advised the sisters to teach one another the gospel of Jesus Christ. He said, "The . . . Society is not only to relieve the poor,

but to save souls."⁹ He further said, "I now turn the key to you in the name of God, and this Society shall rejoice, and knowledge and intelligence shall flow down from this time."¹⁰ Oh, I love this statement. It reminds me to rejoice in the blessings God has for the women of this Church.

Relief Society women have always sought to learn and grow. We know that "the glory of God is intelligence."¹¹

In 1830, in a revelation given through the Prophet Joseph to his wife, Emma, the Lord declared that she should "expound scriptures, and . . . exhort the church, according as it shall be given thee by my Spirit."¹² This charge was given not only to Emma, but Joseph clarified that all

of the sisters should seek after this gift.¹³ Women taught the gospel of Jesus Christ and followed the Savior in word and in deed. The sisters nourished one another by the good word of God.¹⁴

Some women have said that it is frightening to teach a class or speak in front of a group. I can assure you I know from experience that it can be rather intimidating. Let's remember what Eliza R. Snow once said to her niece who was called upon to speak in front of a group. When her niece arose, she was unable to say anything because fear overcame her. She finally just sat down. Eliza kindly and gently advised her, "Never mind, but when you are asked to speak again, try and have something to say."¹⁵





We will have something to say as we prepare ourselves as the Lord has instructed. He says to “preach my gospel by the Spirit,” and those who preach and those who receive “understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together.”¹⁶ As we fervently prepare using the scriptures and approved Church materials and ask the Lord for help, He will give us “the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost”¹⁷ and we will know what to say so that all are edified.

At a wonderful Relief Society meeting, Eliza R. Snow recorded in the minutes that “nearly all present arose and spoke, and the spirit of the Lord like a purifying stream, refreshed every heart.”¹⁸ We hope our sisters today feel nourished, edified, and uplifted every time they attend a Sunday lesson, go visiting teaching, participate in an activity, or perform any act of service.

Sisters, now more than ever, we need women to step up and be strong. We need women who declare the truth with strength, faith, and boldness. We need women to set an example of righteousness. We need women to be “anxiously engaged in a good cause.”¹⁹ We need to live so that our lives bear witness that we love our Heavenly Father and the Savior Jesus Christ and that we will do what They have asked us to do. We need to rescue “all that is finest down deep inside of [us]”²⁰ so that as daughters

of God we can do our part to build the kingdom of God. We will have help to do this. As Joseph declared, “If you live up to your privileges, the angels cannot be restrained from being your associates.”²¹

Let us bear one another’s burdens, mourn with those who mourn, comfort those who stand in need of comfort, and thus keep the covenants we have made.²²

We are most blessed. The Savior stands at the head of this Church. We are led by living prophets, seers, and revelators. We have the holy scriptures to read, study, and gain answers for our daily lives. We have holy temples throughout the world where we can obtain the ordinances necessary to help us return to our Heavenly Father. *And* we have one another to help us.

I see “the image of God engraven upon [the] countenances”²³ of you good women as I travel to many places in the world. I hear of your good deeds and remarkable dedication. I see the Light of Christ reflected in your eyes.

I know that, as Emma encouraged, we can do something extraordinary today. We can be a righteous army of women armed with love, compassion, kindness, service, and faith. We can be a mighty force for good in this world. Then we will be what President Packer describes: “The Relief Society might be likened to a refuge—the place of safety and protection. . . . You

will be safe within it. It encircles each sister like a protecting wall.”²⁴ We must have this place of safety and protection!

Don’t you just get excited to belong to Relief Society? As we remember what these noble women did in the past, we will be guided today and in the future.

I testify that God, our Heavenly Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ, live and love us. I testify that we are led by a prophet of God. I testify that as we keep our covenants, we will be blessed immeasurably. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Spencer W. Kimball, “Relief Society—Its Promise and Potential,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1976, 4.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society course of study, 2007), 451; see also Jill Mulvay Derr and others, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (1992), footnote 61, 445–46.
3. Sarah Granger Kimball, “Auto-biography,” *Woman’s Exponent*, Sept. 1, 1883, 51.
4. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 452.
5. *History of the Church*, 4:605.
6. Emma Smith, quoted in Relief Society, Minute Book Mar. 1842–Mar. 1844, entry for Mar. 17, 1842, 12, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
7. See *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society*, 32–33.
8. Boyd K. Packer, “The Circle of Sisters,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 110.
9. *History of the Church*, 5:25.
10. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 451.
11. D&C 93:36.
12. D&C 25:7.
13. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 454; see also D&C 25:16.
14. See Moroni 6:4.
15. Eliza R. Snow, quoted in Emily S. Richards, “General Conference: Relief Society,” *Woman’s Exponent*, Dec. 1901, 54.
16. D&C 50:14, 22.
17. D&C 121:26.
18. Eliza R. Snow, Minute Book, entry for Apr. 19, 1842, 33.
19. D&C 58:27.
20. J. Reuben Clark, quoted in *Providing in the Lord’s Way: A Leader’s Guide to Welfare* (1990), title page.
21. *History of the Church*, 4:605.
22. See Mosiah 18:8–9.
23. Alma 5:19.
24. Boyd K. Packer, “The Circle of Sisters,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 110.