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Meetinghouses— Places of Reverence and Worship

The Spirit of the Lord is in our meetinghouses and will inspire us as we conduct ourselves in reverence before Him.

A devoted colleague once shared with me an experience he had when fulfilling an assignment to put away chairs and straighten up the stake center following a stake conference. After 30 minutes of carrying out these duties, he realized that he was the last person remaining in the building. Rather than feeling alone with a rush to leave, however, he noticed that the same sweet sense of peace he had felt during the conference remained with him and was even increasing.

As he finished the assignment and exited the meetinghouse, he encountered another member who seemed to be watching him intently. Realizing what my friend had been doing, this member took him by the hand and said, “Brother, the Lord sees these small things that you do for Him, and He looks down and smiles upon them.”

Years later while serving as a bishop, this same friend found himself alone again in his ward meetinghouse. After turning out the lights in the chapel, he lingered for a moment as the moonlight shone through the windows onto the pulpit.

The familiar sense of peace again washed over him, and he sat down near the front of the chapel and reflected on the myriad sacred moments he had experienced in that setting—the many times he had observed the priests breaking the bread at the sacrament table, the occasions when he had felt the Holy Spirit accompanying him as he delivered a ward conference address, the baptismal services he had conducted, the beautiful choir numbers he had heard, and the numerous testimonies from ward members that had touched him so deeply.



Seated alone in that dark chapel, he felt overcome by the collective impact of these experiences on his life and on the lives of his ward members, and he bowed his head in profound gratitude.

My friend had been wisely and correctly taught that the most sacred places on earth are the temple and the home, but through the two experiences related above, he also came to understand the sacred nature of our meetinghouses. Because they are dedicated by priesthood authority, these facilities become settings in which the Lord pours out revelations upon his people and in which the “power of godliness is manifest” through the ordinances that take place there (see Doctrine and Covenants 84:20).

The meetinghouse combines with the home to bring about the promised joy that faithful Saints can experience on the Sabbath

day. It becomes a place where members’ collective worship causes their hearts to become “knit together in unity and in love one towards another” (Mosiah 18:21) and toward the Savior. For us to render proper gratitude and respect for the outpouring of spiritual blessings that come to us through our meetinghouses, we should enter these places of worship with an attitude of deep and sincere reverence.

The Meaning of Reverence

In our modern Church culture, the word *reverence* has become synonymous with the word *quiet*. While soft tones are certainly appropriate for our chapels, this limited view of reverence fails to capture the full meaning of the word. *Reverence* can be traced to the Latin verb *revereri*, which means to “stand in awe of.”¹ Could we possibly find a term that more eloquently describes the feelings of our soul when we truly contemplate what the Savior has done for each of us?

I am reminded of the words of the beautiful hymn we sing while in our chapels: “I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me.”² That profound sense of gratitude, praise, and amazement is the essence of reverence, and it impels us to avoid any type of language or behavior that might diminish those feelings within ourselves or others.

Meetinghouses and the Sabbath Day

From modern revelation, we know that a central part of our Sabbath worship is to “go to the house of prayer and offer up [our] sacraments upon [the Lord’s] holy day” (Doctrine and Covenants 59:9). The “house[s] of prayer” in which we gather on the Sabbath are our sacred meetinghouses.

President Russell M. Nelson has helped us to better understand the close connection between our reverence for the Savior and our feelings toward the Sabbath day. In sharing his own experience in coming to honor the Sabbath, President Nelson related, “I learned from the scriptures that my conduct and my attitude on the Sabbath constituted a *sign* between me and my Father.”³

Just as our conduct and attitude on the Sabbath are a sign of our devotion to the Lord, our conduct, our attitude, and even our manner of dress while in His house of prayer may likewise indicate the degree of reverence we feel toward the Savior.

Meetinghouses and Ordinances

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has amplified our understanding of this concept, declaring:

“In addition to making time for more home-centered gospel instruction, our modified Sunday service . . . emphasizes the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper as the sacred, acknowledged focal point



of our weekly worship experience. We are to remember in as personal a way as possible that Christ died from a heart broken by shouldering entirely alone the sins and sorrows of the whole human family.

“Inasmuch as we contributed to that fatal burden, such a moment demands our respect.”⁴

It is important to remember that the appointed place for this supreme moment of respect toward the Savior is the meetinghouse chapel. In addition to the reverence we feel during the weekly ordinance of the sacrament, our feelings of reverence and respect are amplified when we consider the other priesthood ordinances and blessings carried out in the meetinghouse, including the naming and blessing of children, baptisms and confirmations, priesthood ordinations, and settings apart for callings. Each of these ordinances and blessings can bring an outpouring of the Holy Spirit if those who participate and those who attend come in an attitude of reverence.



Meetinghouses and Worship

The Sabbath day affords us the opportunity to worship the Lord during our home study and as a congregation during our sacrament and other meetings. Since the earliest days of the Church, the Saints have enjoyed coming together to socialize and form bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood. Our meetinghouses are even designed with spaces to accommodate such activities during the week. We must never lose sight of the primary purpose of these facilities, however, which is to provide a place of worship.

Worship and reverence are closely related. “When we worship God, we approach Him with reverent love, humility, and adoration.

We acknowledge and accept Him as our sovereign King, the Creator of the universe, our beloved and infinitely loving Father.”⁵

This central purpose of worship should therefore influence our conduct in meetinghouses even when we are engaged in social or recreational activities. Great care should be taken to minimize disorder, debris, or damage to any part of the facility resulting from Church activities, and action should be taken to promptly clean or repair it in the event of such an occurrence.

Children and youth can be taught that reverence and care for the meetinghouse extends beyond Sunday meetings. Member participation in the cleaning of the meetinghouse—particularly the combined participation of parents and children—is a wonderful means of developing a sense of reverence for our sacred facilities. As evidenced from my friend’s experience in straightening up his stake center after stake conference, the very act of caring for the meetinghouse is a means of worship and invites the Spirit of the Lord.



Caring for our meetinghouses is a means of worship and invites the Spirit of the Lord.



Meetinghouses and the Savior

Under President Nelson’s prophetic direction, significant efforts are being made to ensure that the name of Jesus Christ is never excluded when we refer to His Church. In a similar way, we must not allow the Savior to be displaced from the center of our worship—including our places of worship.

We are accustomed to referring to the temple as the house of the Lord, which is an accurate and important designation. We may be more prone to forget, however, that each of our meetinghouses is dedicated by priesthood authority as a place where the Spirit of the Lord may dwell and where God’s children—both those inside and outside the Church—may come “to the knowledge of their Redeemer” (Mosiah 18:30).

The recently announced initiative to adorn our meetinghouses with artwork that respectfully depicts the Savior and the divine events of His mortal and postmortal life is designed to draw our eyes, minds, and hearts closer to Him. As you enter these houses of prayer for meetings and activities, we lovingly invite you to pause, observe, and contemplate these sacred paintings, to view them with your children, and to allow them to increase your feelings of worship and reverence toward God.

The Old Testament prophet Habakkuk declared, “The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him” (Habakkuk 2:20). May we likewise remember that the Spirit of the Lord is in our meetinghouses and will permeate each of our hearts to the degree that we conduct ourselves in reverence before Him. ■

NOTES

1. “Revereri,” Lexico Powered by Oxford, lexico.com.
2. “I Stand All Amazed,” *Hymns*, no. 193.
3. Russell M. Nelson, “The Sabbath Is a Delight,” *Ensign*, May 2015, 130.
4. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Behold the Lamb of God,” *Ensign*, May 2019, 45.
5. Dean M. Davies, “The Blessings of Worship,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2016, 94.