



**ABOUT
SISTER SMITH**

Alice Colton Smith (1913–2006) graduated from Columbia University in 1934. She

and her husband, Whitney, relocated to Logan, Utah, USA, in 1946 to attend Utah State University, where Alice earned a master's degree in sociology and subsequently joined the faculty. As an assistant professor, she taught until the mid-1970s, when she resigned so she could focus more on her service with the Relief Society general board. Sister Smith was called to serve on the Relief Society general board in 1964, serving for 14 years. She brought a cosmopolitan and scholarly perspective to the board.

From 1960 to 1963, the Smiths lived in Vienna, Austria, where they had been called to establish the first Latter-day Saint mission headquartered in Austria.

Alice Smith gave this talk in the October 1969 officers' session of Relief Society general conference; punctuation and capitalization standardized.

VISITING TEACHERS ARE GOD'S EMISSARIES

By Alice C. Smith

This new series highlights the lives of devoted women and their messages, excerpted from the book *At the Pulpit: 185 Years of Discourses by Latter-day Saint Women* (2017). Selected chapters are available at churchhistorianspress.org/at-the-pulpit.

As Jesus climbed the dry hills of Galilee or trod the dusty roads of Judea, he met poverty, disease, afflictions of every kind. He found the sinner repentant and unrepentant. He met the suffering. And out of these experiences and His vast understanding came His compassionate solicitation, “Come unto me.”

In 1830, the Prophet Joseph Smith declared that God is “the same unchangeable God” [D&C 20:17]. So, it is no surprise that on July 28, 1843, 16 women were appointed “to search out the poor and suffering . . . to relieve the wants of all.”¹ Sixteen in a world of millions. But there had to be a beginning. In 1843, 16 visiting teachers; today [1969], well over 100,000; tomorrow 200,000; the day after tomorrow two million.

A few weeks ago, I met a wonderful friend of mine. She has been active in Relief Society for many years. . . . I asked her what she was doing in the Church now. There was a noticeable pause. Then, she answered, “Oh, I’m just a visiting teacher.” Just a visiting teacher! After we parted, I thought,

how would she feel if the Savior . . . said to her, “I want you to be my emissary. I want you to tell the women [you visit teach] that I love them, that I am concerned about what happens to them and their families. I want you to be my helper, to watch over these sisters, to care for them so that all will be well in my kingdom.” If we met after such a meeting, wouldn’t her reply be different? Hasn’t He already called her through His priesthood as surely as if He stood in her presence?

How many of our visiting teachers think of themselves as “just visiting teachers”?

To the visiting teacher is given the great responsibility of searching out those in need. More, she tells all sisters by her visit that someone cares and that God cares.

. . . She should not be someone who rushes in the last day of the month and says, “I’ve just a few minutes—I know you’ve read the message and know it better than I do, and you don’t need it anyway. How are you, and I’ll see you at Relief Society next week.” The visiting

teacher should leave behind her a love that blesses both the visited sister and her home. . . .

. . . Each year as the Church grows, the need for visiting teachers will grow greater. . . . They will help combat the loneliness which plagues our world and impersonality of the big cities. They will look after the stranger, the widow, the orphan, the wounded, and distressed, after all sisters with concerned, loving care. . . . They will help

relieve physical, emotional, and mental suffering. They will aid the sinner and comfort the sorrowing. They will carry a message of gospel love to all our sisters throughout the world. . . .

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” [Matthew 11:28–30].

God bless the visiting teachers. For when all work together, the yoke is easy and the burden is light.

. . . May it ever be so, I pray.

Amen. ■

NOTE

1. Former Relief Society Handbook, p. 29. See *Handbook of the Relief Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (1931), 29.



PHOTOGRAPH OF SISTER SMITH COURTESY OF HER FAMILY, FRAME FROM GETTY IMAGES