

MAN of FAITH, MAN of COMPASSION

Thomas S. Monson, 16th President of the Church

Although he loved to play softball in his youth, President Thomas S. Monson was a tall, skinny boy who felt disappointed each time he was chosen last for the team. He was not particularly athletic at first, but one day that changed.

“As a boy, I played team softball in elementary and junior high school. Two captains were chosen, and then they, in turn, selected the players they desired on their teams. To be selected fourth or fifth was not too bad, but to be chosen last and relegated to a remote position in the outfield was downright awful. I know. I was there.

“How I hoped that the ball would never be hit in my direction, for surely I would drop it, runners would score, and teammates would laugh.

“As though it were just yesterday, I remember the moment when all that changed in my life. The game started out as I have described: I was chosen last. I made my sorrowful way to the deep pocket of right field and watched as the other team filled the bases with runners. Two batters then went down on strikes. Suddenly, the next batter hit a mighty drive. The ball was coming in my direction. Was it beyond my reach? I raced for the spot where I thought the ball would drop, uttered a silent prayer as I ran, and stretched forth my cupped hands. I surprised myself. I caught the ball! My team won the game! This one experience bolstered my confidence, inspired my desire to practice, and led me from that last-to-be-chosen place to become a real contributor to the team” (*Ensign*, May 1989, 43).

Rather than reveling in his newfound skills on the playing field, President Monson instead took notice of

another boy who became the last chosen and helped him develop his skills. Such Christlike compassion, shown from his boyhood, characterizes the life of President Monson, who on February 4, 2008, was named the 16th President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Developing Compassion

Thomas S. Monson, born in Salt Lake City on August 21, 1927, learned caring and sensitivity from his parents, G. Spencer and Gladys Condie Monson. He remembers that nobody would ever be turned away from their door. It was a time of great economic difficulty, and some transients inevitably would make their way to the Monson home every week. His mother would host them as though each had been an invited guest.

His mother’s caring example was not lost on young Thomas Monson who, while growing up during the Great Depression, became aware of the hardships of those around him.

“He was the kind who accomplished what most boys don’t,” according to President Monson’s boyhood bishop, John R. Burt. “He’d meet with his quorum counselors and stir things up, even as a youngster. Usually you have to do a lot of prodding with young boys, but not with Tom” (*Ensign*, Feb. 1986, 13).

Although times were tough during the Depression, there were also happy times for the Monson family. They spent their summers at a cabin near Provo, Utah, where he developed a love for swimming and fly fishing. Other interests that continued from boyhood include raising



President Thomas S. Monson has served as an Apostle for 44 years and as a counselor in the First Presidency to three Church Presidents. (Below) President Monson as a young man. (Next page) As a naval recruit, and with his wife, Frances, in front of the Salt Lake Temple.





Birmingham roller pigeons (performing birds that roll over backward while flying) and watching football, basketball, and baseball.

President Monson graduated from West High School in Salt Lake City, served in the U.S. Navy during the closing months of World War II, and studied business management at the University of Utah. In 1948 he graduated and on October 7 married his sweetheart, Frances Beverly Johnson, in the Salt Lake Temple. (You can read the story of how they met in the *New Era* article “Whom Shall I Marry?” Oct. 2004, 4.) The couple later became the parents of three children and have nine grandchildren.

A Lifetime of Service

The compassion and sensitivity developed in President Monson’s boyhood continued to be a major part of his life when he was called to be a bishop at age 22. Bishop Monson’s Sixth-Seventh Ward had more than 1,000 members, including 85 widows.

Every Christmas the young bishop took a week of his personal vacation time to visit and bring a gift to each of the widows in his ward. He continued to visit these sisters at Christmas for the next 47 years until the last widow passed away in 1998.

At age 27, President Monson was called as a counselor in the Temple View Stake Presidency, and a few years later he was called to serve as president of the Canadian Mission. On October 4, 1963, he was ordained an Apostle at age 36 (the youngest Apostle in 53 years), and on November 10, 1985, he became a counselor in the First Presidency at age 58 (the youngest in the 20th century).

Looking to the Savior

President Monson has a favorite painting of the Savior, which has always hung in his various offices. “Positioned on the wall of my office, directly opposite my desk, is a lovely print of the Savior, painted by Heinrich Hofmann. I love the painting, which I have had since I was a 22-year-old bishop and which I have taken with me wherever I have been assigned to labor. I have tried to pattern my life after the Master. Whenever I have a difficult decision to make, I have looked at that picture and asked myself, ‘What would He do?’ Then I try to do it. We can never go wrong when we choose to follow the Savior” (*Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 67). **NE**

New FIRST PRESIDENCY



When it was announced on Monday, February 4, that President Thomas S. Monson would become the 16th President of the Church, a new First Presidency was also announced.

President Henry B. Eyring

President Henry B. Eyring was named as the First Counselor. He had been serving in the First Presidency as the Second Counselor under President Gordon B. Hinckley since October 2007.

Born in Princeton, New Jersey, Henry, or Hal as he was called, was raised with his brothers as the only young people in his branch, which met in their home. His family moved to Utah, where President Eyring attended the University of Utah. While in the Air Force and assigned to Albuquerque, New Mexico, he was called as a district missionary in the Western States Mission and served for nearly two years.

After his military service, President Eyring attended Harvard and received masters and doctoral degrees. He married Kathleen Johnson, and they became the parents of six children.

President Eyring was a professor in the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University. He served as president of Ricks College, then served as the Church's Commissioner of Education, a member of the First

Quorum of the Seventy, in the Presiding Bishopric, and as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf was named as the second counselor. He has been a General Authority since April 1994 and has been a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles since October 2004.

Raised in Zwickau, Germany, President Uchtdorf was baptized at eight years old, two years after his family joined the Church.

As a teenager, President Uchtdorf followed his love of flying. He would go to the airport and, at the indulgence of staff, was allowed to look into the cockpits and dream of flying in the freedom of the skies. He started with an engineering education, followed by six years in the German Air Force. At age 29 he became a captain with Lufthansa, where he rose quickly to become director of the training school, chief pilot, and senior vice president of flight operations.

At the same time, he held several Church callings such as president of the Frankfurt Germany Stake, then as president of the Mannheim Germany Stake, and finally as a General Authority in the Second Quorum, First Quorum, and Presidency of the Seventy. President Uchtdorf and his wife, Harriet Reich, have two children. **NE**