

President Marion G. Romney

Address given at the Welfare Services Meeting Saturday, April 6, 1974

Brethren and sisters, I am humbled as I stand before this tremendous audience: I hope you will pray to the Lord to bless us while I speak.

Welfare Program

It is now nearly forty years since I was ordained a bishop. During the years I presided as a bishop, the Welfare Program was begun under its present name. The principles of the Welfare Program, of course, have been fundamental in the Church from the very beginning. From what has already been said here today, you know, and already knew no doubt, that we now have what we call the Welfare Services of the Church, not just the Welfare. You also heard Brother Ashton speak of the Health Services and the Social Services. The original of these three departments was the Welfare Program, the old-fashioned Welfare Program through which the Church undertook to discharge its God-given responsibility to take care of the poor of the Church, and that is what I am going to talk about this morning. In case I don't get around to it, you can remember that I was going to talk about the Welfare Program, the taking care of the poor.

At the present time we need to emphasize this program. For many years following the inauguration of the program a Welfare representative, a member of the General Church Welfare Committee, was in attendance at every stake conference. We covered the Church four times a year teaching the program. President Lee at that time, as you remember, was the managing director; President Moyle was the chairman of the program; and President Clark, the member of the First Presidency assigned to carry forward that work. There was an intensive pro-

gram, a training program, for nearly twenty years. For fifteen years we went around the Church every year visiting every stake president in regional meetings and presented this program. In recent years we haven't had that intensive program of training and I would suppose there are many bishops here today who were never trained in the fundamentals of the Welfare Program. I shall, therefore, devote what I have to say this morning to the fundamentals. What I say may be familiar to many of you, but it won't hurt you to be reminded. Somebody said, "It is more important to be reminded than it is to be taught." I never tire of teaching the truth. As I read the scriptures, I find that the Lord taught Adam in the same language that he taught the Prophet Joseph Smith, and in every dispensation in between.

Helping transients

At the outset I would like to caution you bishops who have the responsibility to implement and administer the program to be careful and wise in helping transients. We have had reports that some characters, and sometimes families, have traveled all over the United States and through Europe by representing to branch presidents in the missions and bishops in the wards that they were Latter-day Saints worthy of and needing help. We recommend that you be sure to have transients, who ask for welfare, properly identify themselves. A good thing to do is have them give you the name of the bishop in their home ward and then call him on the telephone. We don't want to be harsh with our Lord's children, neither do we want to be taken advantage of. Please take note of this matter.

Taking care of the Lord's poor

Now let us turn our attention to the obligation of the Church to take care of the Lord's poor. The Church was not quite nine months old when the Lord gave the instruction that it was to take care of the poor. On January 2, 1831, in the revelation recorded in the 38th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord said:

"And for your salvation I give unto you a commandment, for I have heard your prayers, and the poor have complained before me, and the rich have I made, and all flesh is mine, and I am no respecter of persons.

"And I have made the earth rich, and behold it is my footstool, wherefore, again I will stand upon it.

"And I hold forth and deign to give unto you greater riches, even a land of promise, a land flowing with milk and honey, . . .

"And I will give it unto you for the land of your inheritance, if you seek it with all your hearts.

"Wherefore, hear my voice and follow me, . . .

"And let every man esteem his brother as himself, and practise virtue and holiness before me.

"And again I say unto you, let every man esteem his brother as himself.

"For what man among you having twelve sons, and is no respecter of them, and they serve him obediently, and he saith unto the one: Be thou clothed in robes and sit thou here; and to the other: Be thou clothed in rags and sit thou there—and looketh upon his sons and saith I am just?

"Behold, this I have given unto you as a parable, and it is even as I am. I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine." (D&C 38:16-19, 22, 24-27.)

Economic equality

I know that we quote this scripture in many senses, applying to many dif-

ferent circumstances, and rightly so; but when it was given, the Lord was talking about the economic equality that he wanted to prevail among his people.

"And now, I give unto the church in these parts a commandment, that certain men among them shall be appointed, and they shall be appointed by the voice of the church;

"And they shall look to the poor and the needy, and administer to their relief that they shall not suffer; . . ." (D&C 38:34-35.)

This revelation, as has been said, was given on the second day of January, 1831. The next week, just seven days later, in another revelation the Lord said:

"If thou lovest me thou shalt serve me and keep all my commandments.

"And behold, thou wilt remember the poor, and consecrate of thy properties for their support . . ." (D&C 42:29-30.)

And then he added this great truth:

"And inasmuch as ye impart of your substance unto the poor, ye will do it unto me; [Then he explained how the contributions were to be handled.] and they shall be laid before the bishop of my church and his counselors, . . ." (D&C 42:31.)

The next month, the Lord referred to this subject again. Evidently the brethren had been a little remiss. They hadn't moved fast enough.

"Behold, I say unto you, that ye must visit the poor and the needy and administer to their relief, . . ." (D&C 44:6.)

Four months later, the Lord called some of the brethren to go from Kirtland to Jackson County, Missouri. The Prophet went with them. They had to travel between 1,000 and 1,200 miles. They traveled part of the way on foot. The Prophet himself walked nearly the whole distance from St. Louis to Jackson County—some 300 miles. In the

Saturday, April 6

Second Day

revelation instructing them to go, the Lord said:

"And remember in all things the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted, for he that doeth not these things, the same is not my disciple." (D&C 52:40.)

I have often thought about this commandment. These men who were going out on that journey were poor men and they were new in the Church. But even under these circumstances the Lord told them that if they did not care for the poor they would not be His "disciples."

The Lord's way

As above cited, the Lord has told us how he intends us to take care of the poor. As I have already quoted, the scripture says that the means for taking care of the poor are to be put in the hands of the bishop. In the 104th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord tell us that we are to get the means by humbling the rich, and that we are to distribute them in such a manner as to exalt the poor.

"I, the Lord," he says, "stretched out the heavens, and built the earth, my very handiwork; and all things therein are mine." (D&C 104:14.)

Everything that you have and I have and that every other person in this world has, we hold as stewards. All things belong to the Lord and he is telling us how he expects us to use them.

"And it is my purpose to provide for my saints," he continues, "for all things are mine.

"But it must needs be done in mine own way; and behold this is the way that I, the Lord, have decreed to provide for my saints, that the poor shall be exalted, in that the rich are made low.

"For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare; . . ." (D&C 104: 15-17.)

We need not listen to the false doc-

trine that we must limit the population of this earth. The earth was made by the Lord and he made plenty for all. What we, his children, need is to follow his direction in using it.

"For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare; yea, I prepared all things, and have given unto the children of men to be agents unto themselves." (D&C 104:17.)

Importance of principle

Here is another statement that is worthy of deep consideration by every member of this Church, and of the world:

"Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment." (D&C 104:18.)

Is there any question in your mind about the seriousness the Lord attaches to this principle of caring for the poor? From this scripture it is clear that the rich are to be made low, brought down in humility on an equal with the poor, by giving of their substance for the care of the poor. Today, the law of the Church concerning what we should give for the care of the poor includes tithing, fast offerings, and welfare production. In the early 1830s the Lord revealed and directed the Saints to live the United Order. This required every man to deed his property to the Church. The bishop in turn gave back to every man his inheritance so he could take care of himself and turn the surplus in to the Church. The Saints, however, could not live this law so they lost their heritage in Zion, Jackson County, Missouri. They were driven out. Thereafter the Lord substituted the great principle of tithing. Tithing is not a freewill contribution, brothers and sisters. Tithing is a law of God to this people. He says that those who will not abide the law of tithing shall not abide the day of his

coming. President Brigham Young impressed this fact on my mind—at least I was impressed when I read his statement:

“They say we cut people off the Church for not paying tithing; we never have yet, but they ought to be. God does not fellowship them.” (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, 1954 ed., p. 177.)

This is the way they used to preach tithing in the early days of the Church. I have an idea they were pretty well on target.

Later came the law of the fast. We have heard about that today. We ought to be honest in paying tithing and we ought to be liberal in contributing fast offerings for the care of the poor.

Welfare projects

Then there is welfare production. All over this Church we have production projects. Time was when, commissioned by the First Presidency, I travelled over the Church each year for fifteen or more years. My commission was to see that every ward in the Church had a welfare project or an interest in a project on which necessities of life could be produced.

Will you bishops and branch presidents who are here raise your hands? [A sea of hands were raised.] That is a pretty good showing. How many of you people have a welfare project? How many of you could—on your welfare project provide for your people for six months or a year if there was no transportation? I heard that question put to the people twenty-five years ago by President Clark. The time for which this Welfare Program was established has not yet come. It may be that some time in the future we will survive or starve on what we can produce ourselves. I want you to take this matter seriously. Every bishop in this Church, except in the newly established stakes in the world where we haven't yet gotten the Church fully organized, should have

an interest in a welfare project, a production project where you can produce things to eat and the other necessities of life upon which we can sustain our people. How many of you bishops know the number of your ward members who have in their storage enough to take them over a period of need when they could not get things from the grocery store? These are serious times, as every man with any vision at all knows. If you read the 45th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, you can read of the signs that will precede the coming of the Master. He is giving direction in this work which we must follow in order to be prepared. We must be independent of every other creature beneath the celestial kingdom.

Well, now I had better get back to my notes or I will not say just the things that I should. But I am serious about this. I have been inoculated with the Welfare Program for forty years. I heard it announced from this stand at its beginning.

Objective of program

We talked about how the rich are made low. They are made humble and submissive and obedient to the commandments of the Lord by giving of their means liberally—by giving to the bishop for the care of the poor. How do you exalt the poor as they receive? Well, there is only one way to do that and that is to make them self-sustaining. No man has self-respect when he is the recipient of a dole. If there is anything that he can do, he wants to do it. This program was set up not merely to feed and house and clothe people, it was set up to build people into self-respecting Latter-day Saints. The First Presidency said at that time,

“Our primary purpose [This they said back in 1936, referring to the Welfare Program.] was to set up, insofar as it might be possible, a system under which the curse of idleness would be done away with, the evils of a dole abolished,

Saturday, April 6

Second Day

and independence, industry, thrift and self-respect be once more established amongst our people. The aim of the Church is to help the people to help themselves. Work is to be re-enthroned as the ruling principle of the lives of our Church membership." (Welfare Plan Handbook of Instructions, 1952.)

Exalting the poor

How the nations in the world have receded from that position. Get it for nothing if you can is widely accepted in the world, but in The Church of Jesus Christ the responsibility is upon every man, under God's mandate, to sustain himself and his family to the full extent of his capability. The accomplishment of this objective is the most pressing task that we have in our Welfare Program. Producing the necessities of life is simple and easy compared with distributing those necessities in such a manner as to exalt the poor. A major reason for establishing welfare production projects in the beginning of this program was to provide employment for those who were unemployed. We must emphasize and re-emphasize this aspect of our welfare work. Insofar as possible, welfare production projects should be so planned that they can in large measure be operated by those who will use the production thereof. Our buildings and our grounds, our cattle, all of our property can provide opportunity for people in need to work. Our objective, I repeat, is to build people and to meet that purpose for which the program was set up.

To provide for people who are able to work, without providing them the opportunity to work is a bad practice. On this matter I call your attention to these words of President Brigham Young.

"My experience has taught me," he says, "and it has become a principle with me, that it is never any benefit to give, out and out, to man or woman, money, food, clothing, or anything else, if they are able-bodied, and can work and earn what they need, when there is anything on the earth for them to do. This is my principle, and I try to act upon it. To pursue a contrary course would ruin any community in the world and make them idlers." (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, 1954 ed., p. 274.)

And upon another occasion he said,

"To give to the idler is as wicked as anything else. Never give anything to the idler." (*Ibid.*, p. 275.)

That is the man who won't work when he has the opportunity.

I agree, however, with President Clark's statement,

"We are persuaded that our people are not idlers and have no desire to get something for nothing from any source; that, on the contrary, they not only wish for but welcome the opportunity to work for what they get."

No stone must be left unturned to find work for the unemployed to do in exchange for the relief granted to them. Every possible effort must be made to preserve the moral stamina of our people.

God bless you, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.