

Elder Franklin D. Richards

Of the First Council of the Seventy

My dear brothers and sisters: The counsel of President Kimball and my Brethren, as well as the beautiful music and opening prayer, have made this a most inspirational meeting.

In connection with my new calling, I am truly appreciative of the confidence placed in me by my Father in heaven and my Brethren. I approach this assignment with a deep sense of humility, and with full commitment to devote my best efforts in the building of the kingdom of God. To President Dilworth Young and those of the First Council of the Seventy just released, I express my love and appreciation.

We are living in a difficult but a remarkable age, the dispensation of the fulness of times.

I am grateful that my spirit was reserved to come forth at this particular time and for the knowledge that God lives and that Jesus is the Christ, our Savior and Redeemer.

It is a great privilege to be able to bear witness that the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored in its fulness, through the instrumentality of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and that there is a prophet of God on the earth today, our beloved prophet and president, Spencer W. Kimball. May the Lord bless and sustain him, and may we have the wisdom and courage to follow his counsel.

The Church of Jesus Christ was established in the meridian of time and reestablished in this dispensation for two great purposes: first, to proclaim the truth concerning man's salvation to all the world, and second, to perfect those who accept the gospel of Jesus Christ.

To accomplish the first objective—to take the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is engaged in a worldwide missionary effort, with approximately

150 missions and 25,000 full-time missionaries. With additional thousands of stake and district missionaries, and with the "every member a missionary" program becoming more effective, the Church is growing at an accelerated rate.

Perfecting the Saints

With reference to the perfecting of the Saints, the Savior has asked us to become perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect. (See Matt. 5:48.) In modern revelation we are told that we "are not able to abide the presence of God now, neither the ministering of angels; wherefore, continue in patience until ye are perfected." (D&C 67:13.)

To accomplish the second objective, the perfecting of the Saints, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints provides opportunities for all members to become involved in many different kinds of activities that develop them mentally, morally, physically, and spiritually in the perfection process.

A high percentage of the members of the Church are active in the perfection process and are being blessed in many ways.

Prospective elders

There are, however, many inactive men who do not hold the Melchizedek Priesthood. These potential leaders are called prospective elders. We have a great challenge to bring these, our brothers, more actively into the perfection process.

President Spencer W. Kimball, referring to this challenge in a talk in which he asked members of the Church to lengthen their stride, said, "The cycles of inactivity and indifference are recurring cycles from father to son. The Church must now break that cycle at

Friday, October 1

First Day

two points simultaneously: We must reach out and hold many more of our young men of the Aaronic Priesthood to keep them faithful, to help them to be worthy to go on missions, and to be married in the holy temple; we must, at the same time, reach and hold more of the fathers and the prospective holders of the Melchizedek Priesthood!

"We must find improved ways of vitalizing our Melchizedek Priesthood quorums, particularly in order to reach the prospective elders who are, in so many cases, the fathers of so many of our boys and girls and our young men and women." ("Lengthening Our Stride," Seminar for Regional Representatives of the Twelve, Oct. 3, 1974.)

A great challenge

This presents a great challenge not only to priesthood quorums, but to the Church as a whole, and it is with reference to this matter that I wish to direct the major portion of my remarks today.

Why are these members inactive? I believe the main reasons are, first, they do not understand the gospel, and second, they do not fully appreciate the blessings that come from Church activity.

What can be done to reduce the number of young men attaining the age of eighteen and not being ordained elders? Let me give a few suggestions and examples.

We must recognize that the programs of the Aaronic Priesthood quorums and auxiliaries, together with the seminary and institute programs, are playing a very important role in training these young men. However, their parents, family, and all of us can also have a tremendous influence in their lives.

Parents' example

The living example set by parents

is consciously and unconsciously absorbed by children.

Solomon, in his wisdom, has told us: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it." (Prov. 22:6.)

Recently, I was staying in the home of a stake president who had a young son nine years of age. I was to sleep in this young man's bedroom and noticed on his dresser a little cardboard bank with three compartments, one for his tithing, one for his mission, and one for fun. I asked this young man if he was going on a mission, and he replied, "That's what I'm saving my money for." I am sure that with this type of planning he will be worthy to be ordained an elder and prepared for missionary service.

I was in another stake president's home one weekend and was to sleep in another boy's room. There on the wall were pictures of all the Church temples. He was planning for a temple marriage as well as a mission.

Older children also have a great influence upon younger children. A few weeks ago as I was interviewing a prospective missionary, I asked him, "Why do you want to go on a mission?" He replied, "I know this church is the Church of Jesus Christ, and I want to tell others about it. And, besides," he said, "I'm the oldest child in the family, and I want to set a pattern for my brothers to follow." What a wonderful spirit.

Methods of re-activation

And now concerning the many thousands of good men who do not yet hold the Melchizedek Priesthood and whom we refer to as prospective elders. Let us not forget that many stake presidents, bishops, high councilors, quorum leaders, and other leaders at one time in their lives were inactive or prospective elders. What caused them to become involved again in the perfection process? Perhaps a few examples will

point out some of the important reasons for their return.

A reactivated elder recently stood in a fast and testimony meeting and explained what it meant to have his firstborn child enter into their home. "When I began to realize my responsibility to guide this wonderful little soul through life," he explained, "I knew that only by honoring the priesthood I had neglected could I be the kind of father I want to be."

Recently, a former prospective elder told me what it meant to him for the elders quorum president to ask him to serve as an assistant secretary in the elders quorum presidency. He took a week to decide to accept the assignment, but when he did, he marveled at the change that came into his life. He said, "Suddenly, I felt not only wanted, but actually needed."

I am convinced that we can lengthen our stride by working with *groups* of prospective elders in firesides or cottage meetings. These wonderful men can move more rapidly and comfortably into Church activity when grouped according to age, education, hobbies, etc., and when approached as compatible groups together with their wives.

High priests and seventies can be called upon to assist in teaching and fellowshiping those of similar age groups.

Quorum involvement

Excellent results have been achieved by many elders quorums in teaching temple project groups. Retreats for prospective elders and their wives with home teachers or quorum officers and their wives have developed friendships and spirituality that have changed many lives forever.

Just a few days ago a man and his wife, neighbors of ours who have just been involved in such a temple project group, told us that the results were far beyond their expectations. This

particular prospective elder had previously been reluctant but is now preparing to take his family to the temple. They were greatly impressed by the spirit of caring shown by the brothers and sisters involved in the teaching process.

Many prospective elders are married to nonmember wives. These cases provide an excellent opportunity for the elders quorum president to arrange for the ward mission leader to assign stake or full-time missionaries to teach the nonmember wives, with the cooperation and in the presence of the inactive husbands.

In my opinion this missionary approach should be one of our major efforts in accomplishing our objectives, particularly as study is so vital in obtaining a knowledge of the gospel.

We should involve prospective elders in Church activities, even though at first assignments may be of a minor nature. I recall listening to thrilling reports from prospective elders and new converts who were assigned jobs to raise and lower the chapel flag each day, or to keep the songbooks in repair, or to assist quorum officers. In each instance the persons involved were happy and had very worthwhile experiences.

Returning to activity

In conclusion let me share with you some of the feelings of a prospective elder who has recently come into full Church activity. He writes: "Returning to church activity after years of absence would have been impossible without a lot of help. I'll always be grateful for that evening when my elders quorum president came to my home and said, 'Roger, starting next Sunday evening we are having two other couples over to our home once a week to talk about some important gospel principles. We would be pleased if you and Pat would join us.'

"I know it took courage for him to invite us, but that was an important be-

gining. That was the first time anyone had ever asked me to get back into Church activity. In those fireside meetings my wife and I learned things about the gospel that we had never understood before. When testimonies were expressed, we felt feelings that had been dulled by many years of inactivity.

"As we started having family prayers together, we felt a special spirit enter into our home. Before long I became so anxious to learn about the gospel that I found myself reading the scriptures on the bus going to and from work and even during my noon hour."

His letter then tells of the great joy he and his wife felt when they went to the temple, where they and their children were sealed together for time and for all eternity. And now they are helping prepare their three sons for missionary service.

Perfect our lives

To you who are not now involved in Church activity, we extend to you our love and want you to know how eager we are to share with you the blessings of the priesthood and the gospel. There will never be a better time than now to become active in the process of self-

perfection. I promise you it will bring you peace, happiness, and joy, along with growth and development.

May all of us seek to perfect our lives in the pattern of the Savior, and may we help each other in the perfection process. I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

President Spencer W. Kimball

We have just heard from Elder Franklin D. Richards of the First Council of the Seventy.

The Tabernacle Choir will now sing for us.

The Tabernacle Choir sang "Thanks Be To God," after which Alexander Schreiner played an organ interlude.

President Kimball

It is now our privilege to hear from Elder Howard W. Hunter of the Council of the Twelve Apostles. He will now address us.

Elder Howard W. Hunter

Of the Council of the Twelve

There are times in our struggle with the adversities of mortality when we become weary, weakened, and susceptible to the temptations that seem to be placed in our pathways. A lesson for us lies in the account of the life of the Savior.

Temptations of Christ

Soon after his baptism Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wild, unculti-

vated wilderness. There he remained for forty days and nights, preparing himself for the formal ministry which was then to begin. The greatest task ever to be accomplished in this world lay before him, and he needed divine strength. Throughout these days in the wilderness he chose to fast, that his mortal body might be completely subjected to the divine influence of his Father's Spirit.