

A Call to Action

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My dear brothers and sisters, I have been reflecting on the counsels of the First Presidency relative to Welfare Services, and I have been impressed that through them we all have received a call to action. President Kimball reminded us in the April 1976 welfare session of general conference of the words of the Lord:

“Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46.)

On February 2 of this year, at a historic meeting of the General Welfare Services Committee of the Church, President Marion G. Romney stated:

“All Church members, from kindergarten to high priests groups and all Relief Society sisters, should be so plainly, accurately, and inspirationally taught that *they will be motivated to implement* applicable welfare principles and procedures in their personal lives and in their family and Church responsibilities.”

There is no mistaking these counsels. They are asking us, pleading with us, to *do*, to *implement*, to *accomplish* the welfare work of the Church. We have been reevaluating the crucial role of Relief Society workers in this area. We recognize that the women of the Church have a great responsibility to *help*, to *teach*, to *implement*, and to *work* in harmony and in partnership with the priesthood in this important work.

In one ward a Relief Society president seemed to understand these responsibilities. In a regular weekly ward welfare services committee meeting she reported that an elderly widow was having trouble coping with life after the recent loss of her husband. Her health was waning, her legs were causing her problems and limiting her ability to move about and care for herself. She was understandably very lonely and also worried about her neglected garden. Considerable concern was expressed about her poor diet. The ward Relief Society president explained that compassionate service assignments had been made to the visiting teachers and to other sisters in the ward to help her plan and prepare three balanced meals each day and to organize and do such needed housework as the sister would permit. The home teachers agreed to ask her if she would like them to give her a special blessing. They also said they would keep up her garden and look for other ways to be helpful.

After several weeks, as a result of the blessing and the loving help, she gained courage and a desire to be self-sustaining.

This story illustrates how the ward welfare services committee can work together to meet the needs of ward members.

Stake and district Relief Society presidencies everywhere should plan what to teach so that ward and branch presidencies will more fully understand and carry out their welfare duties efficiently and effectively. Specifically, they should teach how a ward Relief Society president—

1. *Assists* the bishop in determining and matching needs and resources.
2. *Makes visits* to the family and follows up as assigned by the bishop.

3. *Directs* the use of Relief Society resources in providing compassionate services.
4. *Instructs* visiting teachers in ways they can assist.
5. *Keeps strictly confidential* all matters relating to each case and encourages others to do likewise.
6. *Becomes familiar* with bishop's storehouse items or items which must be purchased commercially and counsels with the woman in the home as to what to buy and how to use her resources.
7. *Becomes familiar* with acceptable community resources and makes effective use of them.
8. *Consults* with her counselors on their welfare duties.
9. *Correlates*, under the direction of the bishop, all welfare activities assigned to the Relief Society.

As Relief Society presidents perform these functions they will be fulfilling a primary purpose of the Relief Society as laid down by the Prophet Joseph Smith when he said that an objective of the Relief Society is "the relief of the poor, the destitute, the widow and the orphan, and for the exercise of all benevolent purposes." (*History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4:567.)

As we serve we should be fulfilling the priesthood expectations as stated by President Harold B. Lee in a welfare meeting in October of 1946:

"I would like to think this: A wife in a home, a woman, is expected to be ... an intelligent and inspired participant in the family partnership. That is just where we think the place of the Relief Society is in the Welfare Program. ... We expect that they shall be invited in as intelligent participants in the *planning* of the Welfare partnership, and without that invitation and without that opportunity, we are not going to get the solidarity that we otherwise could expect." (*Relief Society Magazine*, Dec. 1946, p. 814.)

President Tanner restated this partnership principle in June 1976 when he said:

"The presidency of the Relief Society, having a specific responsibility placed upon them by the President of the Church at the time they were organized, should be considered as a partner with the Melchizedek Priesthood in somewhat the same manner as a wife would work with her husband in directing the affairs of the family." (Announcement by the First Presidency, reported in *Church News*, June 5, 1976, p. 3.)

In welfare services the Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society leaders should exemplify that partnership at the stake level by correlating plans for the proper training of ward officers, and at the ward level in both the training of ward welfare services personnel and in implementing the program.

Something of this relationship might be seen if I relate a conversation with a friend of mine. He said, "My wife and I decided to face the front of our home with rocks. So I called around and located a place where I could get them.

"I started to get into my truck when my wife called to me and said, 'Let me go with you. I want to help you.'

"When we got to the place where the rocks were located, we found them on the top of a hill. I complained, 'That's going to be a terrible job to get those rocks down.'

"My wife said, 'I'll go up to the top of the hill and roll the rocks down to you and then you'll just have to carry

them over to the truck. How does that sound?’

“I thought that was a good idea,” he said. “I watched her climb to the top of the hill and disappear for a few minutes. Soon she called out, ‘Here comes the first rock. Here comes another one.’ Then she said, ‘Oh, this rock is a beauty. I hope this one won’t be too heavy for you to carry.’

“I said, ‘I’ll carry anything you roll down.’

“Then she said, ‘Look at this rock. It has real character. Here comes my favorite.’”

He said, “She actually had me waiting anxiously for each rock.” And then he said, “In this endeavor, as in many other of our projects together, she had given me not only the help I needed but a perspective that often eludes men.”

I would like to see all sisters, particularly Relief Society presidents, acting as helpmeets to the priesthood in the rendering of welfare assistance.

I urge Relief Society leaders everywhere to accept the call to action of our inspired prophets to perform and to accomplish our assigned welfare tasks. May we work together as companions with the priesthood, remembering the principle of partnership; may we teach effectively the fundamentals of welfare services, and implement them by enlarging our vision of this work, particularly as it applies to the art of compassionate services. For as President Marion G. Romney once said:

“Effective administration of relief to the poor is an art, and it is an art which every dedicated Relief Society worker will seek to perfect in herself.” (*Relief Society Magazine*, Feb. 1961, p. 77.)

I pray that every Relief Society worker and leader will recognize our great opportunity, our obligation to render assistance to those in need, sympathetically, appropriately, and lovingly—even in the spirit of Jesus Christ when he said:

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13:35.)

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.