

that we are led by a living prophet today. May the words to this favorite Primary song ring in their hearts as they do in mine today:

I feel my Savior's love
 And know that he will bless me.
 I offer him my heart;
 My shepherd he will be.
 He knows I will follow him,
 Give all my life to him.
 I feel my Savior's love,
 The love he freely gives me.
 ["I Feel My Savior's Love," *Children's Songbook*, p. 74]

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

We have just heard from Sister Michaelene P. Grassli, former general Primary president. She has served as a board member of the Primary, a counselor in the Primary presidency, and as president for a total of twenty years. We thank her and her wonderful counselors, Sister Jepsen and Sister Wright, and welcome to their opportunities our new Primary presidency.

Elder David B. Haight of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will be our next speaker.

Elder David B. Haight

Solemn assemblies

From the depths of my soul I have prayed for the direction and influence of the Holy Ghost on this heaven-directed occasion. The proceedings have been most impressive as a new chapter of Church history begins.

Only a few months ago we mourned the death and loss of a great leader, President Ezra Taft Benson, who served a lifetime of faithful service, dedicating his time and inspired leadership to the building of God's kingdom here upon the earth and serving his countrymen with deep loyalty and concern for the nation's welfare. He has joined his eternal companion, Flora, and their other loved ones on the other side in a continuation of his foreordained calling.

Today we are witnesses to and participants in a most sacred occasion—a solemn assembly to act upon heavenly things. As in olden times, there has been much fasting and prayer offered by the Saints throughout the world that they may receive an outpouring of the Spirit of the Lord, which is so much in evidence here on this occasion this morning.

A solemn assembly, as the name implies, denotes a sacred, sober, and reverent occasion when the Saints assemble under the direction of the First Presidency. Solemn assemblies are used for three purposes: the dedication of temples, special instruction to priesthood leaders, and sustaining a new President of the Church. This conference session today is a solemn assembly for the purpose of sustaining a newly called Church President and other officers of the Church.

There is a pattern to solemn assemblies that distinguishes them from other general Church meetings where we sustain officers of the Church. That pattern, which was established by the Prophet Joseph Smith, is that the priesthood quorums, commencing with the First Presidency, stand and manifest by the uplifted right hand their willingness to sustain the President of the Church as a prophet, seer, and revelator, and uphold him by their confidence, faith, and prayers. The priesthood quorums of the Church so manifest by their vote. Then the general body of all the Saints stand and signify their willingness to do the

same. The other leaders of the Church are similarly sustained in their offices and callings.

Sustaining leaders—a solemn covenant

When we sustain the President of the Church by our uplifted hand, it not only signifies that we acknowledge before God that he is the rightful possessor of all the priesthood keys; it also means that we covenant with God that we will abide by the direction and the counsel that come through His prophet. It is a solemn covenant.

On the day the Church was organized, the Lord gave this commandment to the Church:

“For his [the Church president’s] word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.

“For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name’s glory.

“For thus saith the Lord God: Him have I inspired to move the cause of Zion in mighty power for good” (D&C 21:5–7).

The first solemn assembly was held in the Kirtland Temple on 27 March 1836. Following the voting procedure that I described, the Prophet Joseph Smith recorded, “I prophesied to all, that inasmuch as they would uphold these men in their several stations, . . . the Lord would bless them; . . . in the name of [Jesus] Christ, the blessings of heaven should be theirs” (*History of the Church*, 2:418).

Today, by exercising the principle of common consent, we have expressed our will. How sacred is this privilege and responsibility? So sacred that in the great priesthood revelation, the Lord said that these matters “may be brought before a general assembly of the several quorums, *which constitute the spiritual authorities of the church*” (D&C 107:32; italics added).

Succession in the Presidency

The Prophet Joseph Smith declared, “Where [the President is] not, there is no First Presidency” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938], p. 106). Following the death of the President of the Church, the next ranking body, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, becomes the presiding authority. The president of the quorum becomes the *Acting* President of the Church until a new President of the Church is officially ordained and set apart in that office.

Our fifth article of faith declares, “We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.”

The revealed process by which Howard W. Hunter became the President of the Church began when he was called, ordained, and set apart to become a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles—a call that was inspired of the Lord. That calling and ordination placed the newly called Apostle in a priesthood quorum with eleven other men who hold the apostleship.

Each Apostle is ordained under the direction of the President of the Church, who holds the keys of all of the kingdom of God. He gives to each new Apostle the priesthood authority necessary for him to hold every position in the Church.

We declare that the authority to administer in the name of God is operative in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints today. We further testify that this power or commission was conferred on the first officers of the Church by ordination under the hands of those who held the same power in earlier dispensations. Joseph Smith received the keys of the apostleship from Peter, James, and John, the same who held the authority of the apostleship in the New Testament

times. This authority has come down from the Prophet Joseph Smith to President Howard W. Hunter.

False claims of apostolic authority

During the days of Joseph Smith, there were some who were pretenders to apostolic authority. One such was an elder who was sent by Joseph Smith to preach the gospel. It was not long until this elder proclaimed himself a high priest and said he had been ordained by an angel from heaven. He deceived some Church members. He was called back to Ohio by the Prophet Joseph Smith and questioned about his claims. He soon confessed that he had lied, and he begged forgiveness. Orson Hyde, one of the Twelve Apostles, recorded the principle that the Prophet then taught all those who were assembled in the School of the Prophets:

“No true angel from God will ever come to ordain any man, because they have once been sent to establish the priesthood by ordaining me thereunto; . . . the priesthood being once established on earth, with power to ordain others, no heavenly messenger will ever come to interfere with that power by ordaining any more. . . . You may therefore know, from this time forward, that if any man comes to you professing to be ordained by an angel, he is either a liar or has been imposed upon in consequence of transgression by an angel of the devil, for this priesthood shall never be taken away from this church” (“Although Dead, Yet He Speaketh,” *Millennial Star*, 20 Nov. 1846, p. 139).

In later years another Apostle, Elder George Q. Cannon, reaffirmed that principle to the Church. Quoting Brother Cannon:

“God, having once bestowed the keys of the holy Priesthood on man here on the earth for the up-building of His Church, will never take them from the man or men who hold them [who lead

the Church] and *authorize others to bestow them*” (in *Journal of Discourses*, 13:47; italics added).

The instructions by the Prophet Joseph Smith and Elder George Q. Cannon should be a warning and testimony to any pretender who claims apostolic authority on the basis that he has been visited by angels. It should also be a warning to anyone who may be so deceived as to follow these false shepherds.

President Hunter is truly Christlike

We have sustained as God’s prophet on earth a kind, sensitive servant of God—Howard William Hunter. He is a humble, faithful, scholarly, and gentle soul, one who has experienced deep sorrow and suffered serious infirmities and even a threat upon his life, but, with his Scottish ancestral determination, has never given in or given up.

How tenderly he cared for his Claire during her illness, sitting by her bedside night after night, caring for her every need. We are witnesses of President Hunter’s deep sorrow and loneliness in the slow losing of his eternal companion.

President Hunter understands compassion, thankfulness, graciousness, charity, and gratitude toward individuals and toward mankind, and he has the saintly bearing of a prophet of God. He, in my estimation, is truly Christlike.

Service as bishop and stake president

More than forty years ago he was ordained as a new bishop in Southern California. In his blessing he was promised, “You shall be known as an honest, just and honorable bishop among the members of [your] ward—and in future years, these members will come to you with tears . . . and thank you for your blessings, and your guiding hand, and the administration of the work you are now called upon to do” (quoted in Eleanor Knowles, *Howard W. Hunter* [Salt Lake

City: Deseret Book Co., 1994], p. 101). That blessing has proven true.

In February 1950, Bishop Howard W. Hunter was called to be the new stake president of the Pasadena California Stake by Elders Stephen L. Richards and Harold B. Lee. President Hunter not only served his stake members with distinction but assisted the expanding Church in many priesthood leadership assignments in welfare, education, and missionary opportunities, and he had a significant role in the building of the Los Angeles Temple.

President Hunter's leadership and strong moral values were recognized as a powerful influence in the Church organization, which he loves, and also in the Los Angeles civic community.

Special witness of Jesus Christ

The calling to the apostleship was issued to Brother Hunter by President David O. McKay in October 1959. On that occasion President McKay said to him, "The Lord has spoken. You are called to be one of his special witnesses, and tomorrow you will be sustained as a member of the Council of the Twelve" (quoted in Knowles, *Howard W. Hunter*, p. 144).

A prophet is one who knows by personal revelation from the Holy Ghost that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, for "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy," as the Prophet Joseph taught us (Revelation 19:10; see also *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 119). Thus every prophet bears record of Jesus Christ.

The sermons, writings, and teachings of him whom we have sustained this day attest that he is indeed a prophet and a special witness of our Lord and Savior. I quote from one of President Howard Hunter's many public statements of testimony of our Lord and Savior that he has offered to the Church and to the world. President Hunter declared:

"As one called and ordained to bear witness of the name of Jesus Christ to all the world, I testify . . . that he lives. He has a glorified, immortal body of flesh and bones. He is the Only Begotten Son of the Father in the flesh. He is the Savior, the Light and Life of the world. Following his crucifixion and death, he appeared as a resurrected being to Mary, to Peter, to Paul, and to many others. He showed himself to the Nephites. He has shown himself to Joseph Smith, the boy prophet, and to many others in our dispensation. This is his church; he leads it today" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1988, p. 19; or *Ensign*, May 1988, p. 17).

So testified at that time President Hunter. And so I have the honor and privilege on this day to testify of President Hunter. With all my heart and every fiber of my body, I support, sustain, and express my love to President Howard W. Hunter as prophet, seer, and revelator and President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—and to the noble men, President Gordon B. Hinckley and President Thomas S. Monson, who stand by his side in the First Presidency. All are great men of God—faithful and fearless—who, as inspired servants of God, will lead the Church forward, on to greater heights and expansion throughout the world.

I bear this testimony to you in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The chorus sang "Praise to the Man."

President Monson

Elder David B. Haight of the Council of the Twelve Apostles has just addressed us, followed by the Mormon Youth Chorus singing "Praise to the Man."

Elder L. Tom Perry, also of the Council of the Twelve, will be our concluding speaker for this session.