

Rejoice, Daughters of Zion

Mary Ellen Smoot

Women throughout the world will be drawn to the Church as we perfect our lives and live essential truths to light the way for others to follow.

My dear sisters of the Relief Society, I humbly stand before you this day with gratitude in my heart that knows no bounds. I testify to you that in the last months the Lord's Spirit has hovered over the organizations of this Church. We have felt His guiding influence as I have worked with my very capable counselors, our devoted priesthood advisers, board members, and our supportive staff, earnestly praying for direction as we move this work forward. We have diligently researched and evaluated how to lift our sisters, wherever you are serving, in an effort to determine how each of us can catch the vision of the magnificent potential of the Relief Society organization.

I pray that the Spirit of the Holy Ghost will bless you with a greater vision of who you are, why you are here, and the unique gifts you have to bring to the Relief Society organization. It is my hope that as you ponder the direction you will receive this night from the First Presidency and your Relief Society general presidency, you will receive a witness that it is indeed direction that comes from the Lord. This is a monumental moment, one of great significance as we prepare for the future.

In Zechariah 2:10–11 [Zech. 2:10–11] we read:

“Rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord.

“And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto thee.”

We gather together as sisters of a worldwide church with rejoicing in the blessings that the gospel brings. It is truly a day to lift up our hearts! First and foremost, we rejoice in our knowledge that our Heavenly Father loves each of us. We rejoice in our testimonies of Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice. We rejoice in the restoration of the gospel and the mighty work accomplished by the Prophet Joseph Smith. We rejoice that we live in a day when a living prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, boldly moves forward the mighty work of the Lord. We rejoice in the number of temples being built, the breakthrough in computer science to research our ancestors, and the excitement for service. We rejoice in the number of missionaries being sent into all the lands of the earth to gather the honest in heart. We rejoice in our individual lives and the opportunity given to each of us to be part of God's great plan of happiness. We rejoice in the organization of the Relief Society, and we know that women throughout the world will be drawn to the Church as we perfect our lives and live essential truths to light the way for others to follow.

In the words of Wordsworth we recall:

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,*

*Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home.*

During the past two and a half years of our service in the Relief Society general presidency, we are aware that people of the world are curious about Relief Society.

In an effort to respond to the inquiries from outside the Church, and to remind ourselves of the grand blessings of womanhood, we as a Relief Society general presidency present the following: *We are beloved spirit daughters of God, and our lives have meaning, purpose, and direction. As a worldwide sisterhood, we are united in our devotion to Jesus Christ, our Savior and Exemplar. We are women of faith, virtue, vision, and charity who: Increase our testimonies of Jesus Christ through prayer and scripture study. Seek spiritual strength by following the promptings of the Holy Ghost. Dedicate ourselves to strengthening marriages, families, and homes. Find nobility in motherhood and joy in womanhood. Delight in service and good works. Love life and learning. Stand for truth and righteousness. Sustain the priesthood as the authority of God on earth. Rejoice in the blessings of the temple, understand our divine destiny, and strive for exaltation.*

We as a presidency rejoice in this declaration, approved and endorsed by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, which clearly sets forth principles of attitude and action that will lead each of us back into the presence of our Heavenly Father. As we individually apply these teachings, we will, as Father Lehi hoped, reach the tree of life. In 1 Nephi 8:12 [1 Ne. 8:12] we read, “And as I partook of the fruit ... it filled my soul with ... joy; wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit.”

We, like Father Lehi, have a hope that as we journey along our path of life, we will partake of the fruit found in this gospel of Jesus Christ in a personal way and experience joy that will fill our souls with greater faith, hope, and charity. Together let’s examine some of those qualities and how they can affect our lives.

As a worldwide sisterhood, we are united in our devotion to Jesus Christ, our Savior and Exemplar.

We declare to the world that it is not by chance that we have embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ; it rings true! This great plan, when reflected upon, puts this life in perspective.

We know we have and always will exist. We know we have been sent to earth to gain experience and prove ourselves. The decisions we make are vital if we are to gain eternal life and exaltation. We know that this estate is important, and this understanding gives meaning, purpose, and direction in our lives. Ultimately all of us want to learn our lessons well and return home to our loving Heavenly Father.

We accept the Savior as the Only Begotten Son of our Heavenly Father. We know that through Him we will be redeemed and resurrected. Therefore, “we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ” (2 Ne. 25:26).

We have faith, virtue, vision, and charity.

As we visit your part of the world, we see many Relief Society sisters who hold fast to the iron rod. We have faith when the storms of life come, and we choose to keep ourselves clean and pure when temptation arises.

We see a well of charity spring out of each heart as a sister seeks the “pure love of Christ” (Moro. 10:47).

We dedicate ourselves to strengthening marriages, families, and homes and find nobility in motherhood and joy in womanhood.

We understand that the home is the basic unit created by God for our service and learning. Out of this understanding grows a commitment to make our time spent with family a top priority and to look inside to determine how to be a better companion. Out of these reflections flow actions that are kind and loving and forgiving toward our spouses. We see sisters who truly desire their children to partake of the fruit of the gospel by going on missions and marrying in the temple, so they spend time holding meaningful family home evenings, family scripture study, and prayer, and in regular personal temple attendance. The declaration will be a continual reminder to focus on our most important responsibilities.

But not all women give birth to those they mother.

President Joseph F. Smith was left an orphan at the early age of 13. He was later sent on a mission to the Hawaiian Islands. On the island of Molokai he contracted a severe fever and was seriously ill for three months. A wonderful Hawaiian sister took him into her home and tended him as lovingly as though he were her own son.

Many years later President Smith visited the islands as President of the Church. Charles Nibley tenderly described the experience:

“It was a beautiful sight to see the deep-seated love, the even tearful affection, that these people had for him. In the midst of it all I noticed a poor, old, blind woman, tottering under the weight of about ninety years, being led in. She had a few choice bananas in her hand. It was her all—her offering. She was calling, ‘Iosepa, Iosepa.’ Instantly, when he saw her, he ran to her and clasped her in his arms, hugged her, and kissed her, ... patting her on the head saying, ‘Mama, Mama, my dear old Mama.’

“And with tears streaming down his cheeks he turned to me and said, ‘Charlie, she nursed me when I was a boy, sick and without anyone to care for me. She took me in and was a mother to me’” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* [1998], xvi, 192).

We can all extend our arms in love to others and give gifts of compassion and tenderness that can only flow from a woman’s heart.

We delight in service and good works.

Several weeks ago a tornado touched down in Salt Lake City, leaving in its path devastation and destruction. The following morning a stake Relief Society president, whose own home sustained considerable damage, had a report prepared which provided information to her priesthood leaders for future visits and assessments.

Literacy is another way to assist others and change their lives forever. One counselor over education caught that vision. She invited two friends, and together they attended classes learning how to teach English as a second language. They are now teaching English to a wonderful family of 13 from Kosovo. Literacy has been a blessing

for both the teachers and the students.

We stand for truth and righteousness.

We speak out to stop the flowing tide of filth and corruption that is a plague in our society. Sisters who know right from wrong stand firm on the Lord's side, making choices that set them apart from the rest of the world as they carefully monitor the family's use of television programs, dress modestly, and refrain from watching any films that glorify violence and immoral behavior.

We sustain the priesthood as the authority of God on earth.

We see sisters in this great Church who recognize the blessings of the restored priesthood. We rejoice as each baby is blessed, each child is baptized, as we partake of the sacrament and are set apart for Church callings and watch our husbands give fathers' blessings. We are grateful for priesthood blessings that light our way and give us direction and hope. We rejoice in and support worthy priesthood holders.

We rejoice in the blessings of the temple, understand our divine destiny, and strive for exaltation.

We see sisters who rejoice in the blessings of the temple—sisters who seek to make and keep their covenants, do work for their kindred dead, and in the process find their own loads lifted and their power to resist temptation fortified, daughters of God who understand their divine destiny, catch a vision of their potential, and focus on overcoming weaknesses.

We testify that each of us has a vital role, even a sacred mission to perform as a daughter in Zion. It is a new day, the dawning of a new era. It is our time, and it is our destiny to rejoice as we fill the earth with greater kindness and gentleness, greater love and compassion, greater sympathy and empathy than has ever been known before. It is time to give ourselves to the Master and allow Him to lead us into fruitful fields where we can enrich a world filled with darkness and misery. Each of us, no matter who we are, no matter where we serve, must arise and make the most of each opportunity that comes. We must follow the counsel given by the Lord and His servants and make our homes houses of prayer and havens of security and safety. We can and must deepen our faith by increasing our obedience and sacrifice. In this individual process a miracle will take place. The Relief Society will begin to stretch and reach out to the millions in need. It will continue to become an organization that brings relief and rejoicing. This will happen one sister at a time. We will unite in our righteousness and truly partake of the fruit of the tree of life together. The fruits of our labors can heal the world, and, sisters, in the process they can heal us too!

It is my humble prayer that each of us will leave this meeting determined to devote our lives to Christ. I promise you that as you do so, you will have every reason to rejoice, for the Lord "will dwell in the midst of thee" (Zech. 2:11). This I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

