

# Chapter 7: *Family Organizations*

## *Direction Given to Families*

The family [is] the most important organization in time and all eternity; . . . the preservation of family life in time and eternity takes precedence above all other interests . . . . Because of this confidence in the perpetuity of the home and family into the eternities, we build our most elaborate and expensive structures temples of God . . . so that man, woman, and their children may be bound together by covenant in an everlasting union which will transcend all the limitations of this mortal sphere (Perry 1982, 55).

When prophets teach about redeeming the dead, they are often directing their instructions to families, rather than just to individuals. For example, consider the following statement by the Prophet Joseph Smith, quoted earlier in chapter four:

But how are they to become saviors on Mount Zion? By building their temples, erecting their baptismal fonts, and going forth and receiving all the ordinances, baptisms, confirmations, washings, anointings, ordinations, and sealing powers upon their heads, in behalf of their progenitors who are dead, and redeem them that they may come forth in the first resurrection and be exalted to thrones of glory with them; and therein is the chain that binds the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, which fulfills the mission of Elijah.

The Saints have not too much time to save and redeem their dead, and gather together their living relatives, that they may be saved also, before the earth will be smitten, and the consumption decree falls upon the world.

I would advise all the Saints to go to with their might and gather together all their living relatives to this place, that they may be sealed and saved, that they may be prepared against the day that the destroying angel goes forth; and if the whole Church should go to with all their might to save their dead, seal their posterity and gather their living friends, and spend none of their time in behalf of the world, they would hardly get through before night would come, when no man can work . . . (Smith 1978, 6:183).

Some of Joseph Smith's instructions here are directed to the Church as an organization. Neither the individual Church member nor the individual family is expected to undertake the task of building temples and erecting baptismal fonts. Some of Joseph Smith's teachings, on the other hand, are specifically directed to families. For example, the work of receiving ordinances for ancestors and gathering together living relatives should be coordinated among family members. If each individual member were to attempt to perform these tasks without working with the rest of the family, confusion and massive duplication of effort would result.

Now consider President Wilford Woodruff's instructions given in chapter two. He said:

We want the Latter-day Saints from this time to trace their genealogies as far as they can, and to be sealed to their fathers and mothers. Have children sealed to their parents, and run this chain through as far as you can get it (Woodruff 1969, 157).

Each of us has an individual responsibility to follow President Woodruff's instruction. Elder Boyd K. Packer has further taught:

All that I have learned from the revelations and from reading the statements of the prophets has fixed two things in my mind. First, we are individually responsible to seek after our kindred dead and see that the temple ordinances are performed for them. Second, once those names have been found, we are to establish family relationships. Genealogical and temple work is lineage-linked. We are linking the generations together (Packer 1980, 225).

However, the Church does not teach that every individual member should shoulder total personal responsibility to trace the genealogies of all of his or her kindred dead. Instead, research in extended generations should typically be a cooperative effort among descendants. Over the years, the Church has provided tools, such as the Pedigree Resource File, Ancestral File, and [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) to help researchers coordinate with each other so they can prevent unnecessary duplication of effort. Today, the Family Tree ([www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)) facilitates greater collaboration between family members.

Not all family members will want to assist with the effort of doing research in extended generations. There are many other things that family members can do to support the research effort, such as searching individual records under the direction of a researcher, entering data, providing funds, and so on. Any of these activities, to the degree that they are beneficial to the effort, can rightfully be considered "seeking after our kindred dead." Each member of the family can assist in some way.

Because of the wide variety of personal and family circumstances, it is not possible to specify in detail how all families should be organized to coordinate their work and help accomplish the redemption of the living and the dead. The fundamental principle is that we should work together where possible, both Church members and non-Church members. No one individual should assume that everything rests on his or her shoulders. Instead, we should reach out to our families. Each family member can render a unique service, which varies over time as family needs and circumstances vary.

Whether formally or informally organized as such, it is helpful to think in terms of three types of family organizations: "immediate," "grandparent," and "ancestral." As far as is possible, every member of the Church should belong to an immediate family organization as well as a grandparent family organization. Where needed, ancestral family organizations could also be organized, incorporating a wider range of relatives.

## ***The Role of the Immediate Family Organization***

The immediate family organization consists of parents and their children. Key temple and family history responsibilities of the immediate family include:

- Invite all family members to come unto Christ by learning the gospel, being active in Church, and receiving the ordinances and covenants of the temple.
- Ensure that ancestors whose names are readily available have received their ordinances.
- Support family history research.
- Turn the hearts of fathers to children and the hearts of children to their fathers.
- Provide social and cultural activities that strengthen family ties.

The father and mother are leaders of the immediate family organization.

First, I would be certain that sufficient time was calendared each week for a family executive committee meeting to plan family strategy. The executive committee, composed of a husband and wife, would meet together to fully communicate, discuss, plan, and prepare for their leadership role in the family organization (Perry 1980, 9).

As leaders of the immediate family, parents should provide a secure and happy home where their children can bond with each other and their parents. They should also encourage their children to reach out to extended family members. President Kimball taught:

Analysts of our modern time point out that in a fast changing world, people suffer a kind of shock from losing a sense of continuity. The very mobility of our society means that our children are often moved from place to place and lose close contact with the extended family of grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and longtime neighbors. It is important for us also to cultivate in our own family a sense that we belong together eternally, that whatever changes outside our home, there are fundamental aspects of our relationship which will never change. We ought to encourage our children to know their relatives. We need to talk of them, make effort to correspond with them, visit them, join family organizations, etc. (Kimball 1974, 112).

## ***The Role of the Grandparent Family Organization***

The grandparent family organization consists of the extended family to which President Kimball was referring. The grandparent family organization can assist with temple and family history activity in many ways, including:

- Submitting names of the family's kindred dead to the temple and arranging for family members to receive ordinances.
- Providing social activities, cultural activities, and reunions that strengthen family ties among members of the grandparent family.
- Ensuring that the information on Family Tree is complete and accurate in the first few generations.

- Preparing family histories and instructional aids that can be used by immediate families to teach children about their ancestors.
- Soliciting funds to support family history research.

With regard to the grandparent family organization, President Ezra Taft Benson counseled:

Provide leadership by building family togetherness. We urge all senior members, when possible, to call their families together. Organize them into cohesive units. Give leadership to family gatherings. Establish family reunions where fellowship and family heritage can be felt and learned. Some of the sweetest memories I have are of our own family reunions and gatherings. Foster wonderful family traditions which will bind you together eternally. In doing so, we can create a bit of heaven right here on earth within individual families. After all, eternity will be but an extension of righteous family life (Benson 1989, 5).

Each family's individual circumstances will determine how they apply this counsel. Where circumstances prevent grandparents from initiating family activities, adult brothers and sisters, typically between the ages of 20 to 40, can still meet and make plans (This might be called a "brother/sister" family organization.) President Benson applied the principles in his family as follows:

In keeping with the principles which I have outlined to you, I have organized my family, as I'm sure scores of you have done—the Ezra Taft Benson Family Organization—as a grandparent family. Our children and married grandchildren are organizing as part of that organization and as individual, immediate family organizations.

Under my direction we are in the process of verifying our pedigree charts and supporting family group record forms in anticipation of submitting them to the Church as a family in 1979.

I have further commissioned the preparation of family histories by my immediate family members. My wife and I have tried to set the example by preparing and distributing a brief summary of our own personal histories to our posterity. Further histories have been prepared, or are in the process of preparation, on each of our ancestors on my lines and my wife's lines as they appear on our first pedigree chart for four generations back. To our children this represents five generations of family histories; to the grandchildren, six; and the great grandchildren, seven.

In the preparation of these histories, we have sought to write them in a common style and follow a common format. They have been typed on genealogical size sheets so they might conveniently be included in the family book of remembrance. An effort has been made to keep them brief, with a goal that none of them would exceed ten genealogical size pages. We have taken pains to have them reproduced by offset press so that the quality of the print would encourage use and reading. It is also our intent to add pictures of each ancestor to his or her history. We have encouraged members of our family organization to use these histories as a basis for family home evenings, held in their immediate families, to teach their children appreciation, love, and respect for their ancestors (Benson 1978, 30).

The grandparent family organization may take responsibility for submitting family information after adult brothers and sisters compare their information, resolve discrepancies, and correct errors. Originally names were submitted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints via Ancestral File, a DOS-based program. Now, names are submitted to FamilySearch Family Tree, a database available online at <http://familysearch.org>.

In the April 2010 General Conference, Elder Russell M. Nelson explained the purposes of the Family

Tree system,

The Prophet Joseph Smith said, “The greatest responsibility in this world that God has laid upon us is to seek after our dead.” New technology makes it easier than ever to fulfill that responsibility. Temple and family history work is now facilitated by a system known as the “[FamilySearch Family Tree].” This Internet-based system helps members identify their ancestors, determine what ordinance work needs to be done for them, and prepare their names for the temple. It can be accessed from home, a FamilySearch Center, or wherever the Internet is available. . . . The [Family Tree] system changes the dynamics of family history work by facilitating the creation of one common pedigree. In the past, a person worked separately, keeping his or her own family records. One often worked without knowing what other family members were doing. Now each person can contribute information while coordinating with others in developing their family tree (Nelson).

### ***The Role of the Ancestral Family Organization***

With regard to ancestral family organizations, President Benson taught:

Now may I say a word about ancestral type family organizations. Ancestral family organizations are comprised of descendants of a common ancestral couple. The major purpose for organizing or perpetuating an ancestral family organization is to coordinate genealogical activity on common ancestral lines. When ancestral family organizations deviate from this major objective and seek primarily to provide social, cultural, or other types of activities, they take over the legitimate domain of the immediate and grandparent organizations. . . .

Another legitimate function of the ancestral organization is to provide resource material from which the immediate and grandparent family organizations can draw to complete family histories—especially on their first four generations. Thus the ancestral organizations may accumulate, properly file, catalog, and preserve histories, photographs, letters, manuscripts, diaries, journals, and published books.

. . . Ancestral organizations exist only for the coordination of genealogical activity, which includes family histories. Once this function has been accomplished the ancestral family organization might well be dissolved, or at least reduced in importance, in favor of the immediate and grandparent organizations (Benson 1978, 30).

### ***Your Role in Your Family***

There are many ways you could assist with the efforts of your immediate, grandparent, and ancestral family organizations to redeem both the living and the dead. These may include organizing, leading, teaching, writing, doing research, donating funds, strengthening family ties, giving encouragement, and so on. What you do, and how much you do at any time in your life will vary depending on:

- Your circumstances, abilities, and resources
- Guidance from the Holy Ghost
- The needs of your family
- Direction from priesthood leaders

As you prayerfully determine what you can do, remember that the end result of your efforts should be to:

- Bring living relatives to Christ so they will receive the ordinances of the temple, and
- Provide temple ordinances for your kindred dead.

Although our family circumstances vary considerably, most of us can do something to further the work of Christ in and through the family organization. Elder Gene R. Cook taught:

At times when one speaks of home and family, some who are single, widowed, a single parent, or a grandparent might be tempted to feel these teachings don't apply to them. But may I remind all that when the Lord sent us here for our individual growth, he sent us to live with and be nurtured spiritually and temporally by a family. The Lord organized the whole earth this way. There is no other way to enter mortality.

Yet some still say, "I don't have a family. I'm all alone." May I remind you that you always were and ever will be a member of the family of God. You are his son or his daughter. It doesn't matter if your parents or spouse or brothers or sisters are members, nonmembers, living, or dead, they are still your family. And if you are righteous and faithful to the end, no matter what your present status, you ultimately will be blessed as part of a family unit.

Thus, it behooves all of us to learn and live, to the degree we can in our present situation, the principles governing family life in preparation for exaltation, whether we're a parent, grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, or a child—whether we are single or married. This is the Lord's pattern, His expanded view of the word family.

Thus, hearken all ye families of the earth, immediate and extended families, yea, every living soul, and the Lord will teach you of the sacredness of the heavenly organization called family, called home (Cook 1984, 31).

Elder James E. Faust said:

Some say families can't do the job because so many people just do not have families. It is true that a great many do not have a functioning family. Or it is said that too many families fail. Unfortunately, that is also true. However, with all its shortcomings, the family is far and away the greatest social unit, the best answer to human problems, in the history of mankind. Rather than further weaken family ties, they need to be strengthened. . . . I would urge overburdened parents to accept every help. Cannot grandparents, brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends also reinforce by example and precept their love and concern for members of the extended family? (Faust 1987, 81-82)

### ***Helping Your Family Get Organized***

To build a foundation strong enough to support a family in our troubled world today requires the best effort of each of us—father, mother, brother, sister, grandmother and grandfather, aunts and uncles, cousins, and so on. Each must contribute energy and effort in driving piles right down to the bedrock of the gospel until the foundation is strong enough to endure through the eternities. The Lord has promised us in the Doctrine and Covenants that "he that buildeth upon this rock shall never fall" (D&C 50:44). (Perry 1985, 23).

Students can support the efforts of parents, grandparents, siblings, and others to work cooperatively for the redemption of the living and the dead. Some specific things students might do include:

- Find out from family members and Family Tree if ordinances have been provided for

ancestors in the first few generations. If not, gather together any additional information needed to provide the ordinances and submit the names.

- Do research on an extended family line.
- Write a personal history that you can send to all members of your immediate and extended family at Christmas.
- Make a list of your uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces, and nephews. Are there any that you have not reached out to? Any that do not know of your love? Any that don't know you? If so, you may have an opportunity to strengthen family ties.
- Offer to help organize an immediate or grandparent family reunion.
- Contact family members who are doing research. Offer to help by searching records, entering data, submitting information to Family Tree, and/or performing and submitting temple ordinances.
- Organize a family temple trip to do baptisms for the dead.