capable endeavor and enduring truth." The magazine was owned and operated by the General Board of the Relief Society for all of its fifty-six years. Originally a forty-four-page, black and white publication, it evolved into an eighty-page journal with liberal use of color. Its readers liked its small size, which let it fit neatly into a woman's purse. In 1966 the Magazine added a Spanish edition for its 6,000 Spanish-speaking subscribers.

Editors of the Relief Society Magazine looked upon their assignments as mission calls to further the work of Relief Society and strengthen the testimonies of its members. Its first editor, Susa Young Gates (1914–1922), was followed by Alice Louise Reynolds (1923–1930), Mary Connelly Kimball (1930–1937), Belle S. Spafford (1937–1945), and Marianne Clark Sharp (1945–1970). Vesta P. Crawford was associate editor (1947–1970).

From 1872 to 1914 Relief Society matters were disseminated in the Woman's Exponent, a privately owned and edited women's journal, which ceased publication in 1914 with the announcement of the official Church magazine for women.

The Relief Society Magazine had 301,000 subscribers in 1970, when it was incorporated into the Ensign, the Church magazine for adults. Relief Society lessons are now published in a manual each year.

[See also Ensign; Relief Society; Woman's Exponent.]

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MARIANNE CLARK SHARP

RELIEF SOCIETY INNAUVOO

Organized in 1842, the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo differed from other contemporary women's church groups in that it was organized under the priesthood direction of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

The society began as a response to the need for provisions, clothing, and supplies for builders of the Nauvoo Temple. On her own initiative, Sarah M. Granger Kimball invited a group of women to her home on March 4, 1842, to discuss the possibility of organizing a sewing society to aid the workers. Eliza R. Snow drafted possible bylaws and a constitution for the group and submitted them to Joseph Smith. He told her that there was something better for them than a written constitution and that he would organize the women of the Church as the priesthood was organized. He added that the Church would never be perfectly organized until the women were organized.

Minutes of the charter meeting name twenty women and three men who were present in the upper story of Smith’s red-brick store on March 17, 1842. Emma Smith, elected president, chose Sarah M. Cleveland and Elizabeth Ann Whitney as counselors, Eliza R. Snow as secretary, and Elvira A. Cowles as treasurer.

At the first meeting, the Prophet redefined and expanded the object of the society. The women were to look to the needs of the poor, to search after those in need and administer to their wants, and to assist in correcting the morals and

This plate depicts the organization meeting of the Relief Society on March 17, 1842. The Prophet Joseph Smith, who formally organized the twenty women present into a society, stated: "The Church was never perfectly organized until the women were thus organized." Emma Smith was the first president, with Sarah M. Cleveland and Elizabeth Ann Whitney as counselors, and Eliza R. Snow as secretary. Church Museum of History and Art.
strengthening the virtues of the community. He later added the charge to save souls. During a particularly significant address on April 28, 1842, he cited 1 Corinthians 13, from which later members took their motto, “Charity Never Faileth.” He then pronounced the much-quoted sentence, “I now turn the key to you in the name of God and his Society shall rejoice and knowledge and intelligence shall flow down from this time” (“Minutes of the Female Relief Society”).

The society grew quickly. During its first season, 1,189 women became members. The society received and dispersed money, clothing, provisions, and services to the needy. Its meetings were held first in the upper room and then, for lack of space there, outdoors in “the Grove” until September 28, 1842. When the society reconvened in the following spring, the presidency divided the membership into four wards, which then met separately. Each ward had its “necessity committee,” forerunner of the present visiting teachers, who canvassed their area in search of people in need (see VISITING TEACHING). Meetings again ceased for the winter of 1843–1844, but presumably the charitable works continued.

Beset with differences between its president and Church leaders—differences related to the introduction of PLURAL MARRIAGE—the society ceased to function formally after the meetings of March 1844. Aspects of its operation, however, continued through the last days of Nauvoo and the exodus of 1846–1847 in the acts of charity, the sisterly bonding, the gatherings of women in prayer meetings, and the persistence of spiritual manifestations. The leaders of a revived RELIEF SOCIETY in Utah, which President Brigham Young authorized Churchwide beginning in 1867, conscientiously adhered to the patterns established in Nauvoo and resolutely maintained a continuity of operation.

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**BARBARA W. WINDER**

**RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE**

In the gospel of Jesus Christ, personal religious experience is the foundation, vitality, and culmination of religious life. As in the biblical book of Acts, LDS religious experience is varied and owes as much to firsthand experience as to texts and traditions. Latter-day Saints may recognize as a religious experience feelings or impressions that build faith in Christ, show that God hears and answers prayer, manifest what is good and right, enhance personal conviction of truth, or confirm that one’s life is approved of God. The sum of one’s religious experiences is sometimes called a “testimony.” Interpretations of these experiences are derived from cumulative personal experience, which language is often inadequate to describe. The frequency, intelligibility, coherence, and shareability of these phenomena among Latter-day Saints are relatively unique.

Regardless of individual differences in age, culture, and language, such experiences enhance the underlying unity of the members of the Church, enabling them to feel one with each other and with the prophets. They recognize familiar religious experiences in one another’s words and actions and in the scriptures. While the transmission of these experiences is often oral (as in testimony meetings, classes, conversations), many are also preserved in diaries, journals, and family histories. Some of these have become widely familiar and almost normative.

At the core of a Latter-day Saint’s life is CONVERSION to the gospel. First impressions are often crucial. Converts frequently testify to feeling a divine assurance, unexpected and unheralded, that truth is to be found in the Book of Mormon and in the teachings of the Church. They also commonly speak of feeling clean, of being washed of their sins, and of being spiritually reborn with an infusion of new life, peace, joy, light, warmth, and fire (see BAPTISM OF FIRE AND OF THE HOLY GHOST). The experience of finding oneself, though a sinner, accepted by the Lord, often becomes the foundation of a lifetime commitment to God, because maintaining this feeling is desired above all else. Classic examples of this are found in the conversions of Alma (Mosiah 27; Alma 36) and Joseph Smith (PJS 1.5–8).

Latter-day Saints believe that the divine love they receive in individual religious experience should be reflected to others as CHARITY (Mosiah