

(Benson, May 1988). On the other hand, he recognized that some women may not have the opportunity for temple marriage in this life. In a later article addressed to single Latter-day Saint women, he noted the Lord's promise that if their lives are "worthy and [they] endure faithfully . . . [they will] be assured of all blessings" (Benson, Nov. 1988, p. 97), if not in this life, then in the eternities.

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SISTERHOOD

Sisterhood, like BROTHERHOOD, is rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ that views God as the actual father of the immortal and eternal SPIRITS of earthly women and men. President Barbara B. Smith of the RELIEF SOCIETY, said in 1976, "We look upon ourselves as being part of the family of the Lord, and so our sisterhood is one that has a deep understanding of this relationship" (Smith, pp. 7–8). Sisterhood in this broad sense includes all women in the world.

The title "Sister" also has a more special meaning in reference to the women of the Church. Every Latter-day Saint woman is appropriately called "sister." The term does not relate to a woman's profession or ecclesiastical calling, as it does in some religious and professional groups. Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints often refer to women members collectively as "the sisterhood of the Church," "sisters in the gospel," or simply as "the sisters."

"The sisterhood of the Church" may refer specifically to members of the Relief Society, organized by the Prophet Joseph SMITH in 1842, which includes all adult women of the Church—over two

million in 1990. Lucy Mack SMITH, the Prophet's mother, expressed the sisterly quality of the society in a classic statement: "This institution is a good one," she told the women assembled in their second meeting. "We must cherish one another, watch over one another, comfort one another, and gain instruction, that we may all sit down in heaven together" (Relief Society Minutes of Nauvoo, Mar. 24, 1842, LDS Church Archives). A later prophet would speak of "a society of sisters," and refer to "the loving fellowship" of the Relief Society VISITING TEACHING program, which from the beginning has been a channel for sisterly concern (Kimball, p. 2).

The organizational network of the Church promotes sisterhood by providing women opportunities to work and study together, to share religious convictions, and to serve others in charitable ways. Like Dorcas in the early Christian church (Acts 9:36), LDS sisters have traditionally sewn clothing for the needy. In the late nineteenth century they worked together in producing silk, saving grain, and managing retail stores. Later they held nurse training classes and sponsored maternal and child health clinics. They have also extended their service through cooperation with the Red Cross and other community agencies. The nature of the tasks has changed with time, but the sisterhood itself continues.

Several publications have helped to expand this network of concern. The sisters published *Woman's Exponent* from 1872 to 1914, *Relief Society Bulletin* in 1914, and *Relief Society Magazine* from 1915 to 1970. Currently, the *Ensign*, the Church's monthly magazine for adults, carries articles by and about women, messages from women leaders, and reports of women's CONFERENCES. The international MAGAZINES carry much of the same material in translation, keeping the sisters of the Church in touch worldwide.

Contributions from sisters in many nations financed two major projects in the 1950s and 1970s: the Relief Society headquarters building in Salt Lake City and the Monument to Women statuary gardens in NAUVOO, Illinois. At the dedication of the latter in 1978, some twenty thousand women celebrated their sisterhood at the place where their society had begun. In 1984, the Relief Society Building also became the headquarters of the PRIMARY (for children) and of the YOUNG WOMEN (girls twelve to eighteen), enabling the general women leaders of the Church to work

closely together in their mutual concern for nurturing the young.

Since the early days of the Church, women's service in the **TEMPLES** of the Church has contributed a profound religious dimension to their sisterhood. By participating in **TEMPLE ORDINANCES**, in which they minister by divine commission to their "sisters in the gospel," worthy LDS women can help ensure the eternal nature of family ties and create friendships in the process.

The sisters also sustain each other in personal ways. Like **RUTH** and **Naomi**, the women of the early LDS Church who left homes and friends to live in a strange land found comfort in each other's loving support. Women who join the Church today often need the same kind of support as do those who are uprooted in an increasingly mobile society. To an elderly woman living alone, sisterhood may mean the assurance that she is not forgotten but has friends and significant work to do with them, perhaps in a nearby temple. To a young mother it can mean practical help in her home and empathetic sharing of problems in a Relief Society class.

Although LDS sisterhood includes a rich diversity of cultures, and occasional disagreements over local issues, its most important aspect is still the bonding relationship of a common **FAITH**. As one sister said of that faith, "It is a bond that connects women with women and with the Savior across generations" (Peterson, p. 79).

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SMITH, BATHSHEBA BIGLER

Bathsheba Wilson Bigler Smith (1822-1910) was the fourth general president of the **RELIEF**



Bathsheba Wilson Bigler Smith (1822-1910), fourth general president of the Relief Society, served from 1901 to 1910. Courtesy Special Collections Department, University of Utah Libraries.

SOCIETY, matron of the **SALT LAKE TEMPLE**, woman suffrage leader, and member of the **Deseret Hospital Board of Directors**.

Bathsheba was the eighth of nine children born to Mark and Susannah Ogden Bigler at Shinnston, Harrison County, Virginia, on May 3, 1822. She was reared in a genteel, upper South culture. The Biglers provided a substantial living for the family on their 300-acre plantation. Bathsheba was trained in management, hospitality, handiwork, and art, and was a cheerful, dignified, and prayerful woman.

At the age of fifteen, Bathsheba and her family joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. One of the missionaries serving in the area, George A. Smith, later to be the youngest member called to the **QUORUM OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES**, became acquainted with this tall, sophisticated southern belle; before he left Virginia, they pledged that "with the blessings of the Almighty in