SUCCEDION IN THE PRESIDENCY

Upon the death of the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the senior apostle in the Church’s governing quorums (see First Presidency, Quorum of the Twelve Apostles) becomes presiding officer of the Church (see President of the Church).

The principles underlying the succession process were established at the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1844. Since there was at the time no precedent and no clear procedure providing for succession to the office of president, competing views arose. Brigham Young, then President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, presented the proposition that the Twelve, ordained apostles who held all the keys necessary to govern the Church, should be sustained as the authorized leaders in the absence of Joseph Smith. In his favor was the fact that the Twelve in Nauvoo had been carefully tutored by the Prophet in all aspects of Church leadership and had served as his right hand. The Church also understood that this position was in harmony with the 1835 revelation on priesthood (D&C 107). After describing the First Presidency (“three Presiding High Priests, chosen by the body, appointed and ordained to that office, and upheld by the confidence, faith, and prayer of the church”), that revelation affirmed that the Twelve Apostles “form a quorum, equal in authority and power to the three presidents previously mentioned” (D&C 107:22–24).

Inherent in the Twelve’s proposal was the assumption that, although the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles had equal authority and power with the Quorum of the First Presidency, as long as the First Presidency was intact and functioning, they, and not the Twelve, possess the necessary jurisdiction to govern the Church. But the death of the president, thereby disorganizing the presidency and automatically releasing the president’s counselors, bestows on the Quorum of the Twelve the required authorization to exercise the keys they already possess and assume full responsibility for governing the Church—including the reorganization of the First Presidency. Representing the Twelve, Brigham Young also reminded the Saints in 1844 of Joseph Smith’s “last charge to the Twelve,” stipulating that in the event something happened to him, the Twelve were responsible for carrying on the work he had begun (Esplin, pp. 319–20).

Sidney Rigdon, who had been a counselor to Joseph Smith, presented an alternative view. He argued that Joseph Smith’s death did not disorganize the presidency or the Church and that, therefore, as first counselor to Joseph Smith, he should be sustained as “guardian” over the Church. This ran directly counter to the Twelve’s position that the death of the president automatically dissolves the First Presidency, leaving the counselors without authority over the Church.

Though there were theoretically other possibilities for succession besides these two, the competing claims of Sidney Rigdon and of Brigham Young, representing the Twelve, were the only two practical alternatives at that time. After several private meetings during which leaders reviewed the options, on August 8, 1844, thousands of Church members gathered in the grove near the Nauvoo Temple to decide by a public sustaining vote (see Common Consent) whether Sidney Rigdon or the Twelve would lead the Church. Rigdon, an eloquent speaker, took the stand first and spoke at length of his right and position. Then Brigham Young, with less polish but confident that the Twelve held authority and that they were prepared to “direct all things aright,” presented the other view. The result was overwhelming support recognizing the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as the authorized leaders of the Church, specifically with the keys to act as the First Presidency and with the power to reorganize the First Presidency. Although that decision was clearly sanctioned by the 1835 revelation and was in harmony with the position of the Twelve in Nauvoo, many Latter-day Saints claimed a further deciding factor: when Brigham Young spoke on August 8, his voice and appearance bore a striking resemblance to those of Joseph Smith. Wilford Woodruff, one who was present, later said that if “I had not seen him with my own eyes, there is no one that could have convinced me that it was not Joseph Smith” (Deseret News, Mar. 15, 1892, cf. JD 15:81).

For the next three years the Church was governed by the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles with Brigham Young as president of the quorum. In December 1847, following the pioneer journey to the Rocky Mountains, the First Presidency was reorganized and Brigham Young was named President of the Church.

Though the right of the Quorum of the Twelve to reconstitute the First Presidency was firmly established, there have been other short periods
when the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles governed the Church before a new First Presidency was organized. John Taylor, president of the quorum when Brigham Young died in 1877, did not have the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles formally reorganize the First Presidency until 1880. A similar interim existed after his death in 1887. Wilford Woodruff as President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles directed the affairs of the Church on the basis of that position until 1889. Several years later, he instructed Lorenzo Snow, then President of the Twelve Apostles, that it was the will of the Lord that the First Presidency should be organized without delay upon the death of the president (Lorenzo Snow Notes, Dec 3, 1892, Church Archives). Lorenzo Snow, therefore, was named President of the Church in a new First Presidency eleven days after President Woodruff’s death, a precedent of reorganizing the presidency without delay that has since been followed.

Since a fundamental doctrine of the Church is the reality of continuing revelation, and since the Twelve Apostles are sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators, there is no apparent reason that the Quorum of the Twelve could not depart from this precedent and select someone other than the senior apostle to lead the Church, if so directed by revelation. Established principles, however, require (1) that a revelation directing any other course of action must come through the senior apostle in the presiding quorum and approved by unanimous vote of the members of the quorum and (2) that the senior apostle in the presiding quorum by virtue of that position immediately presides over the Church following the death of the president.

The fundamental organizing principle of the Church rests on the reality that it was established by direct commandment from God to Joseph Smith and that those who lead it are specifically called of God to those positions. The existing succession process does not violate that principle, which it would do if succession were decided by a contested election either within the Quorum of the Twelve or by the body of the Church. In keeping with the principle of common consent, the name of each new president is submitted to the body of the Church for its sustaining approval. But this procedure is in no wise an election nor does it affect the legitimacy of the president’s divine commission. Rather than empowering the new leader, the vote is an expression by members that they recognize the legitimacy of the calling and that it is binding upon them. To sustain the president is a commitment that no assistance that can aid his success will be withheld and that no barriers that might hinder his efforts will be erected.

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SUFFERING IN THE WORLD
Suffering is inherent in mortality. Physical bodies are subject to pain and discomfort from hunger, disease, trauma, violence, and exposure. As a social being, man is vulnerable to emotional suffering that often rivals physical pain—anxiety, rejection, loneliness, despair. Among the sensitive there are also other levels of profound suffering. They may relate, for example, to the awareness of the effects of sin or the anguish of the abuse or indifference of one’s loved ones. And there is vicarious suffering in response to the pain around one and the sense of the withdrawal of the Spirit. For Latter-day Saints, Jesus’ words on the cross “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” is a measure of the depth of his suffering (Matt. 27:46).

Mankind’s attempts to explain the necessity of suffering are varied: (1) it is an essential element in testing and building moral character; (2) it is the unavoidable side effect of agency; (3) it is illusory or utterly mysterious. Whatever partial consolations these attempts provide, suffering remains.

LDS doctrine provides two explanations that are uncommon in the Judeo-Christian tradition. First, all mankind chose to enter mortality with full knowledge of the great price that would be required of the Christ and of discipleship in his name. Second, one’s suffering is to be in the image of that of the Lord, whose suffering was requisite “that his bowels [might] be filled with mercy... that he [might] know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12). In no other way could the redemption