

upon the earth, who hold the keys of this last ministry, in foreign lands, standing together in a circle, much fatigued, with their clothes tattered and feet swollen, with their eyes cast downward, and Jesus standing in their midst, and they did not behold Him. The Savior looked upon them and wept” (*HC* 2:381). He saw a vision enabling him to designate the “central place” in Independence, Missouri (*TPJS*, p. 79). Of a vision of the resurrection of the dead, he explained, “So plain was the vision, that I actually saw men, before they had ascended from the tomb, as though they were getting up slowly” (*TPJS*, pp. 295–96). He also saw the Kirtland and Nauvoo temples in vision before their construction and gave detailed instructions to the architects, describing the windows and their illumination (*JD* 13:357; 14:273; *HC* 6:196–97). He foresaw the struggles of the Saints in crossing the plains, their establishment in the Rocky Mountains, and the future condition of the Saints (*HC* 5:85n–86n).

He remarked late in his life, “It is my meditation all the day & more than my meat & drink to know how I shall make the saints of God to comprehend the visions that roll like an overflowing surge, before my mind” (*WJS*, p. 196).

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## VISITING TEACHING

Visiting teaching is an organized means whereby the women of the Church receive regular instructional and compassionate service visits—usually by personal contact in the home—from other female members of the Church. The purpose is to promote SISTERHOOD, present inspirational messages, and note instances of need wherein the temporal and spiritual resources of the Church might be helpful.

In practice, the ward RELIEF SOCIETY president or those assisting her assign pairs of visiting teachers to keep in contact with specific families over a period of several months or even years. More frequent contact is made with women and families exhibiting special needs, such as those new to the Church, the less active, single parents, the divorced, the widowed, the aged, and those faced with illness, death, or other difficulties.

The need for such visitors was recognized soon after the founding of the Relief Society in 1842. At the second meeting of the society on March 24, Emma SMITH, wife of the Prophet Joseph SMITH, suggested appointing persons to wait upon the poor. On July 28, 1843, a Necessity Committee of sixteen was named “to search out the poor and suffering, to call upon the rich for aid, and thus as far as possible, relieve the wants of all.” The original functions of this committee were twofold: “to ascertain the condition of the families visited, and to accept contributions for charitable purposes” (General Board, 1942, pp. 43–44; 1966, p. 68).

In the early years of the Church in Nauvoo, Illinois, visiting teachers reported their visits at the regular Relief Society meeting before all mem-

bers present, citing specific instances of need. It was also customary for visiting teachers during this period to apportion and distribute to needy families the commodities donated to the society.

In 1921 visiting teachers were relieved of the personal responsibility of both ascertaining and meeting the material needs of families, but since then they have continued to report confidentially (to the ward Relief Society president) any instances of illness or need requiring attention. Upon hearing such reports, the Relief Society president either visits the family herself or designates the visiting teachers or someone else to give aid as a representative of the society. In cases of economic need, the Relief Society president and ward bishop confidentially inquire concerning the family's condition to arrange for any needed assistance from Church resources and for means to remedy the situation causing need. This modification of assignment brought visiting teachers into the more agreeable role of friendly visitors carrying messages from the society to the home, yet still fulfilling the original assignment from the Prophet Joseph Smith to "provoke the brethren to good works in looking after the wants of the poor—searching after objects of charity, and in administering to their wants" (General Board, 1966, p. 18).

An observation of Eliza R. SNOW, an early president of the Relief Society organization, encapsulates the spirit of visiting teaching: "Many times a kind expression—a few words of counsel, or even a warm or affectionate shake of the hand—will do more good and be better appreciated than a purse of gold" (General Board, 1966, p. 40).

The importance of visiting teaching has been consistently reemphasized by Church Presidents. Spencer W. KIMBALL exhorted visiting teachers to do as the priesthood teachers do:

"Watch over the Church always"—not twenty minutes a month but always—"and be with and strengthen them"—not a knock at the door, but to be *with* them, and *lift* them, and strengthen them, and empower them, and fortify them—"and see that there is no iniquity, . . . neither hardness, . . . backbiting, nor evil speaking" (D&C 20:53–54). . . . How glorious is the privilege of two sisters going into a home, soft-pedaling anything that could be detrimental, and instead, building up all the authorities of the Church, the Church itself, its doctrines, its policies, its practices—"And see that [they] meet together often, and . . . do their duty" (D&C 20:55) [*Ensign*, June 1978, p. 24].

Visiting teaching allows every sister to serve in the Church. Whether active or inactive, single or married, newly baptized or a member of long standing, each can serve effectively as a visiting teacher.

Because of their sensitivity to the home and family and their consequent ability to identify needs that might otherwise go unobserved, visiting teachers give complementary support to the bishop and Relief Society president. They can also become a readily organized corps in times of emergency, crisis, or death. Countless recorded stories demonstrate the effectiveness of the visiting teaching program in extending essential service, love, and compassion to members, particularly the sisters of the Church.

[See also *Compassionate Service*.]

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## VISITORS CENTERS

The Church maintains and staffs several HISTORICAL SITES and visitors centers. Their main functions are to introduce visitors to the history and doctrine of the Church, to help them understand the blessings of the restored gospel, and to strengthen the members and provide them with missionary opportunities.

Most tour guides at visitors centers and historic sites are volunteers, called to serve from six months to two years. They are taught specific information to present to visitors individually or in guided tours, and they are encouraged to meet the needs of their guests, answer questions, and have friendly personal interaction with them. Visitors are taught that the Church is a Christian religion and that Jesus is the Christ. An atmosphere of goodwill and positive public relations is sought for and fostered by the attendants and tour guides.

Visitors centers typically feature visual displays, films, photographs or paintings, replicas, and artifacts regarding the local site, as well as presentations about the Savior Jesus Christ, the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Bible and the Book of