

COMPASSIONATE SERVICE

The term “compassionate service” is used in the Church to refer to love-inspired assistance willingly given to meet physical, spiritual, and emotional needs. It requires a sensitivity that perceives human distress beyond spoken words (Luke 10:30–37; cf. 8:43–48), an eye that recognizes the good in people (Mosiah 4:16–18), and an understanding heart attuned to the HOLY SPIRIT to discern what is appropriate to say and do (3 Ne. 17:5–8; John 19:25–27). A call to Christlike service undergirded the Prophet Joseph SMITH’s formal charge to the Female RELIEF SOCIETY organized in 1842. Aware of the dire needs of the Saints, he said that “the object of the society [is to search] after objects of charity and [administer] to their wants” (Minutes of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, p. 7). A Necessity Committee of sixteen sisters was appointed “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” (*History of Relief Society*, p. 68). Since that time, not only Relief Society members but also other Church members have been involved in formal and informal acts of compassionate service.

Present-day Relief Society visiting teachers continue to carry out Joseph Smith’s commission



Relief Society sisters and their families provide compassionate watchcare for each other, make themselves aware of one another’s needs, and give loving service to individuals and families (c. 1985).

with regular visits to each LDS family, discerning needs and providing caring support. Ezra Taft BENSON stated, “We urge you, particularly priesthood brethren and Relief Society sisters, to be sensitive to the needs of the poor, the sick, and the needy . . . [and] see that the widows and fatherless are assisted” (p. 7). Through appropriate channels of the PRIESTHOOD and Relief Society, assistance is to be given to the poor, sick, bereaved, homeless, and members with special personal problems and burdens (Mosiah 18:8–9; D&C 52:40).

When compassionate service is clothed in the true spirit of charity—which the Book of Mormon defines as the pure love of Christ—it becomes an all-encompassing and rewarding experience for the giver as well as the receiver (1 Cor. 13:4–8; Moro. 7:6–8, 45–47).

[See also Visiting Teaching.]

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HULDA PARKER YOUNG

COMPREHENSIVE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Intended as a centennial history of the LDS Church (1830–1930), Elder B. H. Roberts’s six-volume *Comprehensive History of the Church* stands as a high point in the publication of Church history to that time. Most earlier works were either attacks upon or defenses of the Church. Although Roberts’s study was a kind of defense, he set a more even tone, a degree of uncommon objectivity.

Like several historians preceding him (Bancroft, Whitney, Tullidge), Roberts set out to produce a multivolume work. Originally a periodical series prepared for the *Americana* magazine, Roberts’s articles appeared in forty-two-page installments between July 1909 and July 1915 (*CHC* 1:v–vi). As the centennial year of 1930 approached, Elder George Albert Smith suggested

that Roberts bring his work up to date and that the Church publish it for the centennial.

Published in handsome bindings with numerous illustrations, the work was impressive. But to the reader of today its importance lies beyond its format. Roberts was pointing the way to a new approach; he wanted Church history to avoid apology and indiscriminating defense of the faith. For example, he was skeptical of including any myths parading as history: "I find my own heart strengthened in the truth by getting rid of the untruth, the spectacular, the bizarre, as soon as I learn that it is based on worthless testimony" (Madsen, p. 363). He treated the difficulties of the Saints in Missouri objectively, assigning some elements of blame to both sides.

Roberts was willing to deal with sensitive topics. His analysis of the MOUNTAIN MEADOWS MASSACRE was fairly exacting. He was also willing to press his editors to get what he felt was fairness; he insisted on including Joseph Smith's KING FOLLETT DISCOURSE despite urgings to the contrary by some members. In some ways Roberts's *Comprehensive History* was an act of courage; certainly it was his magnum opus.

Though not trained as a historian, Roberts was well known as an orator and as a theologian. He read widely and was a vibrant politician, a noted missionary, and a popular Church leader. His theological writings continue to attract attention. All of this energy, even charisma, flows into his writing, producing rhapsodic prose that sometimes overshoots the mark. He wrote in the Romantic style, accepting Prescott and Parkman as his models.

The *Comprehensive History* is the high-water mark of studies produced before academic scholars undertook the writing of Church history after 1950. Roberts shows a faithfulness to documentary sources and rules of evidence. The six-volume set is a worthy monument to the Church's first century and still attracts serious attention.

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DOUGLAS D. ALDER

COMPUTER SYSTEMS

For many years The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints used mechanical punched-card systems for accounting and other administrative purposes. These were replaced by modern computers. In 1962 the Church's computer systems were expanded to help provide names for temple work. They also were applied to managing the large and rapidly expanding genealogical information base. Church computer resources now serve every level, from general Church administration to the individual member.

In Church TEMPLES, computer systems are used to record biographical information of individuals, living and dead, who have received temple ORDINANCES. Family history computer systems maintain growing catalogs of worldwide genealogical records, a lineage-linked ANCESTRAL FILE, and an index of completed ordinances and other lists to help interested persons pursue family history work.

Computers also aid in the administration of various Church programs, including the international MISSIONARY program, where computers are used to track all missionaries and route individual requests for missionary visits. FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS are recorded on computers by clerks at the WARD level, making possible regular reports to contributors and to the Church. All central budgeting and financial transactions are managed by computer. The Church maintains detailed membership records which are created on computers in the wards and are regularly updated and forwarded to central computers at Church headquarters or region/area offices (*see* RECORD KEEPING).

The Church uses computers to prepare, print, and distribute a wide range of materials through its DISTRIBUTION CENTERS in various parts of the world. SCRIPTURES, lesson manuals, handbooks, forms, and Church MAGAZINES are prepared with the use of computers. These materials are printed in as many as eighty-one languages, and computers are used extensively in the translation process.

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS uses computers to monitor public response to Church media. Computer systems also manage information in areas such as Church welfare, historical records, physical facilities, magazine subscriptions, and purchasing. The SEMINARIES and INSTITUTES track potential and enrolled students throughout the world by computer.