

# NEW ZEALAND LOCAL PAGES

## LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

### Faith, Family, and Freedom

By Elder Dallin H. Oaks

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

**M**y dear brothers and sisters, I feel very privileged to be able to address you.



**I.** I have felt to begin by speaking to our youth and young adults. You young people are in a critically important period of your life. I urge you to think about the future. That is difficult for young people, especially youth. But please believe me that the decisions you make today will have a large impact on your life for many years to come. I want to speak to you in the same way I speak to my 29 grandchildren.

Education is an example. For a young person, a job that provides immediate income and satisfaction appears very attractive.

Some of our young people even drop out of school when given this choice. But when you compare the long-term value of an income-producing job today with the advantages of education for the rest of your life, continuing your education is clearly the best choice. Don't be one of those who drop out of school because it is difficult or because other things attract you. Get as much education as you can. Education will make it possible for you to provide for yourself and your family and your loved ones in the years to come. Inadequate education will condemn you to low income and frustration for a lifetime.

**II.** Returned missionaries, I affirm the importance of education for you, but I have some additional things to say to you. In the mission field you had the company of a good companion, the discipline of mission rules, and the guidance of your mission president and other mission leaders. In that environment you made great

progress in your ability to learn the gospel, to serve the Lord, and to hear the promptings of His Holy Spirit to guide you in what you would do. When you returned from your mission, you had an important choice to make. This important choice was between returning to the way you lived prior to your mission or holding on to the way you had learned to live in the mission field. What choice did you make? What choices are you making today?

My young brothers and sisters, I urge you to hold on to the eternally important things you learned in the mission field. If you've gotten away from them, I urge you to return to



**Elder Dallin H. Oaks**



them. Attend sacrament meeting every Sunday and partake of the sacrament to qualify for the great promise that you will “always have his Spirit to be with [you]” (D&C 20:77). Have daily scripture study like you did in the mission field. It will keep you on the path of truth, and it will also help you to have His Spirit to be with you always. Don’t slip back into listening to the kind of music that is mind deadening and spiritually destructive. Seek out your bishop and ask for a Church calling. Serve the Lord and your fellowmen. Be the kind of returned missionary for whom those initials “RM” mean “returned missionary,” not “retired Mormon.”

Stay close to your families. Hang on to the wholesome traditions of your culture, the kind of traditions that have led to righteous behaviour, strong families, and good citizens and servants of the Lord. Finally, associate with good friends, the kind of people you would like to have as eternal friends and among whom you can meet a companion with whom you can go to the temple to assure that your sweet relationship will endure throughout eternity.

### III.

Now I have something to say to the parents and Church leaders of returned missionaries. Parents, when your son or daughter left for missionary service, he or she was a teenager, subject to your authority and mostly dependent upon your leadership and support. When your missionary returned, he or she had become an adult—a young single adult. Young single adults should not be treated like children, and they should not expect you to support them and guide them in everything that they do. Please, parents, treat your returned missionaries like the adults that they are. Encourage them and counsel them, but don’t treat them like children.

Bishops and stake presidents, I say the same to you. These returned missionaries are highly trained and experienced servants of the Lord. As a servant of the Lord and a called leader of His Church, I say to you, please give your returned missionaries Church callings as soon as they return from their missions. Put them to work in the Church. We must not lose their experience and their great potential as role models, especially for younger

men and women. Put them to work in teaching and leading. If this means releasing more experienced men and women to make room for callings to these young single adults, count that as a cost of training and preserving the rising generation, and do it. An older mature member can get along without a Church calling. But we need callings and continued training for these young adults who are the future leaders of the Church.



### IV.

Now I speak of some other very important subjects. Here in

the United States we are speaking to our fellow citizens—LDS and non-LDS—of three subjects: faith, family, and freedom. I believe these subjects are equally important for you, my brothers and sisters in the Pacific. I begin with the doctrine of the family and its relationship to our responsibilities as parents and future parents.

Consider these inspired words from the family proclamation:

“We . . . solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children. . . .

“The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity.”<sup>1</sup>

This explanation of God’s plan—eternal truths we accept and have no power to change—gives us a perspective that does not allow us to accept other arrangements for children or other definitions of marriage, even though civil laws permit them.

Our theology begins with heavenly parents. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the plan of our Heavenly Father for the benefit of his spirit children. That gospel plan is carried out through earthly families. As parents we participate in that plan by providing earthly bodies for the spirit children of our heavenly parents. We solemnly affirm that the fulness of eternal salvation is in family relationships, which we desire to perpetuate throughout eternity. We may truly say that the gospel plan originated in the council of an eternal family, it is implemented through our earthly families, and it has its destiny in our eternal families.

Brothers and sisters, I testify that these things are true. If we have faith and hold on to these truths, we will be blessed in this life and in all time to come.

This Church exists to provide the sons and daughters of God with the means of entrance into and exaltation in the celestial kingdom. It is correct to say that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a family-centred church, in doctrine and practices. At a time when the world seems

to be losing its understanding of the purpose of marriage and the value of childbearing, it is vital that we Latter-day Saints have no confusion about these matters. In Latter-day Saint families we have a father and a mother, not a mother and a partner—not a father and a partner. We have a father and a mother. And we should always speak of our parents in those terms.

We are, of course, conscious that in many nations of the world, including within the Pacific Area, and in many states of the United States, the law has permitted something called “marriage” to be performed between a woman and a woman or between a man and a man. But that does not change the biological fact that only a man and a woman together have the natural capacity to conceive children. More importantly, changes in the civil law do not change the plan of God or the commandments He has given His children. As the First Presidency reminded us in their recent letter, “God expects us to uphold and keep His commandments regardless of divergent opinions or trends in society.”<sup>2</sup>



## V.

Traditional man-woman marriage is a religious doctrine, but it is much more. Marriage is far more than a contract between two individuals to authorize their affections and to provide for mutual obligations. Traditional marriage is a vital social institution for rearing children and teaching them to become responsible adults.

Many studies have shown that a husband and wife who are united in a loving, committed marriage provide the best environment for protecting, nurturing, and raising children.

But beyond that, the traditional marriage of a man and a woman has been the pattern for thousands of years because families guided by a loving mother and father serve as the fundamental institution for transmitting to future generations the moral strengths and values that are important to civilization. There is no substitute for a biological mother and father. In 1948, the world's nations issued the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms that "the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society."<sup>3</sup>

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints affirms that God's children have a right to be born and reared in a home with married parents of the opposite gender, not to be part of some social experiment. There is ample evidence over the years that children do better by almost every measure when they are raised in a home with parents of separate gender. We are for governments promoting and encouraging what is best for their future generations. We are for the long view—the transmission of values across multiple generations. We are for the future of children.



## VI.

Parents have a God-given responsibility to teach their children. President David O. McKay made this inspired statement:

"The home is the first and most effective place for children to learn the lessons of life: truth, honor, virtue, self-control; the value of education, honest work, and the purpose and privilege of life. Nothing can take the place of home in rearing and teaching children, and no other success can compensate for failure in the home."<sup>4</sup>

More recently, the First Presidency has called on parents “to devote their best efforts to the teaching and rearing of their children in gospel principles. . . . The home is the basis of a righteous life, and no other instrumentality can take its place . . . in . . . this God-given responsibility.”<sup>5</sup> In their homes, parents are able to teach their children lovingly, by precept and example. Parents should not transfer this responsibility to anyone else. Even the best boarding schools cannot substitute for the parental teaching that guides a child toward eternal life. President Ezra Taft Benson taught, “The family is the most effective place to instill lasting values in its members.”<sup>6</sup> For example, schools and governments can teach children about rights, but eternal life is not achieved by asserting rights. Eternal life, “the greatest of all the gifts of God” (D&C 14:7), is achieved by fulfilling responsibilities, and the home is the place to teach about duties and responsibilities.

Parents, this responsibility to teach our children is first in importance. The First Presidency has declared that “how-

ever worthy and appropriate other demands or activities may be, they must not be permitted to displace the divinely-appointed duties that only parents and families can adequately perform.”<sup>7</sup> Some of the most important efforts toward fulfilling the mission of the Church will be those of parents who teach their children the doctrines and practices of the Church, by precept and by example.

## VII.

I have been speaking of the doctrine of the family and

parents’ responsibilities to teach their children. But in the restored gospel there is more to the doctrine of the family than honouring our mortal parents and teaching our mortal posterity. We know by modern revelation and prophetic teaching that our family duties extend to our ancestors as well as our posterity. For the living and the dead, certain ordinances need to be performed in mortality. That is one of the great purposes of the temples that are now located so widely throughout the South Pacific.



HAMILTON NEW ZEALAND TEMPLE

I was pleased to learn that your Area Presidency is encouraging every youth and adult to acquire a temple recommend, to identify deceased family members through completing the booklet *My Family* and by taking or sending family names to the temple for ordinance work. I encourage you to follow your Area Presidency's leadership. Young and old, be involved in the great rescue effort of the members of our families—our ancestors—who have died without the opportunity to participate in those essential ordinances of baptism, the making of covenants that we call the temple endowment, and that essential ordinance of marriage in the temple.

#### **VIII.**

I've now spoken of faith and family. As I mentioned earlier, in the United States when we speak of faith and family, we also speak of freedom, which means the freedom to choose who and how we will worship and how we will perform our religious duties. You have the same freedoms in the Pacific. Use the freedom you have been granted. I also

urge you not to be intimidated in speaking of your religious faith and the teachings of the restored Church. We insist on our leaders and members' rights to express and advocate our religious convictions on marriage, family, and morality, free from legal or personal restrictions.

Our precious religious freedom also carries the responsibility to be respectful toward those who do not agree with our doctrine or our actions. In your country you have a history of tolerant diversity—not perfect but mostly effective at allowing persons with competing visions to live together in peace. We all want to live together in happiness and harmony. We all want to live together in a community of goodwill, patience, and understanding. We all want effective ways to resolve differences without anger or contention and with mutual understanding and accommodation. To achieve these goals we must have mutual respect for others whose beliefs, values, and behaviours differ from our own. This does not mean that we will deny or abandon our differences but that we will learn

to live with others who do not share them.

For example, those who rely on and use the laws authorizing same-sex marriage should not be treated disrespectfully. The gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us to love and treat all people with kindness and civility, even when we disagree.

#### **IX.**

In conclusion, I remind us that we have a solemn religious duty to be witnesses of God.

The Apostle John taught, "And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of anti-christ, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world" (1 John 4:3).

If we fail to speak out as witnesses of God and His teachings, we are like the salt in the Saviour's teaching about the salt that has "lost [its] savour." Mixed with other substances—just like we can be diluted by the values of the world—salt loses its unique influence on the mixture of the mass. As the Saviour taught, that salt is "thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out,

and to be trodden under foot of men” (Matthew 5:13).

My fellow Latter-day Saints, we are the “salt of the earth.” We must retain our savour by living our religion and by asserting ourselves as witnesses of God. When we do this, we associate ourselves with those who will enjoy the ultimate

victory of truth and righteousness, when “every knee shall bow . . . and every tongue shall confess” to God and the Lord Jesus Christ (see Romans 14:11), whom we worship and whose servants we are. I testify of Them and invoke Their blessings in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

#### NOTES

1. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
2. First Presidency letter, March 6, 2014.
3. United Nations, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” General Assembly Resolution 217 A (III), Dec. 10, 1948, available at [un.org/en/documents/udhr](http://un.org/en/documents/udhr).
4. *Family Home Evening Manual 1968–69*, (1968), iii.
5. First Presidency letter, Feb. 11, 1999; printed in *Church News*, Feb. 27, 1999, 3.
6. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Ezra Taft Benson* (2014), 187.
7. First Presidency letter, Feb. 11, 1999.



## Enriching Marriage

For members, marriage is an important earthly experience of eternal consequence. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” states, “Marriage between man and woman is essential to His [Heavenly Father’s] eternal plan.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, unhappy marriages exist. Often the most important things for a happy marriage are neglected in place of instant gratification and the pursuit of competing activities, eg social media, work, sports, Church callings and community interests. When these types of activities take undue priority, marital discontent will flow. President James E. Faust succinctly declared: “In my experience there is another reason [for divorce] which seems not so obvious. . . . It is the lack of a constant enrichment in marriage. It is an absence of that something extra which makes it precious, special, and wonderful, when it is also drudgery, difficult, and dull.”<sup>2</sup>

President Faust further declared, “In the enriching of marriage the big things are the little things.”<sup>3</sup> The Strengthening Marriage course suggests five actions to help enrich marriages<sup>4</sup>:

- **Center your marriage in the gospel of Jesus Christ.** Regarding happiness in marriage, President Faust observed, “Spiritual oneness is the anchor.”<sup>5</sup>
- **Take time for each other.** President Gordon B. Hinckley said of families, “Nothing [we] have is more precious. . . . When all is said and done, it is this family relationship which we will take with us into the life beyond.”<sup>6</sup>
- **Have fun together.** Enjoyable activities are immensely enriching. Fun leisure pursuits are endless.
- **Talk frequently and positively.** President Faust shared: “Marriage relationships can be enriched



by better communication. . . . We communicate in a thousand ways, such as a smile, a brush of the hair, a gentle touch, and remembering each day to say ‘I love you’ and the husband to say ‘You’re beautiful.’ Some other important words to say, when appropriate, are ‘I’m sorry.’ Listening is excellent communication.”<sup>7</sup>

- **Perform acts of kindness.** “Husbands and wives help [one another] when they show genuine respect, kindness, and affection for each other.”<sup>8</sup>

For more information, go to [www.providentliving.org/lds-family-services/strengthening-marriage?lang=eng](http://www.providentliving.org/lds-family-services/strengthening-marriage?lang=eng) ■

### NOTES

1. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 2010, 129.
2. James E. Faust, in *Strengthening Marriage Instructor’s Guide* (2006), 55.
3. James E. Faust, in *Strengthening Marriage*, 57.
4. See *Strengthening Marriage*, 57–62.
5. James E. Faust, in *Strengthening Marriage*, 57.
6. Gordon B. Hinckley, in *Strengthening Marriage*, 58.
7. James E. Faust, in *Strengthening Marriage*, 60.
8. *Strengthening Marriage*, 61.