

Organization of the Relief Society



Joseph Smith's Red Brick Store in Nauvoo, Illinois

Sarah M. Kimball invited about twelve women to meet in her home to discuss how they could contribute to the building of the Nauvoo Temple. A summary of that event is found in the following excerpt from *Daughters in My Kingdom*:

“In that era, it was a popular practice for women to form their own organizations, often with constitutions and bylaws—sets of rules to govern the organizations. The women who met at Sarah Kimball’s home decided to establish a constitution and bylaws, and Eliza R. Snow accepted the responsibility to write them. Then the women asked Joseph Smith to review them and give his opinion of them. After the Prophet read them, he

said they were ‘the best he had ever seen. “But,” he said, “this is not what you want. Tell the sisters their offering is accepted of the Lord, and he has something better for them than a written constitution. I invite them all to meet with me and a few of the brethren . . . next Thursday afternoon, and I will organize the women under the priesthood after the pattern of the priesthood”’ [Sarah M. Kimball, “Auto-biography,” *Woman’s Exponent*, Sept. 1, 1883, 51]. . . .

“That next Thursday, on March 17, 1842, twenty women assembled on the upper floor of a building, often called ‘the red brick store,’ where Joseph Smith had an office and a business to support his family. They met under the direction of Joseph Smith and two members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Elders John Taylor and Willard Richards.

“Rather than pattern a Latter-day Saint women’s organization after the women’s societies that were prevalent and popular at that time, the Prophet Joseph Smith organized them in a divinely inspired and authorized manner. . . .

“. . . The Prophet Joseph Smith declared, ‘The Church was never perfectly organized until the women were thus organized’ [*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 451]. Sister Eliza R. Snow, [who later served as] the second Relief Society general president, reiterated this teaching. She said: ‘Although the name may be of modern date, the institution is of ancient origin. We were told by our martyred prophet that the same organization existed in the church anciently’ [Eliza R. Snow, “Female Relief Society,” *Deseret News*, Apr. 22, 1868, 1; punctuation standardized]” (*Daughters in My Kingdom* [2017], 11–12, 7).

- What stands out to you about how the Relief Society was organized?
- Based on the statements in this handout, what truths can we learn about Relief Society?