

We will step out of chronological order to next discuss the organization of the woman's Relief Society, because it fits best beside the organization of the church. Sarah Granger Kimball remembered the Prophet Joseph Smith saying: "I will organize the women under the priesthood after the pattern of the priesthood. . . The Church was never perfectly organized until the women were thus organized" ("Auto-biography," *Woman's Exponent*, Sept. 1, 1883, 51). The prophet's first cousin, George Albert Smith, later said: "It was the Prophet Joseph Smith who first turned the key for the emancipation of women of this world" (Belle Spafford, *BYU Speeches*, 02-11-1975). In other words, Joseph Smith became the first feminist in nineteenth century America.

Sources:

We have a wealth of information from the minutes taken at the he first two years of Relief Society organization through: <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book/1#full-transcript>. Other sources will be included in the text.

Time Line

- Sep21, 1826** Emma joins Joseph as directed by Angel Moroni to bring the "right person" to receive the plates
June 1829 Angel Moroni shows Mary Whitmer the Gold Plates as the first witness other than the Prophet Joseph
July 1830 Emma Receives the Revelation known as D&C 25
1835-1836 Women help with Temple in Kirtland OH
Feb? 1842 Margaret Cooke desires to help with the Temple and tells Sarah Granger Kimball
Mar17, 1842 Organization of the Relief Society and Presidency Ordained (20 members)
Mar24, 1842 Second Meeting of the Relief Society (47 members)
Mar30, 1842 Gifts of the Spirit poured out

Historical Overview in Preparation for the Restoration of the Organization and Empowerment of Women

The handout is organized chronologically—walking through the history that prepared the way for the organization of the Relief Society, and then notes from the first few meetings of the organization.

July 1830, Harmony PA

We read in D&C 25 that in July 1830, the prophet Joseph spoke for the Lord in a blessing to Emma Hale Smith. At the end of the blessing, the Lord expands the audience beyond Emma to, "all" (D&C 25:16). This may possibly refer to all disciples or all women (also see D&C 61:18). In either case, the message was a major step forward in empowering women in the history of the world. In the revelation God promised that Emma would "be ordained under" the prophet's "hand to expound scriptures, and to exhort the church, according as it shall be given thee by my Spirit" (D&C 25:16, 7). At the organization of the Relief Society (RS), Joseph quoted this verse and added, "not she alone, but others, may attain to the same blessings" (*JSP*, "Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book," 8).

This direction to teach the scripture in church sharply contrasts with most of Christianity, which had kept women silent in churches for 18 centuries due to a change in the text of 1 Cor 14:35 (see my NT CFM Commentary). In the revelation God defined "daughters in my kingdom" as those who "receive my gospel" (D&C 25:1). God promised Emma that he will "preserve thy life, and thou shalt receive an inheritance in Zion," and that her sins were forgiven (D&C 25:2-3).

The Lord also calls Emma "an elect lady" (which title is also found in 2 John 1:1). Joseph later explained that "she was called an Elect lady . . . because, [she was] elected to preside" (*JSP*, "Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book," 9).

God asks Emma to: 1) not murmur, 2) comfort Joseph, 3) act as scribe for the Bible translation, 4) expound the scriptures 5) exhort the church, 6) write and learn, 7) lay aside things of this world, 8) prepare a hymnal (published in 1835), 9) continue in meekness, 10) beware of pride, and 11) keep the commandments.

1835-1836 Kirtland OH

In Kirtland the LDS women organized themselves to help with the Temple. Some drove oxen to haul rock, worked with the brick masons, and others made the veils for inside the temple. Joseph praised them, "Well, sisters, you are always on hand. The sisters are always first and foremost in all good works. Mary was first at the resurrection; and the sisters now are the first to work on the inside of the temple" (Tullidge, *Women of Mormondom*, 76).

Early Spring 1842

In early 1842, a seamstress, Miss Margaret Cooke, and her employer, Sarah Granger Kimball, her came up with a plan where they could help to further the building of the Nauvoo Temple. Sarah Kimball recorded:

In the [spring of 1842], a Miss Cooke was seamstress for me. The subject of combining our efforts for assisting the Temple hands came up in conversation. She desired to help, but had no means to furnish. I told her I would furnish material if she would make some shirts for the workmen. It was then suggested that some of our neighbors might wish to combine means and efforts with ours, and we decided to invite a few to come and consult with us on the subject of forming a Ladies' Society. The neighboring sisters met in my parlor and decided to organize. I was delegated to call on Sister Eliza R. Snow and ask her to write a constitution and by-laws, and submit them to President Smith prior to our next meeting. When she read them to him, he replied that the constitution and by-laws 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 (Hyrum & Helen Andrus, comps., *They Knew the Prophet*, 131).

By looking at Joseph's other writings we can try to understand what he meant by "under the priesthood" and "the pattern of the priesthood." In D&C 107:7, the same phrase is used: "the office of an elder comes *under the priesthood* of Melchizedek." The power of God would be present and the woman's organization is soon blessed with an outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit. As early as 1835, the "pattern" of the priesthood is organized as "Presidencies of individual stakes and priesthood quorums generally followed this same pattern of one president with two counselors" (Instruction on Priesthood between ca. 1 Mar. and ca. 4 May 1835 [D&C 107:13–15, 21, 60–63]; *Minutes and Discourse*, ca. 7 July 1834).

By having this organization patterned after and "under the priesthood" they are blessed with the same divine inspiration, blessings and power from God that are associated with the priesthood quorums. In 1842, Joseph taught the sisters: "the Society should move according to the ancient Priesthood, hence there should be a select Society separate from all the evils of the world, choice, virtuou[s] and holy." I assume this refers to Adam, Enoch, and Abraham's time, not the Mosaic order.

Organization of the Relief Society Thursday, March 17, 1842

(20 women present Upper Room of the Red Brick Store)

Joseph Smith's journal records: "I assisted in commencing the organization of 'The Female Relief Society of Nauvoo' . . . I gave much instruction, read in the New Testament, and Book of Doctrine and Covenants concerning the Elect Lady, and shewed that the elect meant to be elected to a certain work &c and that the revelation was then fulfilled by Sister Emma's election to the Presidency of the Society, she having previously been ordained to expound Scriptures" (*History of the Church*, vol. 4.552). The secretary recorded more (*Relief Society Minute Book*, 6-7):

. . . The meeting was address'd by Pres. Smith, to illustrate the object of the Society—that the Society of Sisters might provoke the brethren to good works in looking to the wants of the poor—searching after objects of charity, and in administering to their wants—to assist; by correcting the morals and strengthening the virtues of the female community . . . Pres. Smith further remark'd that an organization to show them how to go to work would be sufficient. He propos'd that the

Sisters elect a presiding officer to preside over them, and let that presiding officer choose two Counsellors to assist in the duties of her Office—that he would ordain them to preside over the Society—and let them preside just as the Presidency, preside over the church; and if they need his instruction—ask him, he will give it from time to time.

Let this Presidency serve as a constitution—all their decisions be considered law; and acted upon as such. If any Officers are wanted to carry out the designs of the Institution, let them be appointed and set apart, as Deacons, Teachers &c. are among us. The minutes of your meetings will be precedents for you to act upon—your Constitutio[n] and law. He then suggested the propriety of electing a Presidency to continue in office during good behavior, or so long as they shall continue to fill the office with dignity &c. like the first Presidency of the church (Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 104-5).

The minutes to the meeting then recorded the process of selecting Emma as President. After which, "President Smith read the Revelation to Emma smith, from the book of Doctrine and Covenants; and stated that she was ordain'd at the time, the Revelation was given, to expound the scriptures to all; and to teach the female part of community; and that not she alone, but others, may attain to the same blessings (ibid., *Relief Society Minute Book*, 8);

Name and Purpose

Many women's societies sprang up in the 19th century to promote reform. From 1815-1861 we see societies in most cities for Protestant missionary work, benevolent societies, abolitionist, female educational, etc. Many used the name Benevolent in their title, so they became known as "The Benevolent Empire." Because of this, at that first Women's meeting, John Taylor suggested using the name: "The Nauvoo Female Benevolent Society." Everyone seemed in agreement until Emma spoke. She felt it was too popular. Some of the most well-known Benevolent Societies were corrupt. She preferred "Relief Society" as that was their aim. Her newly called counselor, Sister Cleveland added: "we design to act in the name of the Lord—to relieve the wants of the distressed, and do all the good we can." The minutes record how the tenor changed to support their new president:

Historical Context

Remember, the idea of the priesthood was shunned protestant 17th through early 19th century America. As mentioned in a previous lecture, "Priesthood" was seen as "popish phraseology." Yet Joseph's revelations and angelic visitations taught him that the priesthood was the power of God (D&C 50:26-27; 1 Nephi 17:29; etc.). Joseph's view of the priesthood developed over the next two decades into a vast theology intertwined priesthood power with the gifts and fruits of the Spirit in an interdependent way. Right from the start of the restoration Joseph began linking them together: "the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness . . . [If] the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man" (D&CC 121:36-37). The Lord taught Joseph that the power of the Priesthood functions only when the fruits of the Spirit are present (see Gal 5:22; Eph 5:9). We also see Joseph connecting the gifts of the Spirit and the power of the priesthood together in the organization of the Relief Society.

“Pres. Emma Smith remark’d— we are going to do something extraordinary . . . Elder Taylor arose and said— I shall have to concede the point— your arguments are so potent I cannot stand before them— I shall have to give way—Pres. J. S. said I also shall have to concede the point, all I shall have to give to the poor, I shall give to this Society” (ibid., 12).

So the name became: *The Female Relief Society of Nauvoo*. It began with 20 women, and two years later included 1,341 sisters.

Thursday, March 24, 1842.—(2nd Meeting~ 68 members)

The prophet also attended the second meeting and his journal recorded:

I attended by request, the Female Relief Society, whose object is the relief of the poor, the destitute, the widow and the orphan, and for the exercise of all benevolent purposes. Its organization was completed this day. Mrs. Emma Smith takes the presidential chair; Mrs. Elizabeth Ann Whitney and Sarah M. Cleveland are her counselors; Mrs. Elvira Cole is treasurer, and our well-known and talented poetess, Miss Eliza R. Snow, secretary. There was a very numerous attendance at the organization of the society, and also at the subsequent meetings, of some of our most intelligent, humane, philanthropic and respectable ladies; and we are well assured from a knowledge of those pure principles of benevolence that flow spontaneously from their humane and philanthropic bosoms, that with the resources they will have at command, they will fly to the relief of the stranger; they will pour in oil and wine to the wounded heart of the distressed; they will dry up the tears of the orphan and make the widow's heart to rejoice” (*History of the Church*, vol. 4.567).

Joseph wanted a very small select group in the new society. He hoped they would be raised up as priestesses. He repeatedly asked for caution in allowing in members. The timing was important, as it was these women who would soon officiate as priestesses in the Temple.

Thursday, March 30, 1842 (3rd Meeting)

Secretary Eliza R. Snow recorded from their third meeting: “Pres. Joseph Smith arose—spoke of the organization of the society—said he was deeply interested that it might be built up to the Most High in an acceptable manner—that its rules must be observed—that none should be received into the society but those who were worthy. . . . thus have a **select society of the virtuous**, and those who will walk circumspectly.

Commended them for their zeal but said some times their zeal was not according to knowledge. . . . All must act in concert or nothing can be done, that **the society should move according to the ancient Priesthood**, hence there should be a select society, separate from all the evils of the world, choice, virtuous and holy. Said he was going **to make of this society a kingdom of priests as in Enoch's day-as in Paul's day-that it is the privilege of each member to live long and enjoy health**” (*History of the Church*, 4. 570; *Relief Society Minute Book*, 22).

The minutes also include lists of each donation offered by the women—monetary or in kind. Many appear as widow’s mites, and each is listed beside a woman’s name.

Ordained as Presidentess and Priestesses

During those first few meetings, the women were organized as were the brethren. Interestingly, as part of the letter written in Liberty Jail in 1839 that became part of D&C sections 121, 122, he talks about keys of the kingdom, the priesthood, and then goes onto say, “And now dear and well beloved brethren and when we say brethren we mean those who have continued faithful in Christ men, women, and children, we feel to exhort you in the name of the Lord Jesus, to be strong in the faith of the new and everlasting covenant, and nothing frightened at your enemies” (Joseph Smith, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, Dean C. Jessee, ed. 374–382).

April 14, 1842 (4th Meeting, ~88 members)

Pres. E. Smith arose and address’d the meeting by saying . . . her desire was to do good—wish’d all the members of this Society to assist her— said it was necessary to begin at home— to eradicate all evil from our own hearts— and warn those who wish to join, with us, to come calculating to divest themselves of every thing wrong and unite to expose iniquity, to search it out and put it away— She said the Society had other duties to attend to than seeing to the wants of the poor.

Exhorted the members so to conduct as to have the honor of commencing a good work and of carrying it out— enforc’d the necessity of walking in a manner that would be approbated of God.

Though not mentioned in the minutes, Joseph encouraged both men and women to heal the sick through the gifts of the Spirit. There must have been something said at one of these first four meetings about women healing and given instructions on the laying on of hands because it is mentioned in the next meeting as happening after this meeting.

April 19 (5th Meeting)

Mrs. [Elizabeth Davis] Durfee bore testimony to the great blessing she received when administered to, after the close of the last meeting, by Pres. E. Smith & Councillors Cleveland and Whitney. she said she never realized more benefit thro’ any administration— that she was heal’d, and thought the sisters had more faith than the brethren.

Miss [Eliza R.] Snow after making observations with regard to the Society— the importance of acting in wisdom & walking humbly before God &c. said she had a blessing for Mrs. Buel, that inasmuch as she had become a member of [p. 31] this Society, as the spirit of a person pervades every member of the body, so shall the Spirit of the Lord which pervades this Society be with her—she shall feel it and rejoice— she shall be blest wherever she is, and the Lord shall open the way and she shall be instrumental in doing much,—thro’ her own exertions by the instrumentality of others, she shall be enabled to contribute much to the fund of the Society—she shall warm up the hearts of those who are cold and dormant, and shall be

instrumental in doing much good—Mrs. [Abigail] Leonard, Councillor W. and Councillor C. bore testimony to the truth of what Miss Snow had said to Mrs. Buel—

Councillor Cleveland stated that she many times felt in her heart, what she could not express it in our own language, and as the Prophet had given us liberty to improve the gifts of the gospel in our meetings, and feelings the power resting upon, desired to speak in the gift of tongues; which she did in a powerful manner.

Mrs. Sessions arose and gave the interpretation of what Councillor C. had spoken in an unknown tongue, and said that God was well pleas'd with this Society, that if we would be humble and faithful the Lord would pour out upon the members generally the gift of prophecy— that when the speaker laid her hand on the head of Sister Snow, she said that not only she should have the spirit but that all should have it also— that the speaker then address'd herself to Mother Smith saying that the prayers of father Smith were now answered upon the members of the Society— that the days of Mother S. should be prolong'd and she should meet many times with the Society, should enjoy much in the society of the [p. [32]] sisters & shall hereafter be crown'd a mother of those that shall prove faithful &c.

The meeting was very interesting, nearly all present arose & spoke, and the spirit of the Lord like a purifying stream, refreshed every heart. . . .

The meeting clos'd with prayer by Mother Smith and singing by the choir— after which

Mrs. Leonard was administered to for the restoration of health, by Councillors f & Whitney.

Next week we will begin here and continue to examine the growth of the organization and exercising of the Gifts of the Spirit. We will also study the Prophet Joseph's defense of the woman exercising the Gifts of the Spirt. He called them to "Live up to their privileges." We continue to heard support from this as recently as this past General Conference when Joy Jones quoted Pres. Russel M. Nelson who said: "I pled with my sisters of the church to step forward, take your rightful and needful place in your home, in your community and in the kingdom of God—more than you ever have before."

I have looked carefully at how Joseph Smith used twelve words associated with Priesthood. (Under the heading of AP—I include the words: Aaronic, Aaron, Levitical, Levi, Lesser). I looked at the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, plus three sources of Joseph's personal writings or sermons—

1. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church, of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. 1844. Reprint Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, Reprint 1980.
2. Dean C. Jessee, ed. *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1984.
3. Andrew Ehat and Lyndon Cook, ed. and comp. *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Smith*. Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center Brigham Young University, 1990.

COUNTING uses of Priesthood in *History of the Church*

Date	AP- lesser	MP- high	Auth	Office	Ordinance	Power	Spirit	Keys	Order of	Ordain	Title	Miracle
1.39-40	2		1		1		1			2		
1.40-41		1			1			1		3		
1.43/4					1					1		
1.60-2	1	1	1	1	1		1			1		
1.79				1			1			1		
1.84				1			1			1		
1.85-6						1	1					
1.175; 6- 3		1				1						
1.267												
1.286 9-22/3-3										1	1	
1.299	1	1										
1.325			1				1					
1.327		1		1								
1.334		2		1				2				
1.336			1	1		1	1					
1.338/9		1		1						1		
1.353		1										
1.354	1	2		2					1			
1.358	1								1			

Date-Refer	AP	MP	Auth	Office	Ordinance	Power	Spirit	Keys	Order of	Ordain	Title	Miracle
327, 1844	1				1		1	1	1	1		
328, 1844	1				1	2	1	1		1		
329, 1844		1			2	1	1	1				
330, 1844					?seal	1						
331, 1844						1	1	1				
332, 1844					1	1	1					
334, 1844	1						1			1		
365, 1844						1						
366, 1844								2		1		
368, 1844					2							
370, 1844					1							
TOTAL	16	16	14	10	36	22	19	25	8	10	7	4

COUNTING uses of Priesthood in **Dean Jessee, *Personal Writings of the Prophet Joseph Smith***

Date-Refer	AP	MP	Auth	Office	Ordinance	Power	Spirit	Keys	Order of	Ordain	Title	Miracle
4		1			2	1	1	1	1			
37/38		1			1					1		
92			1									
113			1	1			1			1		
134		1		2	1					1		
136	1							1				
148/9		1		1	1							
150, 1-28-36		1			3							
152			1									
153					1	2						
171/2	1	1										
173/4	1	1	1									
181		1			1							
204							1					
215					1	1			1			
260/2	1	1										
380/2								2		1		
390/8					1							
401/6			2			3	1			1	1	
530/1						1	1					
545					1							
TOTAL	4	9	6	4	13	8	5	4	2	5	1	

COUNTING uses of Priesthood in Book of Mormon and D&C use of the word: Priesthood[s]

Date-Refer	AP	MP	Auth	Office	Ordinance	Power	Spirit	Keys	Order of	Ordain	Title	Miracle
Alma 2:20		1					1		1			
Alma 13:6		1		11					1	1		
Alma 13:7		1							2			
Alma 13:8		2		3	4				1	3		
Alma 13:10		2							1	1		
Alma 13:14		2										
Alma 13:18		3							1			
D&C 2:1							1					
D&C 13:1	1				2			1		1		
D&C 20:67		1		1						1		
D&C 27:8	2									2		
Date-Refer	AP	MP	Auth	Office	Ordinance	Power	Spirit	Keys	Order of	Ordained	Title	Miracle

D&C 68:1-2							1			2		
D&C 68:15	1	1								1		
DC68:17-21	2	2	2	4	1		1	3		1		
D&C 78:1		1								1		
D&C 81:2		1						2				
D&C 84:6										1		
DC 84:16-19	1	1						2		1	1	
D&C 84:21			1		1	1						
DC 84:25-26	1	1						1				
DC 84:29-30	2	1		1						1		
DC 84:33,35	1	1					1			1		
DC 84:39-42				2						1		
D&C 84:107	1									1		
D&C 85:11	1	1										
D&C86:8-11				1							1	
D&C 94:6									1			
DC107:1-10	5	9	1	9		1			2		1	
107:13-18	7	6	3	4	1	2	1	3		4		
DC107:20-2	3	2	1	5	2	1		1		2		
DC107:40									1	1		
DC107:64-6		3		2							1	
107:69-70	2	1		1				1				
DC107:73,76	2	3		2				1	2	1		
DC107:78-9		2		1		2						
DC107:82		2		1								
DC107:87-8	1			2						1		
DC107:91	1			1								
D&C 112:30				1		1						
D&C 113:6,8			1			2		1				
D&C 119:2,4											1	
121:21,36-7			1			2		1			1	
121:41,45						1	1					
D&C 122:9											1	
D&C 124:28					1							

Date-Refer	AP	MP	Auth	Office	Ordinance	Power	Spirit	Keys	Order of	Ordnained	Title	Miracle
DC124:34,42				?				1		1		
DC124:91,95				1				1		1		
DC 124:123		1		1				1	1			
DC124:130,32				1						3		
DC 124:137				1						1		
DC 127:8							1					
DC128:8-9,11			1		1	4	2	1				
DC128:17,21					1	1		1				
DC131:2,5,7						4	2	1	1			
DC132:19,28						1	1	1		1		
DC132:44-45						3	1	1				
DC132:58-9	1				1	1		1				
DC132:61,64						1		1				
TOTAL	35	52	11	56+?	15	28	14	27	15	36	7	0

The Book of Mormon cites: "The Holy Order of God" or variations on that 25 times, in addition to the priesthood quotes. Once again, almost all come from Alma (while 1 Nephi, Helaman, and Ether each had one reference)

