

Church Service

Interviewer: Lara Anderson (granddaughter), 3/18/24

Lara

We are going to be discussing grandpa's church service over the years in many capacities. Do you want to just give us some highlights of the many callings that you've held?

John C. Elsey

Well, the first calling I had as a member was as a home teacher with another guy my age, Richard Sager, and we were visiting this old guy, and we were like, "How do we do this?" You know, a couple of 18-year-olds. . . we'd never done this stuff before and we went to visit and he was very nice.

Then I remember, at that time, they had a program where they would send a couple of elders to the hospitals to give blessings to anybody who wanted them and I went, terrified, not having given a blessing before. So, I did that.

Then. I was a scout master. That was the first real church calling I think I had. What?

Went on a mission after I graduated from the University of Utah went on a mission—served in Virginia and North Carolina.

Came back and went to school in Boston. I was the scoutmaster there in Boston. And also, counselor in the Elder's Quorum presidency. After that, we went to Illinois and I was—that was a memorable experience. I was a counselor to the Young Men's president for the district. We did not have a stake—they had branches and a district. So () was President of the Young Men for the district. And he was on the district High Council too. . . I can't remember. But anyway, I worked with him, and we developed a lifelong friendship. He was a wonderful person, he and his wife. So I served there for a couple years in the district, and he was called to be the missionwide Young Men's president, and I served as the counselor with him on that. We traveled all over Illinois up into Wisconsin—had some youth conferences. We put on a couple of them, and it was a lot of fun.

And then, well, we moved to California. And my first calling there was as the Young Men's president, which I really enjoyed. I was having a great time with all the young kids, young people, and then I got called as the ward clerk. I did not like that because I didn't want to leave the young people. I was not very happy in that calling. I think I made it known.

I stayed about a year and then I was called on a stake mission. We would go contacting at night sometimes. We had people that we were trying to teach and work with. Good experiences there. I was in that position, when they wanted me to be a 70. That's when they had 70s in those days. So they told me a General Authority ordains a 70. So, I was to go to this place at this time, and it turned out to be a stake conference. And the visiting authority there was Gordon B. Hinckley when he was a member of the

Quorum of the 12. And so when I got to the office, they had me just go in. I think it was the Stake President's office, and it was just he and I. He was absolutely wonderful. I just was in tears almost the whole time. He was so gracious. He set me apart and ordained me as a 70. It was really a highlight. I just really admired that man. He was so kind, so gentle, so understanding— really a neat experience to have that 20 minutes or so with President Hinckley.

And then, after that. . . I can't remember. . . I worked with Young Men. Yeah, I got called as the Deacons Quorum advisor. Our boys, Mike and John, were deacon's age at that time, so I got working with them and really enjoyed that.

And then I got called into the Bishopric—served as the first counselor. I was on the High Council for a while, and then called as the Bishop of our ward—served there five years.

And after that, I was the stake clerk. I don't think the Stake Presidency met as a group without me and (), who was the Executive Secretary. The five of us met for nine years. And, I was on the speaking circuit of the high council, too. So, I was speaking a couple times every other month for nine years. Then after that, I was called as a high priest group leader for our ward. And then we went on a mission to Nauvoo. Came back and moved up here.

We did a couple things up here. I was the emergency preparedness person. And then we had the empty nesters. And we taught the temple prep class.. I really enjoyed teaching that class

They called me as the Elders Quorum secretary. Someone said I was probably the oldest one in the church. Served in that until about a year ago. And since then, I've been retired.

Lara

Did you always participate in choir through the years too?

John C. Elsey

Yeah, I did the stake choir in California. That was fun. I used to sing in the ward choir. And if they had a stake choir, I usually tried to be involved in that—not because I had such a good voice, but because they just needed people and I was a body up there. . . And music is amazing.

Lara

Did you do a lot with scouts? You said you were scout master twice?

John C. Elsey

Yeah, I did. I was grateful to be able to have those years with our boys, John and Mike when they were scouting and we've done a lot with them—hiked in the Sierras. One year, I remember, I think I spent 23 nights sleeping on the ground—between the camps and the Sierra 50 miler. . .

Lara

Looking over the span of your church service, how do you feel that your church service affected your life?

John C. Elsey

Well, when I was young I really developed a testimony of the church and felt it was true. And, I realized that I was happiest when I was doing and keeping the commandments and was involved and I just always wanted to be involved. I've always had a temple recommend—been able to serve there..

Lara

How many years did you serve as a temple worker?

John C. Elsey

Oh, that's true. Yeah, I was over there. I kind of wanted to serve in the temple, but understood that you couldn't really miss much, but when I was called, we went, and they gave you a list of substitutes. So I thought, "Oh, you can take these trips and be away. Because you get a substitute." So, I served about 10 years as an ordinance worker, and then I was a substitute. Spent time subbing for others and then they sub for me, but we were able to travel still and able to do it all.

Lara

So you feel like church service showed you testimony and built your testimony?

John C. Elsey

Oh, yeah. It goes hand in hand, right? I remember thinking when I was a young missionary that no one could serve a mission and not be involved in the church—that turns out not to be true, but to me, it just was the only way to live. And you needed to do that.

Lara

If you were to give advice to people in general as they fulfill their church callings, what advice would you give?

John C. Elsey

The callings are kind of like frosting on the cake in a way. You have a testimony based on your relationship with Heavenly Father and the Savior, and you build that from scriptures and your own study. Then the service that you give is just kind of what you do, but If you are released or something, that's not the end of your church service.

The basics stay the same. I've heard of people who have positions of bishops or whatnot, and are released and they drop out of the church. And I think, "Well, that's not the way it should be. There should be a foundation there—independent of any calling or service that you have and you need to build that foundation. And once you have that, then life is, you know, what you're doing and what you should be doing, and all the answers kind of fall into place.

There is another aspect of church service, I guess, where we got involved in family history. I had always thought that my dad had really been into it, and when he got to a city, he'd look up all the Elseys in the phone book then call and see if we were related.

They worked on the charts and the pages in those days. But once we got here in Lindon, we started looking at the family history. Mavis is a convert, so she had virgin territories. She's the only member of the church in her family, so all her family that she knew we did the temple work for. We even hired a person in the Czech Republic who was able to locate a lot of her ancestry. I think we got over 300 names from him that we did the temple work for. And then with the internet, I got into learning how to find names and search through Ancestry and all that.

And so we've done a whole bunch of family history stuff. They used to give the cards away. [Grandpa opened his drawer and pulled out a thick envelope of temple names] These are some of the people we've done the work for. And Mavis has got a similar bunch as well. So, that was a good thing.

I guess, one of my laments at the moment is that I'm not able to go to the temple. I remember the time when I was able to get up and leave the house at eight o'clock and be at the 8 30 session at the Timpanogos temple. And it was nice to go. I like to go by myself in a way because it gives time to reflect and think. And you can meditate and think about things. We've had times, particularly in California—one time, I remember, we spent all day in the temple. We got to the temple in Los Angeles in the morning, eight or nine o'clock and were there until 9 o'clock at night—did everyone's ordinances for our family. That was really a lot of fun. I remember, one time I got thinking I did 12 endowments in January, besides, being a temple worker at the time.

So, working every Friday and serving there, I miss not being able to be in the temple as much. Probably won't be around to see the Lindon Temple finished. But, when I thought about that, what popped into my mind was, "Wait till you see what's on this side."

I appreciate our opportunities to be there. And the covenants, I mean, Mavis and I try to figure out how to go together, but with the everlasting eternal nature of the marriage covenant, that's very comforting and to have eternal families—together is good.

Lara

Anything you would like to add?

John C. Elsey

Well, there's been a lot of spiritual moments—when you feel the spirit and I often felt that the spirit can be more real than what you might see. When John was young, he liked magic, so he put on these magic shows. And, you can see that some of the things appeared to be one way. You saw it with your eyes, and you would think it was something but it really wasn't—it was some magic behind it or something you could do that would trick your senses. But the spirit doesn't need your eyes to see. The spirit can

communicate directly with your mind and can put thoughts there, give direction, and it comes right to your mind. You don't need ears to hear or eyes to see. The spirit puts all those thoughts right in your mind which is very sure and more powerful than almost anything.

So when we have those feelings, they're very real but they're also fragile. I mean, President Harold B. Lee said, A testimony is like a moonbeam. You have to kind of keep with it the whole time. You can't really hold it, put it on the shelf and say it's mine." You have to continually feed your testimony the way you have to feed your body. And keep it going.