**North America Northwest and West Areas Multi-Stake Conference Broadcast**

**Sunday, January 28, 2018**

**Service and Covenants**

By Elder D. Todd Christofferson

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

It is good to be with you this Sabbath Day. I am grateful for the privilege of speaking to you together with those who have already addressed us. I have deep affection and admiration for Elder Patrick Kearon. When he joined the Church years ago in England, he did so in the face of considerable opposition, but then, as now, he had the courage of his convictions. He has ever been quietly determined to follow the Lord. Those who doubted the wisdom of his decision to be baptized have largely been persuaded by his example, his marriage to Jennifer, and the exemplary family they have raised together. He is a man of wise counsel, as you have witnessed, and of sterling character, and he also speaks English quite well.

Sister Cristina Franco is a woman of spiritual maturity with a sparkling personality. She was called to serve in the Primary General Presidency last year while she was serving as a full-time missionary in Argentina with her husband, Rodolfo. He was president of the Argentina Resistencia Mission. During the last months of their mission, Sister Franco was not able to look forward to a rest. She was preparing to hit the ground running again. We are grateful to her and to Rodolfo.

Elder Brent Nattress, whom we heard from first, was also called straight out of full-time missionary service. With his wife Shawna, Elder Nattress was presiding over the Arizona Gilbert Mission when he was called as a General Authority Seventy two years ago. His background is in healthcare, which is a good fit since he is a person who genuinely does care about others. He and Shawna have a beautiful family of 5 daughters and 2 sons.

We gather today at the end of what has been a memorable and significant month in the history of the Church with the passing of a president of the Church and the setting apart of a new First Presidency. I felt that President Monson’s funeral was a fitting tribute to a devoted and tireless leader. I think the thing that I will remember most about him was his willingness to help whomever he could. He didn’t seem to worry that he couldn’t do everything, or that he knew of many more needs than he could possibly help with. But that didn’t stop him from doing what he could do in the moment. And he did it with love and cheerfulness, and with faith that the Lord would provide what he could not. Besides that, he was a good delegator, and was not shy about asking others also to lend a hand. I think of the scripture penned by the Prophet Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail: “Let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed.”[[1]](#endnote-1) The Lord’s arm was certainly revealed in the ministry of Thomas S. Monson.

As you know, with the death of the president of the Church, the First Presidency is dissolved, and the counselors resume their places in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. In this case, the number serving in the Twelve had been eleven with the death of Elder Robert D. Hales last General Conference. With the addition of Elders Henry B. Eyring and Dieter F. Uchtdorf, we were a quorum of thirteen when we met in the temple two weeks ago. This was my first experience being part of a meeting to determine when the First Presidency should be reconstituted and who should serve in it. I know the Spirit when I feel it, and I felt it then. The sweet feeling of peace and unity made it plain once again why the Holy Spirit is called the Comforter.

I was surprised at how powerful the impression was that came to all of us that the First Presidency should be reorganized that very day. I felt it in a very convincing way. I know the pattern is that the senior apostle becomes the new president of the Church, so in some ways that decision was a foregone conclusion. But as we discussed it, I received a witness that it was not just a matter of an established pattern or a simple formality that President Russell M. Nelson should become president. The witness was that Lord had prepared and chosen him, and that it was in fact His will that Russell Marion Nelson should be ordained and set apart in that office. I feel the same with respect to each of his counselors.

We may all feel that President Nelson’s call is logical and fitting, but I believe it is important to know that the Lord has put him where he is and sustains him in presiding over the Church. As I mentioned, that was clearly manifest to me and the other apostles, but each of you is entitled to the same confirmation. It is something to pray about and to pray for. I hope you will do so, and let the Lord respond to you in his way and time. That testimony came to me with respect to President Monson ten years ago the moment he stood to address the Church for the first time as president. But it can come to each of us at any time as the Lord wills and as we are open to receive it. As I say, I hope you will seek that witness as to President Nelson because it will strengthen you in your own service in the Lord’s cause.

It was interesting after the news conference on Tuesday, January 16th, announcing the new First Presidency, a reporter asked Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf about his feelings not being part of the new presidency. I thought Elder Uchtdorf’s response was especially meaningful. I can’t remember the exact words, but he said something to the effect, “About ten years ago I gave a talk in General Conference, titled ‘Lift Where You Stand.’ That is what I have been doing, and what I will happily continue to do.” It was a beautiful, humble expression that inspired me to go back and re-read his talk.

You will probably recall the simple story he told about a group of brethren in the Darmstadt, Germany, meetinghouse trying to move a grand piano from the chapel to the cultural hall. Elder Uchtdorf recalled, “The task of getting that gravity-friendly instrument through the chapel and into the cultural hall seemed nearly impossible.”[[2]](#endnote-2) They tried various things, positioning and re-positioning the brethren around the piano by strength, height, and age, but nothing worked. Finally, Brother Hanno Luschin spoke up and said, “Brethren, stand close together and lift where you stand.”[[3]](#endnote-3) It seemed too simple, but it worked. Elder Uchtdorf noted that often we fall into one of two camps—we seek to lead, or we seek to hide. There is a better way, however, taught by the Savior Himself: “Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.”[[4]](#endnote-4) We should seek to serve others—wherever we are, wherever we stand—motivated not by selfishness but by charity.

This reminded me of the classic statement of President J. Reuben Clark, Jr. about service in the Church. Most of you are not old enough to remember J. Reuben Clark, but he was a strong and effective member of the First Presidency for many years. He was called as second counselor to President Heber J. Grant while he was serving as the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico. He had never served as a General Authority; he was just called straight into the First Presidency. President Clark served as second counselor, then first counselor, and then when President David O. McKay became president, President Clark became second counselor again, just as it has been with President Henry B. Eyring now. It was in the General Conference when he was sustained as President McKay’s second counselor that President Clark made the statement I refer to. We found a black and white film clip in the Church archive of him speaking on that occasion that I want to play for you. It is very brief.

[Play film segment]

“I thank you for your sustaining votes, and I earnestly pray that I may be the beneficiary of your prayers as time shall go on, and that I may be able to do the things which I am supposed to do with an eye single to the glory of our Heavenly Father. In the service of the Lord, it is not where you serve but how. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, one takes the place to which one is duly called, which place one neither seeks nor declines.”

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So it is.

When President Gordon B. Hinckley became president of the Church in 1995 he said this:

This church does not belong to its President. Its head is the Lord Jesus Christ, whose name each of us has taken upon ourselves. We are all in this great endeavor together. We are here to assist our Father in His work and His glory, “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Your obligation is as serious in your sphere of responsibility as is my obligation in my sphere. No calling in this church is small or of little consequence. All of us in the pursuit of our duty touch the lives of others. To each of us in our respective responsibilities the Lord has said: “Wherefore, be faithful; stand in the office which I have appointed unto you; succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees” (Doctrine and Covenants 81:5). . . . What is really important is that this is the work of the Master. Our work is to go about doing good as did He.[[6]](#endnote-6)

These brethren are right. Any service we give in the Church, willingly and out of a good heart, is valued by the Lord and ultimately refining and sanctifying for us. As President Nelson begins his service in a new calling, this would be a good time for each of us also to begin anew. Some of you are just beginning in a new assignment or calling. Some are continuing in a calling you may have had for years. Whatever the circumstances, all of us can today recommit to doing well our part of the Lord’s work. In a way, this service to Him and to one another is an offering we place upon the altar. It is an expression of gratitude for the incomparable service he rendered for us by His sinless life, by His suffering and death, by His resurrection.

We are all part of the body of Christ, whether the head, hand, foot, ear, eye, or whatever our function. The Savior wills, as Paul said,

That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.[[7]](#endnote-7)

I think of a dear sister I knew years ago in Tennessee, Florence Redelsheimer. Florence served in the military as a nurse in World War II and later joined the Church at age 70 (which I thought at the time was quite old—I don’t think that any more). She had contracted tuberculosis during her service as a nurse, and later in life, the effects of this disease began to take a heavy toll on her. By her mid-70s she was homebound and lived with pain every day. In these difficult circumstances, the bishop and Relief Society president called Florence to be a visiting teacher to four women who were disaffected members of the Church and who wanted no visits.

What could Florence do in such a situation? What service realistically could she give? Well, she did what she could. It wasn’t much, but she did something. She sent notes to each of these women expressing friendship and interest in them and their welfare. She often included words of encouragement in the form of a scripture or a poem. She let each one know that she prayed for her happiness. It was not always easy for Florence to write, but she faithfully sent her notes and letters, sometimes weekly.

Months passed with no response of any kind. Then, after nearly a year, one of these women called Florence on the phone. She was discouraged and despondent. She felt that there was no one in the world who cared about her or who would befriend or help her. In her desperation, she reached out to Florence, to this woman she had never met, but who had been sending her encouraging, friendly notes. Florence did indeed help and counsel her in this moment of deep depression and thereafter. I believe the ray of light that Florence’s simple acts of service and caring represented to this woman literally saved her life when she was contemplating ending it.

As the scripture I cited earlier said, I hope we will each cheerfully do what lies within our power so that the arm or power of the Lord can be revealed to rescue and bless family members, fellow ward members, and many others, even strangers.

Now, I would like to remind you of something President Nelson said to the members of the Church on January 16th when the new First Presidency was announced. Quoting,

Now, to each member of the Church I say: Keep on the covenant path. Your commitment to follow the Savior by making covenants with Him and then keeping those covenants will open the door to every spiritual blessing and privilege available to men, women, and children everywhere. As a new presidency, we want to begin with the end in mind. For this reason, we’re speaking to you today from a temple. The end for which each of us strives is to be endowed with power in a house of the Lord, sealed as families, faithful to covenants made in a temple that qualify us for the greatest gift of God, that of eternal life. The ordinances of the temple and the covenants you make there are key to strengthening your life, your marriage and family, and your ability to resist the attacks of the adversary. Your worship in the temple and your service there for your ancestors will bless you with increased personal revelation and peace and will fortify your commitment to stay on the covenant path.[[8]](#endnote-8) [End quote]

A covenant, as you know, is an agreement between God and man. Its terms are set by God.[[9]](#endnote-9) God binds Himself to sustain us, to sanctify us, and in the end to exalt us in His kingdom. We commit to take upon us the name of Christ, to serve Him and to keep His commandments. And God gives us the gift of the Holy Ghost to guide, comfort, protect, and sustain us in keeping our commitment.

We enter into these covenants with God by priesthood ordinances, the sacred rituals that God has ordained for us to manifest our commitment. The first of these is baptism, just as the Savior Himself was baptized to set the example for us. Nephi tells us that “he showeth unto the children of men that, according to the flesh he humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments. Wherefore, after he was baptized with water the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove.”[[10]](#endnote-10) So we follow that example and continue on to the highest and most sacred ordinances, those received in the temple.

Repeating President Nelson’s words, “The ordinances of the temple and the covenants you make there are key to strengthening your life, your marriage and family, and your ability to resist the attacks of the adversary.”[[11]](#endnote-11) And he added that our worship in the temple and the service we give there on behalf of our ancestors will bless us with increased personal revelation and peace and will fortify our commitment to stay on the covenant path. Of course, as mentioned earlier, our Church service is one of the most important ways we pursue the covenant path.

Our covenants with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ increase and strengthen our faith in them. How is that, you may ask. Let me explain by referring to a newspaper article I read years ago. It was talking about Mormons doing baptisms for the dead, and the misinformed author said (I’m paraphrasing), “Here is what the Mormons do; they take rolls of microfilm with names of deceased persons and immerse the microfilm in a container of water. And when they take it out of the water, all those people are baptized.”[[12]](#endnote-12) I have to admit that idea never occurred to me. Wouldn’t that speed up the work in the temple!

Obviously, that’s not how it works, and as we think about why that doesn’t work, it is clear—there is no personal covenant involved. We know, as Nephi put it, that baptism is the gate by which we enter into the covenant path,[[13]](#endnote-13) and it is a very narrow gate—only one person can pass through at a time, because each person needs to make his or her promise, personally and individually to God. And each person needs to receive God’s promise to him or her personally, individually, by name. It is a testament to the infinite worth of each soul.

Our Heavenly Father binds Himself to bless and bring us into His celestial kingdom one by one. Thus, we can have the greatest faith that He knows each of us, and that His love, the grace of Christ, and the help of the Holy Ghost will see us through any trial or challenge. And if we strive to keep our promise of obedience to Him, we know that everything turns out right in the end. Whatever you have to face, God will see you through. No suffering, no sadness, no injustice will endure or harm you in any lasting way. In the end, He will give you everything He has. You have a covenant with Him.

Remember the vision of the Apostle John regarding those who follow the covenant path: “For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”[[14]](#endnote-14)

I bear you my testimony, my witness, that God loves His children, that Jesus Christ is our Redeemer, the resurrected Lord, that this is the church of Jesus Christ, that He personally directs its affairs, and that He has called President Russell M. Nelson and his counselors, President Dallin H. Oaks and President Henry B. Eyring, to preside in the Church in this season. I pray our Heavenly Father’s constant blessings upon each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. Doctrine and Covenants 123:17. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Lift Where You Stand,” *Ensign*, November 2008, 53. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Lift Where You Stand,” *Ensign*, November 2008, 53. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Matthew 20:27. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. J. Reuben Clark, “Pledge of Devoted Service,” Conference Report, April 1951, 154. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Gordon B. Hinckley, “This Is the Work of the Master,” *Ensign*, May 1995, . [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. 1 Corinthians 12:25-27. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Russell M. Nelson, “A Message from the First Presidency,” January 16, 2018, https://www.lds.org/bc/content/ldsorg/church/news/2018/01/19/2018-01-1000-a-message-from-the-first-presidency.pdf?lang=eng. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. See Bible Dictionary, “Covenant,” 651. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. 2 Nephi 31:7-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Russell M. Nelson, “A Message from the First Presidency,” January 16, 2018, https://www.lds.org/bc/content/ldsorg/church/news/2018/01/19/2018-01-1000-a-message-from-the-first-presidency.pdf?lang=eng. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Reference?? [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. See 2 Nephi 31:17. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Revelation 7:17. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)