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“Women Who Speak with the Power and Authority of God”:
The Role of Women in the Northern Indian Mission, 1964-1973

Amber Miller
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On a quiet lot on the edge of the little town of Fort Thompson, South Dakota, sits a little tan building with plenty of windows and a gravel parking lot. The little tan building stands peacefully, residing in solitude in a cove of trees engulfed by farmland. Once frequented by Latter-day Saint patrons for Sunday worship, the building now waits patiently for the day when hymns, doctrines, and fellowship will fill its empty hall once more. Where the little building now stands, a trailer house once stood, used as both a residence for the missionaries and as a meeting house for Saints on the Crow Creek reservation for spiritual meetings such as sacrament, Sunday school, and Relief Society. In a great act of faith, Lucille Turner, Crow Creek Sioux, sold the land on which the building stands to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, providing the Church with property for a meetinghouse on the reservation. Though presently vacant, the little tan building housed the worship of numerous Native Latter-day Saints for many years.¹

The story behind this resolute meetinghouse mirrors the rough, but sanctified beginnings of Native membership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on numerous Indian reservations throughout the United States as the Church engaged in “Lamanite missions” during the 1960s and 1970s. Such mission work among indigenous people began shortly after the Church’s founding in 1830, resulting from the Latter-day Saint belief that Indigenous Americans are the remnant of God’s chosen people from the religion’s Book of Mormon, sometimes equated with the term “Lamanites.”² Responding to this doctrine, the Church devoted many resources to Lamanite missions, with a particular peak of indigenous mission work taking place in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Many historians have chronicled the trials and adventures of Indian missionaries, describing miraculous tales of conversion, as well as overwhelming obstacles such as the negative reactions of white locals. Today, historians continue exploring this narrative, painting it
in frames from inspirational tales of faith and friendship to colonizing assimilationist expeditions. Although the continuing conversation of these historic missions covers a wide range of views and interpretations, the roles and contributions of women often take a subordinate position in the Indian Mission narrative. In this light, historians of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century mention little more about women than missionaries receiving instruction to marry Native women to form friendships and non-Indian women receiving blessings that they will one day teach the Lamanites.

In Ronald W. Walker’s scholarly writings on the first Indian Mission in 1830, he discusses that the first Indian missionaries were men, and that these men often intermarried with the Natives. Walker’s claims corroborate with Wesley R. Law’s “Mormon Indian Missions,” PhD dissertation, which asserts that Brigham Young encouraged the Elders to marry “Indian” girls to gain the trust of the people. These brief portrayals of women suggest that the first role of women in missionary work was as connectors between missionaries and Native peoples through intermarriage. To add to this role, Ronald Walker alludes to women in Kirtland who received promises in their patriarchal blessings that they would one day have the chance to teach the daughters of the Lamanites. Similarly, in his account of the second mission to Indians in Kansas, historian Danny L. Jorgensen describes that some women received blessings dubbing them as teachers, the missionaries of this mission being families instead of individual males. Though both historians reveal great promise for women’s involvement in missionary work as teachers, neither Walker nor Jorgensen record these women ever getting the chance to fulfill these blessings.

While many historians characterized women’s roles through brief mentions of intermarriage and blessings, many more historians do not mention women in their writings at
all. Historian David K. Flake discusses the reasoning behind this dearth of discussion on women’s roles in the early Indian missions, clearly stating in his *History of the Southwest Indian Mission*, “These missionaries were always men....” Flake acknowledges the minimal documentation of the role of women in the Southwest Indian mission prior to 1930 by suggesting that women are rarely mentioned because they were not as involved in the early Native American missionary work of the Church. However, the scholarly writings on Indian Missions after 1930 do not contain much more mention of the role of women in indigenous missionary efforts. As in early accounts of Indian missions, scholarly writings reveal that, though women participated more in missionary work in the twentieth century, their voices, perspectives, and actions are still largely missing from the Church’s historical conversation regarding Indian missions.

The Northern Indian Mission of 1964 to 1973 serves as a microcosm in its exemplifying of the role of women in the missionary efforts of the Northcentral United States through a recently discovered collection of primary sources preserved by mission president Rex C. Reeve Jr. These primary sources, as supplemented by oral histories, emphasize the experiences of the mission president’s wife, the mission Relief Society, and numerous sister missionaries and female converts within the Northern Indian Mission boundaries of Montana, Wyoming, North and South Dakota, Nebraska, and Minnesota. These records reveal that Native and non-Native women played an integral role in the dissemination of the gospel to the Native American people in the Northern Indian Mission through teaching and testifying, comforting and unifying, and ultimately inspiring many as examples of faith.
Teaching and Testifying

Founded on April 1, 1964, the Northern Indian Mission focused on restoring the “Lamanite” people through growing relationships with them and integrating LDS doctrines and scriptures into Native American culture and belief. With this focus in mind, the missionaries of the Northern Indian Mission approached their proselyting duties with “grafting,” or by attempting to blend LDS doctrines and teachings with Indian culture and identity. Notably, President Rex C. Reeve Jr. and his wife Barbara emphasized teaching women and children, as previous mission presidents focused on other themes, such as education or self-reliance.

The mission president’s wife Barbara Reeve played a significant role in the teaching of the missionaries of the Northern Indian mission. Dedicated her own “Mission Mother” page in the mission’s periodical to the missionaries, Sister Reeve wielded the opportunity to give messages to the missionaries, frequently seizing this opportunity by bearing testimony of sacred principles, encouraging missionaries to keep the commandments, and using scriptures and personal revelation to give advice on how to approach missionary work. Sister Reeve started one of her letters to the missionaries in The Lamanite, “Dear Missionary Companions, the Lord is with us and so is Satan...We are fighting one of the final battles with Satan here upon this earth.” Barbara Reeve’s powerful words to the missionaries ring true, as they mirror doctrines within the Church such as the reality of Satan, the sacred role of missionary work, and the continuous battle between God and Satan raging in Heaven and on Earth. She continued, “Our Heavenly Father would have us bring the truth to our brothers and sisters here. He loves each one as a spirit child.” Again, these words touch on the LDS doctrines of the sacredness of missionary work and the idea that God loves all of his children. Near the end of her remarks, Barbara unyieldingly declared, “Each of the above statements, I testify to you, are true,” openly sharing her witness of
the reality of the previously outlined doctrines. Listing fundamental doctrines of the Church, and explicitly bearing testimony of the sacredness and truth of these principles, Barbara Reeve frequently acted as a witness to the missionaries of the Northern Indian Mission of the doctrines of the missionary cause.

Through the “Mission Mother” page, the mission wife not only bore testimony to the missionaries, but she also taught them. In one issue of *The Lamanite*, Sister Reeve used the *Book of Mormon* scripture, Mosiah 18:23 to teach the missionaries about the commandment to keep the sabbath day holy. She explained, “One of the laws that we need to keep in mind, if we are to be in tune with our Heavenly Father, is to keep the Sabbath Day Holy.” She continued, reading from Mosiah, “And he commanded them that they should observe the sabbath day, and keep it holy...” discussing afterward some promised blessings that the missionaries would find as they kept this commandment. As missionaries are often instructed to do when teaching investigators to the Church, Barbara used the words of the prophets in the *Book of Mormon* to demonstrate the imperative nature of keeping the commandments, promising blessings to the missionaries as a result of their action on the principles taught.

In addition to spiritual teachings, Barbara gave advice on physical tactics of missionary work using her influence in the “Mission Mother” page. *The Lamanite* records some of Barbara Reeve’s advice on how to increase unity within a missionary companionship. She described, “Build this relationship by praise of your companion that is sincere and uplifting. Be careful not to leave him or her out when with other missionaries or people. Be aware of his or her strengths....” Through these insightful words, Barbara imparted motherly wisdom on how to nurture a relationship conducive to the spirit and missionary work to those in her stewardship. These instances of teaching and testifying demonstrate that the mission president’s wife...
contributed to the spiritual training of the missionaries through the “Mission Mother” page, giving instruction on how to live righteously, and how to approach missionary work.

Just as the mission mother taught and testified to missionaries, the Relief Society taught and testified to Native American women in the Church through formal lessons and bulletin messages from the Relief Society presidency. Formal lessons by the Relief Society touched on a wide variety of subjects, many of which supported the mission’s goal of conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ through integrating LDS beliefs with Native culture and identity.¹⁷ In this light, the gospel was often taught by the Relief Society as a way of life. As part of this life-application of the gospel, the Relief Society instructed the women of the Northern Indian Mission on housewife subjects such as cleaning, baking, cooking, mending clothes, nutrition, and finances. These domestic themes often took the form of homemaking lessons that included definitions, diagrams, recipes, instructions, and descriptions of why each skill mattered, usually tying back to the idea of building the home as a mother in God’s kingdom on the Earth.¹⁸

The Relief Society’s teachings also had social implications, focusing on, not only the Native women’s physical homemaking skills, but improving homemaking skills in the social sphere. This social homemaking instruction took forms such as providing instruction on relationships between husbands and wives, and advice on how a mother should raise her children. These topics presented themselves in lessons with headings and subheadings including statements like, “The husband and wife need to feel good towards each other,” “What should a Mother Teach Her Children,” and “How Should a Mother Teach.”¹⁹ The instruction for such topics usually included LDS doctrines, such as the belief that all humans are children of God, God loves his children, and all must obey His commandments.²⁰ Other social relations lessons
emphasized general social skills and norms valued in the Church, such as the idea that everyone is a teacher.\(^{21}\)

In addition to training the Native American women on homemaking and family building, the Relief Society sought to increase knowledge of the gospel. This instruction presented itself in church history lessons, spiritual living lessons, and visiting teaching messages. In this religious sphere of teaching, the Relief Society ensured that the Native women of the Church had a sound knowledge of historical events like the Latter-day Saint migration to Utah, the restoration of the Church through the prophet Joseph Smith, and various other topics.\(^{22}\) The Relief Society added upon this foundational knowledge with lessons on the doctrines of the Church, especially those found in the religion’s *Book of Mormon*, which, according to LDS theology, contains the history of the ancestors of the Indigenous Americans.\(^{23}\) In lessons and visiting teaching messages, the Relief Society encouraged, not only gaining knowledge of the gospel, but sharing it. One visiting teaching lesson quoted Moroni 9:6 from the *Book of Mormon*, saying, “And now...notwithstanding their hardness, let us labor diligently; for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation....”\(^{24}\) Using scriptures, quotes from prophets, and testimonies on how the gospel blesses people, Relief Society literature called the women of the Northern Indian Mission to share the gospel, teaching them how and why members tell others about the Church.

Aside from the Relief Society’s thorough efforts to teach and testify to the women of the Northern Indian mission, there were numerous fulltime sister missionaries called to serve in this area. Although most evidence simply reveals names, quotes, and brief references to these faithful sister missionaries, their presence in the mission and roles as teachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ are essential to the Northern Indian Mission narrative. Many of the sister missionaries in
the Northern Indian mission came from varying states and countries. However, there were those, like Donna Gill Sitake from Sisseton, South Dakota, who attained the unique opportunity to teach among their own people. Raised and converted to the gospel in South Dakota, Donna exercised her new-found faith by serving a mission in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.25 While serving in Louisiana, Donna felt impressed that she was destined to preach the gospel among her people, and she continuously pondered and prayed on the subject. Remarkably, a call eventually came from Church headquarters in Salt Lake City, reassigning her to South Dakota. Reflecting on this miraculous experience, Donna described, “I went back and served there. I enjoyed my time working among my own people. I brought many of them into the Church. We baptized many of them.”26 Donna’s experience reveals that, in the same way that the mission wife taught the missionaries, and the Relief Society taught the Native women of the Church, sister missionaries carried out their role as teachers and witnesses of the gospel among the indigenous population in the Northern Indian mission.

**Comforting and Unifying**

In addition to preaching the gospel alongside male missionaries and mission leaders, women played the role of comforters and unifiers in the mission field. Knowing the rigorous and sometimes disheartening instances that missionaries experienced, the mission president’s wife often used her influence in *The Lamanite* to encourage and comfort the young men and women serving in the Northern Indian Mission. Sister Barbara Reeve often acknowledged the difficulties of mission life, noting in one instance, “...summer can be a discouraging time to some missionaries. The pow-wow season starts and it becomes increasingly difficult to find folks at home.”27 In addition to acknowledging common difficulties familiar to most missionaries, Barbara offered inspiring advice on how to address each issue, suggesting solutions such as,
“going from tent to tent at the powwows to hold family prayers,” and “working to arrange for Sunday morning services.” The mission wife’s acknowledgement of difficulty and her motherly advice on how to move forward despite challenges, demonstrated the comfort that comes with parental instruction, as she fulfilled her role as comforting mission mother.

The mission wife comforted missionaries in other ways, often sharing mission successes through the “Mission Mother” page. On one occasion, Barbara Reeve shared, “This last month the news of many baptisms that have taken place or about to take place, has reached us here at home...We are proud of you and appreciate the efforts that have brought about these baptisms.”

These words highlight successes in the mission, attributing the successes to the efforts of the young men and women serving day in and day out to bring people closer to God through baptism. Similarly, Barbara shared successes on many other occasions, noting events like converts attending the temple for the first time, patriarchal blessings received by new members, and converts called on their own missions. These indicators, as keystones in the covenant path back to God, suggested success at the hand of the missionaries. The mission wife’s dissemination of these encouraging statistics comforted young missionaries, revealing to them that their exhaustive efforts were not in vain.

While the mission president’s wife comforted the missionaries, the leaders of the Relief Society of the Northern Indian mission sought to unify the Native sisters of the Church. In light of this goal of unification, the Relief Society bulletins often contained reports, called “Tall Feathers,” on the progress and doings of Relief Societies across the mission. “Tall Feathers” reports commended Relief Societies that submitted reports on time by name, dubbing them “Star Relief Societies.” These reports also included descriptions and acknowledgements of the actions of each individual Relief Society, listing everything from rummage sales, plays, and quilt-
making, to ground breakings ceremonies for new Church buildings. Posting this sort of information allowed the sisters in each Relief Society to maintain a connection with sisters in other Relief Societies. Exhibiting their fellow sisters’ engagement in promoting Church activity and service, “Tall Feathers” reports held Relief Society members accountable to each other.31 Instead of emphasizing the individual Relief Society, these reports in the bulletins promoted the image of all Relief Societies being one united whole in the Northern Indian Mission.

Another facet of the Relief Society’s unifying role expressed itself in the form of letters from the Relief Society presidency. These letters often addressed widespread problems faced by the women within the mission boundaries. The topics ranged from moral cleanliness and helping inactive husbands, to acceptance of priesthood leaders as servants of the Lord set apart to help those in their congregations.32 These mission-wide Relief Society letters suggest that there were shared concerns throughout the mission, the Relief Society leaders attempting to unify the sisters in their struggles by calling them all to action in a movement for change. Furthermore, these letters also unified sisters through recounting unifying activities. One such activity was described in a letter from Barbara Reeve, member of the mission Relief Society presidency at the time. In outlining a Relief Society trip to Salt Lake City to listen to conference, Barbara described, “...Many of the sisters said that being together made them feel so strong. The feeling of strength came because we were all together, united, and because we had the spirit of the Lord with us.”33 Barbara’s description matched the goal of the Relief Society, in that the sisters of the mission felt united during this spiritual journey to Salt Lake to hear the words of the prophets. By publishing such a powerful unifying experience in a newsletter distributed to all the Relief Societies in the mission, the leaders of the Relief Society worked to spread feelings of oneness throughout the Northern Indian Mission.
Not only did the Relief Society work directly with the sisters of the Northcentral United States to create unity, but they also requested the help of the Northern Indian missionaries in seeing unification through the Relief Society. The mission’s *The Lamanite* publication to the missionaries often contained a page specifically designated to the mission auxiliary. Through *The Lamanite* auxiliary page, the Relief Society directed missionaries in their work within the wards, ensuring Relief Society participation by providing guidelines for the implementation of Relief Society meetings, such as Relief Society organization and meeting components. Such requests from the mission Relief Society reveal that the Relief Society sought to unite the women of the Northcentral United States through the proper application of Relief Society meetings, as ensured by missionary support. This emphasis on Relief Society, directed by the female leaders of the mission Relief Society, indicates that the unification of the women of the Church was an important facet of membership retention within the mission.

Indian Seminary Program reports for the Northern Indian Mission explicitly express the contributions of the wives of program coordinators to Indian missionary work through comforting and unifying. The “role of wives” and “positions held by wives” sections of the Indian Seminary Program reports delineate the specific roles of the wives of seminary coordinators, many of which participated as seminary teachers, food preparers, and teachers and presidency members of the Primary, Relief Society, Sunday school, and Young Women’s programs. Through such positions within the Church, these women profoundly influenced the people within their stewardships. Jean Nahomni Mani, Dakota Latter-day Saint from Fort Thompson, South Dakota, remembers frequently receiving encouragement from her own young women’s leader, who often exclaimed things like, “Jean, I know you’re gonna to do well. I know you’re gonna be happy.” These seemingly simple phrases brought young members like Jean
comfort and hope in places where suffering was rampant. Jean explained the comforting impact of her leader’s words, saying, “That was one of the first times I started hearing that in my life.” Jean’s comment demonstrates that in discouraging reservation conditions, such as substance abuse and poverty, the wives of seminary coordinators comforted the people of the Northern Indian Mission through their various roles within the Church.

In a similar manner, the wives of seminary coordinators extended positive messages of comfort and unity in ways that progressed the dissemination of the gospel through their positions within the community. One seminary coordinator described the unifying effects resulting from his wife filling the position of a local schoolteacher, stating, “The teachers and administration at the school learned that Mormons can laugh and cry just like themselves. Because of her being in the school the image of the Church has really been changed and we are reaching people that wouldn’t even talk to us or the Elders before.” In this sense, the wife of the seminary coordinator served as a conduit between the Latter-day Saints and the community members, unifying them by exemplifying that members of the Church were relatable and loving people.

Sister missionaries also participated in the role of comforting and unifying within the mission. In the “Letters to the Lamanite” open submission section of the mission’s periodical, Sister M. Dosela defined a “Lady Missionary,” saying, “She is alive, she is happy, she is dedicated, she is filled with the love of the Gospel...” This description of sister missionaries became a reality through frequent publications by sisters in The Lamanite, which reflected powerful enthusiasm and love for the work. One sister described, “I am grateful, above any word in the dictionary for my mission call...It is humbling to walk into a log cabin home and see 11 people just sitting on the edges of their beds...with the spirit of the only true Lord growing warmer each minute we are there.” Another young missionary, Sister Betty Paniora, addressed
missionaries throughout the mission in *The Lamanite*, both acknowledging the difficulty of the work and expressing sincere words of encouragement, saying, “Heavenly Father knows us and He knows the work that we do...Keep up the good work...Go to it will all that you are worth...Stick to it.” In these instances, sister missionaries exhibited profound perspective, acknowledged hardship, and called other missionaries to action. In this sense, female missionaries unified and comforted their fellow missionaries by sharing their perspective, understanding, and enthusiasm for the Lord’s work.

Similarly, sister missionaries had a profound comforting effect on those they taught. A young girl on the Sisseton-Wapheton Reservation in South Dakota, Donna Fifita became a member of the Church in 1966 and entered the Indian Placement Program. Upon returning to South Dakota for her senior year of high school, Donna found herself without friends, feeling alone. She recounted her solution to the problem, stating, “...I remember asking the mission president’s wife if she could ask her husband to send sisters to be in the area.” Navajo Sister Biligody and Samoan Sister Tutagalavou came to Donna’s area shortly thereafter. Donna remembered, “I grew really close to those sisters. They were just like my friends. Through their example they got me to come to BYU.” As mentioned earlier, Donna eventually served a mission in Louisiana, and then among her own people in South Dakota. Donna’s story reveals that sister missionaries were sought-after symbols of friendship and love. These attributes brought converts and investigators like Donna comfort and hope in uncertain and lonely circumstances.

In the same sense, sister missionaries were beacons of light for many people within the Northern Indian mission. Crow Creek Sioux Joyce Coleman remembered a specific sister missionary who was a cowgirl from Colorado Springs, Colorado. This sister missionary
influenced Joyce, a horse lover, because of her relatability in her love for horses and her bright personality. Joyce’s sister Jean also remembered the impact of the sister missionaries. Describing their influence, Jean described, “It was like, ‘Look! They’re missionaries, they’re wearing dresses, and they still have fun, and they still have testimonies.’” Joyce and Jean’s experiences suggest that the sister missionaries were comforting in their friendship and warmth. More specifically, the sister missionaries were a source of comfort for those they taught in the Northern Indian mission in that they showed investigators and new members how to navigate maintaining one’s personality while living the commandments and keeping covenants.

Native Women as Inspiring Examples of Faith

Most impactfully, women served as examples of faith in the Northern Indian Mission, as they accepted gospel teachings and implemented substantial change in their lives. Banned from the reservation by U.S. Indian agents during the first Lamanite mission, missionary Oliver Cowdery observed women leading in reception of the gospel among white Missourians, mentioning his hopes that, “the time [was] not far distant when men [would] follow.” This highlight of women’s perceptiveness in receiving the gospel is exemplified in stories of Native women hearing the gospel, feeling its truth, and pursuing its precepts following divine guidance. Numerous women in the Northern Indian Mission took their place among the indigenous female followers of Christ, standing, and continuing to stand, as persevering examples of faith.

In many instances in the Northern Indian Mission, women and girls were the first to join the Church or truly convert in their families, their examples profoundly influencing those around them. Native American Edouardo Zendajas from Omaha Nebraska noted that, though he was baptized with his family during his childhood, his true conversion did not occur until after he married his wife, and they were expecting their first child. Zendajas explained his experience as
his wife began taking the missionary lessons, stating, “I kind of felt obligated to take some of the challenges that she was being faced with and do some of the things that the missionaries were asking her to do...I was converted along at the same time that my wife was.”46 Similarly, Joseph Harlan of Macy Nebraska attributed his conversion to his mother, who invited the missionaries into their home, and led her family in their pursuit for the truth of the gospel. She was the first to act on the teachings of the missionaries, declaring, “I believe that this Church is the one that we’re looking for.” Harlan remembered that most of his family followed his mother’s example by being baptized shortly thereafter.47 Both instances portray the conversion of a family resulting from an indigenous women’s investigation into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Both women gained a firm conviction of the truth of the missionaries’ message and acted in faith to abide by their teachings, leading their family members by example down the path of discipleship.

In this sense, the example set by Native American women and girls in the Northern Indian Mission often had a ripple effect within families and communities. Joyce Coleman remembered being a rebellious child, heading down a harmful path. Resisting any help or advice from her grandmother, she found the Church through the missionary advertisement of the Indian Placement program in 1969. A free and adventurous spirit, Joyce joined the Church at age fourteen and went to Idaho Falls, Idaho to participate in the Placement Program. During her time in placement, Joyce gained a powerful testimony of the gospel, returning home as a new person. Describing this transformation, Joyce evaluated, “My grandmother saw that being a member of the Church turned my life around because before I talked to the missionaries...I had been very rebellious.” This change in Joyce’s demeanor profoundly affected both Joyce’s grandmother Lucille, and her sister Jean, and the two later entered the waters of baptism on the same day.
Joyce’s example continued, as she eventually served a mission for the Church in Quito, Ecuador, and San Diego, California.⁴⁸

Jean and Lucille’s conversions propelled forward because of the gospel’s notable effect on Joyce. Jean described her feelings about this phenomenon, emphasizing, “When she came back, she was a changed person...And I saw how she had changed so positively.”⁴⁹ This transformation in Joyce’s behavior directly led to Jean’s desire to go into placement, and ultimately to join the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Similarly, Joyce’s evolution from rebel to peaceful follower of Christ resulted in the baptism of Joyce’s grandmother Lucille. From the day of her baptism, Lucille was a stalwart member of the Church, eventually selling a portion of her property to the Church, providing a place for a meetinghouse on the Crow Creek reservation. Jean recounted her grandmother’s faithful courage, saying, “She would tell everybody ‘I’m Mormon now.’...She never once hesitated to say that she was Mormon...and that was hard in that community.”⁵⁰ In this light, Joyce’s powerful story of conversion to the gospel and consequential change in demeanor demonstrates how one young woman’s faithful example led to the conversion of other family members, many of which became powerful women of faith and examples in their own spheres.

Many such examples permeate the history of the Northern Indian Mission, several of which are like that of Danielle Ferron of South Dakota. From the time she was introduced to the Church around age eleven, Danielle went to church every Sunday by herself until her non-member mother permitted her to join the Church at age fifteen. Even after baptism, Danielle continued to progress in the gospel, eventually serving a mission, and becoming a lifelong member, reading the scriptures, attending Church, and serving in the temple.⁵¹ Such
extraordinary women who developed and maintained their faith in the face of adversity became role models for many in the mission, especially students in the Indian Seminary Program.

Specifically emphasizing Native American women of the Church who attended BYU, the Indian Seminary Program in the Northern Indian Mission highlighted female examples through pictures and descriptions in published seminary materials and handouts. Such portrayals often included newspaper clippings and pictures of Native American women at BYU with short descriptions of their involvement or actions at the university.\textsuperscript{52} Other descriptions were more personalized, outlining the circumstances of local Native women attending school at BYU. One description included on a handout entitled, “One of Our Own,” outlined, “We are really proud to have a Sioux girl from the Pine Ridge Reservation at Brigham Young University...They have an excellent Indian program designed specially to help Lamanites.”\textsuperscript{53} Presenting examples of Native woman succeeding at a religious university and emphasizing the religiously conceived identity of “Lamanite,” these portrayals of Native women served as examples of faith and education attainment for the younger indigenous population in the Northern Indian Mission.

Though the Northern Indian Mission no longer exists, the continuity of its missionary efforts lives on through Native members who remain examples of faith today. Though many of these stalwart examples are men like Lower Brule Sioux Douglas Philbrick, who works tirelessly to keep the Church membership in central South Dakota strong, women are also present among the remaining believers. One such faithful inspiration is Jean Nahomni Mani. A shining light in her community, Jean answers questions about her positivity, stating, “I tell them what saved me was the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I learned to have a close relationship with God...and that is what gave me the foundation to be a positive person.”\textsuperscript{54} Jean, like her grandmother and sister Joyce, continually maintains her witness of Christ and His Church openly
and unashamedly. Concluding her remarks, Jean proclaimed, “...I bear you my testimony. I will share that with anyone, any time to help them become a better person. And I say that in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.” Jean’s words reflect her conviction of the truthfulness of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, demonstrating that, just as in the time of the Northern Indian Mission, women continue to be inspiring examples of faith in the Northcentral region of the United States.

**Conclusion**

This paper does not seek to minimize the role of men in the Northern Indian Mission, but rather to examine the ways in which women contributed, as previous histories fail to acknowledge the involvement of women in the Indian mission narrative. Though men heavily participated in the work of the Northern Indian mission, serving in roles such as mission president, missionaries, local priesthood leaders, faithful converts, and life-time members, women also presented valuable effort. In this light, women worked, quite visibly, alongside their husbands, priesthood leaders, fellow missionaries, and members in the work of salvation.

In 1979, church president and Prophet Spencer W. Kimball prophesied about the influence of the women of the Church in the latter days. He outlined, “Much of the major growth that is coming to the Church in the last days will come because many of the good women of the world … will be drawn to the Church in large numbers.” Evidence from the Northern Indian Mission depicts such “good women” in the Northcentral United States being “drawn to the Church” when they recognized the truth of the gospel through their own experiences. President Kimball’s prophesy builds on the notion of women leading in conversion, attributing the movement to women’s “righteousness and articulateness” and “the degree that the women of the Church are seen as distinct and different...from the women of the world.” The women of the
Church emphasized in this paper embody the righteousness, obedience, and distinctness described by President Kimball.

President Kimball’s prophesy about the imperative role of women in the Church in this era was echoed by both President Russell M. Nelson in his 2015 general conference talk “A Plea to My Sisters,” and by President Dallin H. Oaks in his 2022 BYU Devotional Speech “Going Forward in the Second Century.” The repetition of this prophesy by prominent, current church leaders reflects the Church’s reliance on the strength and righteousness of its women. President Nelson’s talk refers to this reliance, stating, “We, your brethren, need your strength, your conversion, your conviction, your ability to lead, your wisdom, and your voices.” The records of the Northern Indian Mission exemplify the necessity of women in the work of the Lord portrayed by President Nelson. As missionaries, mission leaders, local Church leaders, and devoted members, the women of the Northern Indian Mission contributed to the training of missionaries, preached the gospel, and put forth strenuous efforts toward the retention of new converts through their teaching, testimonies, comforting natures, and their righteous examples. Gracefully articulated by President Nelson, the microcosm of the Northern Indian Mission demonstrates that, “The kingdom of God is not and cannot be complete without women who make sacred covenants and then keep them, women who can speak with the power and authority of God!”
Appendix A

Image 1:
Image 2:
Image 3:
Northern Indian Mission Relief Society, “Various Recipes.” Homemaking Lesson (October 1966), Relief Society Bulletin (October 1966), adapted from Relief Society Magazine (July 1966), 544, Northern Indian Mission Collection, Box 1, MSS 8816, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
Image 4:
Cover Page, The Lamanite (September 1970), Rex C. Reeve Jr., Northern Indian Mission Collection, Box 2, MSS 8816, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
Image 5:
Notes

1 Joyce Coleman, interview by Amber Miller, October 8, 2022.
4 Jorgensen, “Building the Kingdom of God,” 205.
7 The aforementioned David K. Flake points out that after the late 1930s, women began to enter the mission field as individual missionaries and missionary couples with their husbands. With no additional specifications on these female missionaries’ actions, Flake only hints at their involvement by naming the methods of doing missionary work in the Southwest Indian mission, describing that this mission work was done by “holding religious instruction classes for Mormon Indian children in connection with the government schools, conducting Relief Societies, an organization for the women, and in giving practical help in such things as canning foods to alleviate the wartime shortages.” Flake, *History of the Southwest Indian Mission*, 104, 107, 121. In his telling of events in the Alaska-Canada Mission from 1964-1971, Church Education pioneer E. Bruce Preece, mentions women only in a handful of notable conversion stories. E. Bruce Preece, “Pioneering CES in the Alaskan-Canadian Mission,” in *Church Education Pioneers in Frontier Alaska: A narrative history of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Alaska*, ed. Douglas F. Baird and Dennis H. Kendall (Morrisville, NC: Lulu Enterprises, Inc., 2016). Furthermore, in Preece’s survey of missionary work in the church covering efforts in the Southwest Indian Mission, Northern Indian Mission, Canadian Indian Mission, etc., there is no allusion to women and their roles in the work. Edward B. Preece, *Mormon Missionary Work among the Indians of North America in the Twentieth Century* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1965).
8 See Appendix A, Image 1 and 2.
10 Buckley, Cochran, Brooks, and Hollist, “Grafting Indians and Mormons Together,” 184.
11 Buckley, Cochran, Brooks, and Hollist, “Grafting Indians and Mormons Together,” 203-204.
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