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Latter-day Saint Prayer Circles

D. Michael Quinn

A central characteristic of religious devotion is the existence of ordinances, rites, and special observances that not only symbolize sacred relationships between Deity and mankind but also bind together the religious participants as a group distinct from the unenlightened, the unconverted, and the uninitiated. One immediately thinks of such examples as the ancient practice of ordination by the laying on of hands, the sacrifice of animals, the Abrahamic circumcision, the Mosaic ceremonial cleansings and dietary laws, and the Christian baptism and sacrament. These ordinances have not only been clearly recorded in sacred history but have also been witnessed by non-believers.

This binding process in religion has often been achieved through secret as well as public rites. Latter-day Saint scholar Hugh Nibley has devoted much research to ancient ordinances that were "hidden from the world" and were intended to be experienced in sacred seclusion.¹ The importance of such study lies in the fact that within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are certain nonpublic ordinances that Mormon leaders have repeatedly affirmed are divine restorations of ancient ordinances of God.² LDS prophets have identified these as "temple ordinances," known as washing, anointing, endowment, sealing, and second anointing.³

Like other temple practices, the existence of a special "prayer circle" ceremony has been referred to in official publications of the

An earlier version of this article was presented at the Welch Symposium in honor of Professor Hugh Nibley, 28 March 1975.

D. Michael Quinn is assistant professor of history at Brigham Young University.

¹See, for example, his "The Idea of the Temple in History," *Millennial Star* 120 (August 1958):228-37, 247-49; "Christian Envy of the Temple," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 50 (1959-60):97-123, 229-40; *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975).

²James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord: A Study of Holy Sanctuaries, Ancient and Modern* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1912), pp. 18, 99-100, 234-38; Franklin D. Richards, "The Temple of the Lord: The Importance of Temples, Ancient and Modern," *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 11 (October 1920):146-49; John A. Widtsoe, "Fundamentals of Temple Doctrine," *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 13 (July 1922):129.

³Examples are in Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), p. 779; James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1833-1964*, 6+ vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965-), 2:228, 5:112; Nels B. Lundwall, comp., *Temples of the Most High*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1975), pp. 269-74; *Young Women's Journal* 5 (August 1894):513.

LDS Church.⁴ The specific ceremony of prayer in the LDS prayer circle is known as the “true order of prayer”⁵ and has been described in Church-related publications. For example, in 1933 the Church periodical *Improvement Era* printed the following statement:

President [Lorenzo] Snow put on his holy temple robes, repaired again to the same sacred altar, offered up the signs of the Priesthood and poured out his heart to the Lord.⁶

Moreover, a recent biography of LDS President Spencer W. Kimball gives this description of the weekly prayer circle of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

Every Thursday the Council of the Twelve met in a room on the [Salt Lake] Temple’s fourth floor. The apostles sat by seniority in twelve large oak chairs, in a crescent around an upholstered altar. Harold B. Lee played a small organ in the corner as they opened with a hymn. Then all twelve, dressed in temple clothes, formed a prayer circle around the altar. The prayer completed, they changed back to street clothes to handle the Quorum’s business.⁷

In addition, LDS prayer circle organizations published their own histories in 1895 and in 1929.⁸ Thus, through publications of the LDS Church, one may learn that an ordinance of the temple is known as the prayer circle, that it requires the participants to pray in a circle as they are dressed in holy temple clothing, and that the prayer is accompanied by offering certain signs of the priesthood at an altar.

PRECEDENTS TO THE LDS PRAYER CIRCLE

One ancient predecessor of the LDS prayer circle is found in the ceremonies of the early Christian Church. Deriving from a practice apparently inaugurated at the Last Supper, this apostolic prayer circle is described in the apocryphal Acts of John (first published in English in 1897): “He bade us therefore make as it were a ring, holding

⁴*Deseret News*, 12 June 1923; Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols., 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 7:390, 552, 554 (hereafter cited as *HC*); and *Aaronic Priesthood Leadership Materials, 1973–1974* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1973), p. 7; Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 6:256.

⁵Bathsheba W. Smith, “Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” *Juvenile Instructor* 27 (1 June 1892):345.

⁶LeRoi C. Snow, “An Experience of My Father’s,” *Improvement Era* 36 (August 1933):667.

⁷Edward L. Kimball and Andrew E. Kimball, Jr., *Spencer W. Kimball: Twelfth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1977), p. 207. See also Lawrence Clayton, ed., *William Clayton’s Journal* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1921), p. 203.

⁸*A Token of Love from the Members of the John Taylor Prayer Circle to Patriarch Joseph Horne* (Salt Lake City: The John Taylor Prayer Circle, 1895); *History of the Elders’ Quorum Prayer Circle, Salt Lake City, 1893–1929* (Salt Lake City: n.p., n.d.).

one another's hands, and himself standing in the midst he said: 'Answer Amen unto me.'"⁹ Hugh Nibley's research into a large number of Greek, Syriac, and Coptic texts has produced a composite overview indicating that certain elements of Latter-day Saint prayer circle ceremonies are recognizable on many occasions in these ancient rites. Some ancient texts require prayer circle participants to wash their hands, or to receive secret words and ordinances, or to be dressed in special clothing. Other texts require them to harbor no ill feeling toward their neighbors, to pray in the circle with uplifted hands, or foot to foot, or holding hands. Generally the participants in these ancient rites repeated the speaker's words in antiphonal manner and copied his actions as he led the circle in prayer either at an altar or at a veil.¹⁰

Closer to Joseph Smith's own time and place was the use of circle worship among nineteenth century participants in American Protestant revivals. At the most famous revival of that era in Cane Ridge, Kentucky, one eyewitness wrote in 1801 that the revivalists "collected in small circles of 10 or 12."¹¹ Moreover, in the Methodist Episcopal revivals of the 1820s and 1830s, "when the invitation was given, there was a general rush, the large 'prayer ring' was filled, and for at least two hours prayer ardent went up to God."¹² As is well known, Joseph Smith and most other leaders of the early LDS Church had observed or participated in Protestant revivals.

Contemporary with the impact of religious revivalism in America was the influence of Freemasonry. In Masonic ritual of that era there was a prayer ceremony which an official Masonic source described as follows: "...Lodges were opened at sunrise, the Master taking his station in the East and the brethren forming a half circle around him."¹³ From other sources it appears that after the Masons unitedly repeat the Masonic signs previously received, "The brethren

⁹Acts of John, 94-96, in M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), pp. 253-54. James dates this document as "not later than the middle of the second century" (ibid., p. 228). An English translation of the New Testament apocrypha had been available in print at least as early as 1820, but at that time the Acts of John was noted as one of "the Apocryphal Pieces not now extant." (See *The Apocryphal New Testament*, trans. William Hone [London: William Hone, 1820].) The Acts of John was first published in *Apocrypha Anecdota, Second Series*, ed. M. R. James in *Texts and Studies: Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature*, ed. J. A. Robinson, 10 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891-1952), vol. 5, no. 1, p. ix.

¹⁰Hugh Nibley, "The Early Christian Prayer Circle," in this issue of *BYU Studies*.

¹¹As cited in Catherine C. Cleveland, *The Great Revival in the West, 1797-1805* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916), p. 79.

¹²Rev. James Erwin, *Reminiscences of Early Circuit Life* (Toledo, Ohio: Spear, Johnson & Co., 1884), p. 68.

¹³Albert G. Mackey, *An Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, 2 vols., rev. ed. (New York: The Masonic History Company, 1920), 2:577.

assemble around the altar, and form a circle, and stand in such a position as to touch each other, leaving a space for the Most Excellent Master; [who] . . . then kneels, joins hands with the others, which closes the circle.”¹⁴ Joseph Smith became a Master Mason on 16 March 1842, but had associated for a number of years with such loyal Masons as Hyrum and John Smith, Heber C. Kimball, Newel K. Whitney, James Adams, George Miller, and John C. Bennett.¹⁵

With its Methodist, Masonic, and early Christian antecedents, the LDS prayer circle did not arise without parallels. In fact, historical parallels are the strength of the firm LDS position that Mormonism is not a new creation but instead in its most essential features is a restoration of those sacred doctrines and practices revealed by God to man from the beginning. In Mormonism the reception of divine revelation is an active, responsive process, rather than a passive operation. If Joseph Smith had any knowledge of these earlier practices of prayer, then that partial understanding served as an incentive for him to seek divine and more complete instruction.

DEVELOPMENT OF LDS PRAYER CIRCLE (1829–1846)

Although conventional forms of public and private prayer were practiced within the LDS Church from its earliest years, there were significant variations in the conduct of prayer. Physical objects were sometimes used in connection with prayer. Between 1827 and 1829 the Prophet Joseph Smith sought revelation through the Urim and Thummim as well as through a Seer Stone.¹⁶ Oliver Cowdery was by revelation given the gift of working with a “rod of nature . . . and therefore whatsoever you shall ask me to tell you by that means, that will I grant unto you, that you shall know.”¹⁷ Moreover, during the

¹⁴David Bernard, *Light on Masonry: A Collection of All the Most Important Documents on the Subject of Speculative Free Masonry* (Utica, N.Y.: William Williams, 1829), pp. 116–17; also pp. 15, 28.

¹⁵For further analysis of this relationship, see E. Cecil McGavin, *Mormonism and Masonry* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956); Mervin B. Hogan, “Utah’s Memorial to Free Masonry,” *Royal Arch Mason* 11 (Fall 1974):199–204; and Kenneth W. Godfrey, “Joseph Smith and the Masons,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 64 (Spring 1971):79–90.

¹⁶B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century I*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), 1:129, 2:106; Doctrine and Covenants, introductions to Sections 3, 6, 7, 11, 14, 15, 16, and 17.

¹⁷*A Book of Commandments for the Government of the Church of Christ* (Zion [Independence, Mo.]: W. W. Phelps & Co., 1833), p. 19. “In the revelation to Oliver Cowdery in May 1829, Bro. [B. H.] Roberts said that the gift which the Lord says he has in his hand meant a stick which was like Aaron’s Rod. It is said Bro. Phineas Young [brother-in-law of Oliver Cowdery and brother of Brigham Young] got it from him [Cowdery] and gave it to President Young who had it with him when he arrived in this [Salt Lake] valley and that it was with that stick that he pointed out where the Temple should be built.” Anthon H. Lund Journal, 5 July 1901, Archives Division, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter cited as Church Historical Department).

Nauvoo period Apostle Heber C. Kimball “inquired by the rod” in prayer.¹⁸

Prayer in a circle was inaugurated in the LDS School of the Prophets at Kirtland, Ohio, in 1833, according to a reminiscence of Zebedee Coltrin fifty years later:

They opened with prayer, Joseph then gave instructions to prepare their minds. He told them to *kneel and pray with uplifted hands*. . . . About the time that the school was first organized some wished to see an angel, and a number *joined in the circle, and prayed*. When the vision came, two of the brethren shrank and called for the vision to close or they would perish.¹⁹

In the LDS Church, prayer was conducted in a circle as early as 1833, but this was after the conventional manner of Protestant revival “prayer rings.” When Mormons prayed in a circle before 1842, they did not offer those prayers as a part of intricate rites as was done anciently and after 1842.

Even the revelation of 19 January 1841, which spoke of William Law’s receiving “the keys by which he may ask and receive blessings” (D&C 124:97), did not refer to the true order of prayer. Joseph Smith’s remarks to a theological lyceum at Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1841 indicate that the 1841 revelation had reference to the manner in which Deity is named:

The Great God has a Name By w[h]ich he will be Called Which is Ahman—also in asking have Referance to a personage like Adam for God made Adam Just in his own Image Now this [is] a key for you to know how to ask & obtain.²⁰

Not until 1842 did Joseph Smith give instructions and priesthood ordinances that constituted what was known first as “the holy order” and became known later as the “endowment.”

On 4 May 1842 Hyrum Smith, William Law, Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, Newel K. Whitney, George Miller, William Marks, and James Adams met “in Joseph’s private office, where Joseph taught the ancient order of things for the first

¹⁸Heber C. Kimball 1844–1845 Journal, 6 June 1844, 5 July 1844, 25 January 1845, Church Historical Department.

¹⁹Minutes of the School of the Prophets, Salt Lake City, 11 October 1883, p. 69, Church Historical Department; italics added.

²⁰Record of William P. McIntire, Church Historical Department. McIntire’s record has no page numbers and is only sketchily dated. The first entry is mistakenly dated 8 January 1840, since the second entry is dated “Tuesday the 12,” which was Tuesday, 12 January 1841. From the latter date until his summary of the April 1841 conference, the meetings are indicated without any designation of date or day of the week. Apparently the lyceum met weekly, in which case the statement quoted in the text was given on 9 March 1841.

time in these last days, and recieved [their] washings, anointings and endowments.”²¹ It is very likely that the true order of prayer was included, for Heber C. Kimball wrote Apostle Parley P. Pratt on 17 June 1842: “We have recieved some pressious things through the Prophet on the preasthood that would caus your Soul to rejoice I can not give them to you on paper fore they are not to be riten.”²²

Although the order of prayer may have been instituted as early as 1842, the organization of a prayer circle was not complete until 1843. The initial meeting for this purpose occurred on 26 May 1843, involving eight of the men who had received the 1842 priesthood endowment, plus additional men. A summary of this May 1843 meeting is the first entry in a document at the LDS Archives titled, “Meetings of the anointed Quorum, Journalizing, 1843–4.”²³ The full establishment of a prayer circle that included women occurred on 28 September 1843, which is described as follows in the published *History of the Church*:

At half-past eleven, a. m., a council convened over the store, consisting of myself, my brother Hyrum, Uncle John Smith, Newel K. Whitney, George Miller, Willard Richards, John Taylor, Amasa Lyman, John M. Bernhisel, and Lucien Woodworth; and at seven in the evening we met in the front upper room of the Mansion, with William Law and William Marks. By the common consent and unanimous voice of the council, I was chosen president of the special council.

The president led in prayer that his days might be prolonged until his mission on the earth is accomplished, have dominion over his

²¹Elden Jay Watson, ed., *Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1801–1844* (Salt Lake City: Smith Secretarial Service, 1968), p. 116. HC 5:1–2 omits William Law and William Marks from the list of men, which is in error as shown in the following sources: Heber C. Kimball 1840–1845 Journal, before the 1845 entries in a passage in a section titled “Strange Events”: “June [sic] 1842 I was aniciated into the ancient order was washed and annointed and Sealled and ordained a Preast, and Soforth in company with nine others. Viz Josept Smith Hiram Smith Wm Law Wm Law Marks Judge Adams, Brigham Young, Willard Richards, George Miller–N K Whitney,” and in Heber C. Kimball 1845–1846 Journal (21 December 1845), p. 159: “About 4 years ago next May [i.e., May 1842] nine persons were admitted into the Holy order 5 are now living–B. Young–W. Richards George Miller N. K. Whitney & H. C. Kimball two are dead [James Adams and Hyrum Smith], and two are worse than dead [the apostatized William Law and William Marks].” HC 5:1–2 also errs in stating that in May 1842 these men obtained “the highest order of the Melchisedek Priesthood.” This particular entry was not a quote from Joseph Smith’s journal, which was not begun in the 1842 period until December 1842; the published HC entry appears instead to have been a reconstruction of the May 1842 event by the Church Historian several years later. It is clear from the organization of the Quorum of the Anointed on 28 September 1843 that the “highest order of the Melchisedek Priesthood” cannot be obtained by men alone but must be obtained by men in connection with their wives through the ordinance of second anointing. See discussion below, fn. 31, and D&C 131:1–4; 132:19–20.

²²Kimball to Pratt, 17 June 1842, Parley P. Pratt and Heber C. Kimball Papers, Church Historical Department.

²³“Meetings of the anointed Quorum, Journalizing, 1843–4,” included with Joseph Smith Journals; Joseph Smith, Jr., Journal, 26 May 1843, Church Historical Department; HC 5:409.

enemies, all their households be blessed, and all the Church and the world.²⁴

The reference to Joseph Smith's being chosen president of a special council has caused one historian and Joseph Smith's most recent biographer to conclude that this was an early organization of the theocratic Council of Fifty,²⁵ a misinterpretation which results from a textual alteration made in the published history. Instead of the words: "I was chosen president of the special council," the original record reads: "Baurak Ale was by common consent & unanimous voice chosen president of the Quorum & anointed & ordained to the highest order of the priesthood (& Companion—d[itt]o."²⁶ Baurak Ale was a designation for Joseph Smith, Jr., and his companion on this occasion was his wife Emma.²⁷ The "Quorum" mentioned was often designated the "Quorum of the Anointed," "The Holy Order of the Holy Priesthood," or "The Holy Order" in the diaries of its Nauvoo participants and in the official records available about its meetings. A reference to "quorum" in a diary or other record is too vague in itself to assume application to a prayer circle. Nevertheless, the sources are sufficiently abundant that by cross-checking different sources for the same date it is possible to identify the Nauvoo prayer circle when it was described by its various names.

Women were excluded from the Holy Order for more than a year after Joseph Smith administered the endowment to nine men in May 1842. This may have been the result of the scandals surrounding the apostasy of John C. Bennett. Bennett was disfellowshipped three weeks after Joseph Smith introduced the Holy Order, and within a month Bennett began publishing an exposé charging Joseph Smith with introducing spiritual wifery and a female lodge of Masonry (actually a reference to the Relief Society). In the cross-currents of

²⁴HC 6:39.

²⁵Klaus J. Hansen, *Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History* (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1967), p. 59; Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), p. 367.

²⁶Joseph Smith Journal, 28 September 1843; "Meetings of the anointed Quorum," 28 September 1843; Manuscript History of the Church, 28 September 1843, Church Historical Department.

²⁷See D&C 103:21. Emma Smith's participating in the Holy Order continued into 1844, as indicated in the "Strange Events" section of Heber C. Kimball's 1840–45 Journal prior to his 1845 entries: "January 1844 my wife Vilate and menny females was received in to the Holy order and was washed and inointed by Emma." Also Heber C. Kimball's 1844–1845 Journal states on 4 October 1844: "4 Friday Met in council at Sister Emma Smith in Company with my Bre of the Twelve the Bishops and the Temple commity and expressed our feelings to her & [what] our intentions ware she seemed pleased with our course. it seamed like old times." The latter passages of this entry were omitted in HC 7:283.

charges and denials that Joseph Smith had proposed spiritual marriage to Sarah M. Pratt, wife of Orson Pratt, both Apostle Pratt and his wife were excommunicated from the LDS Church in the summer of 1842 by their own request. This seems to be what Heber C. Kimball was referring to in 1845 when he said that women were not admitted to the Holy Order at first because men had been led by their wives out of the Church.²⁸ When Bennett was falsely claiming in 1842 that Joseph Smith had established a female lodge of Masonry, there is no evidence that Joseph Smith even hinted that women would be admitted to the Holy Order, or endowment. It was not until the summer of 1843, six months after the Pratts were reinstated into the Church and after the Bennett scandal appeared to have faded away, that Joseph Smith prepared to admit women to the Holy Order.²⁹

Beginning 28 September 1843, the wives of previously endowed men were given the ordinances of anointing and endowment in order to join the prayer circle, and other men and women were admitted to the Anointed Quorum each week. By the time Joseph Smith and Hyrum Smith were murdered in June 1844, more than sixty-five persons were members of the Quorum of the Anointed.³⁰ Following

²⁸Heber C. Kimball 1845–1846 Journal, 21 December 1845, p. 159. Bennett's allegations regarding the Holy Order, Sarah M. Pratt, and a female Masonic lodge appeared in *Sangamo Journal* (Springfield, Ill.), 8 July, 15 July, 2 September 1842. Pratt's case is described in T. Edgar Lyon, "Orson Pratt—Early Mormon Leader" (Master's thesis, University of Chicago, 1932), pp. 34–44.

²⁹HC 4:604 presents minutes of the Nauvoo Female Relief Society which would seem to indicate that as early as 28 April 1842, Joseph Smith had suggested that the women would one day receive the ordinances of the endowment and participate in the prayer circle: "He spoke of delivering the keys of the Priesthood to the Church and said that the faithful members of the Relief Society should receive them in connection with their husbands, that the Saints whose integrity has been tried and proved faithful, might know how to ask the Lord and receive an answer; for according to his prayers, God had appointed him elsewhere." However, none of the italicized words in this quote from the published *History of The Church* were in the original minutes. See Nauvoo Female Relief Society Minutes, p. 37, Church Historical Department. No document presently extant supports the conclusion that Joseph Smith suggested prior to 1843 that women would receive the endowment and participate in the prayer circle.

³⁰Alphabetical list of persons who were admitted to the Quorum of the Anointed during the lifetime of Joseph Smith and who participated with him in weekly prayer circle meetings: James Adams and wife Mary, Almon W. Babbitt, John M. Bernhisel, Reynolds Cahoon and wife Thirzah, William Clayton, Alpheus Cutler and wife Lois, Sister [Elizabeth?] Durfee, Joseph Fielding and wife Hannah, John P. Greene, Orson Hyde and wife Marinda Nancy, Heber C. Kimball and wife Vilate, Joseph C. Kingsbury, William Law and wife Jane, Cornelius P. Lott and wife Permelia, Amasa M. Lyman, William Marks and wife Mary Catherine, George Miller and wife Mary Catherine, Isaac Morley and wife Lucy, Fanny Young Murray, William W. Phelps and wife Sally, Orson Pratt, Parley P. Pratt and wife Mary Ann, Levi Richards, Willard Richards and wife Jenetta, Sidney Rigdon, Agnes C. Smith, George A. Smith and wife Bathsheba, Hyrum Smith and wife Mary, John Smith and wife Clarissa, Joseph Smith and wife Emma, Lucy Mack Smith, Samuel H. Smith, William Smith, Orson Spencer and wife Catherine, John Taylor and wife Leonora, Mercy R. Fielding Thompson, Newel K. Whitney and wife Elizabeth Ann, Lyman Wight, Wilford Woodruff and wife Phoebe, Lucien Woodworth and wife Phebe, Brigham Young and wife Mary Ann, Joseph Young and wife Clarissa. See the brief record of "Meetings of the anointed Quorum"; the entries in the Wilford Woodruff Journal from 2 December

the example of Joseph and Emma Smith, many of the members of this group received the second anointing during the lifetime of Joseph Smith, to which President Wilford Woodruff publicly testified.³¹ Others, like Sidney Rigdon and Orson Pratt, participated alone, and therefore did not receive the second anointing in connection with a spouse. Male membership in the first prayer circle included only the most prominent leaders of the Church and Kingdom of God; in most cases they were General Authorities, or prominent in the bishopric of the Church or leadership of the Nauvoo Stake, whereas the other men in the Anointed Quorum who were still faithful to Joseph Smith in the spring of 1844 also became members of the Council of Fifty.³²

Prior to the death of Joseph Smith, it is significant that the female members of the Quorum of the Anointed were in nearly every case the monogamous wives of the male members of the group. Exceptions were Lucy Mack Smith (the mother of Joseph the Prophet and the widow of Patriarch Joseph Smith, Sr.), Agnes M. Coolbrith Smith (the widow of Joseph Smith's brother Don Carlos), Fanny Young Murray (widowed sister of Brigham Young), Mercy R. Fielding Thompson (widowed sister-in-law of Hyrum Smith), and "Sister Durfee" (who may have been the widow Elizabeth Davis Brackenbury Durfee). Aside from Lucy Mack Smith, the other four women were polygamous wives. Mercy Fielding Thompson was the plural wife of Hyrum Smith. Agnes Coolbrith Smith, Fanny Young Murray, and Elizabeth Davis Durfee were identified in contemporary and later sources as plural wives of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Moreover, a special case was Marinda Nancy Hyde who had been sealed in

1843 to 26 February 1844; the entries for September 1843 to May 1844 in Joseph Smith, Jr., Journal, in Roberts' *History of the Church*, and in Manuscript History of the Church; the entries of 7 and 10 December 1845 in Heber C. Kimball Journal—all the above manuscripts at Church Historical Department; and the list of members of the Quorum of the Anointed in the Newel K. Whitney 1833–45 Account Book in box 6, folder 15, Newel K. Whitney Family Collection, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. In the LDS Genealogical Library at Salt Lake City, microfilm #183,371 of the Nauvoo Temple Supplemental Record of Endowments is a list on pp. 66–67 of persons who received the endowment prior to 1845. Only fifty-three of the more than eighty members of the 1843–45 Anointed Quorum are listed, and most of the dates are inaccurate.

³¹*Young Women's Journal*, 5 (August 1894):513. For contemporary evidence, see Wilford Woodruff Journal, 20 January, 25 January–4 February 1844 and corresponding entries in "Meetings of the anointed Quorum"; in the Manuscript History of the Church; in HC 6:181–96; in "History of Joseph Smith," *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 22:406, 455, 586; and in Joseph Smith, Jr., Journal.

³²Compare the list of members of the Council of Fifty in 1844, as found in Hansen, *Quest for Empire*, p. 223, with list in fn. 30 above.

1842 to Joseph Smith as a plural wife, but participated with her husband Orson in the Holy Order.³³

During the lifetime of Joseph Smith only about seventeen percent of the women in the Holy Order were plural wives and little more than one third of the men had married plural wives. These men and women of the Holy Order were a select group, a religious elite within the Church, yet plural marriage was a minority practice among them. Scores of men and women were not allowed to participate in the Holy Order until after 1844, even though they had entered into polygamy during the lifetime of Joseph Smith. Therefore, during the lifetime of Joseph Smith, polygamy was only an appendage "to the highest order of the priesthood" established on 28 September 1843.

This "quorum" or prayer circle practiced during the life of Joseph Smith the ordinances that were subsequently administered in LDS temples. This is indicated in a fall 1844 journal entry by Joseph Fielding, brother-in-law of Patriarch Hyrum Smith:

When [Sidney] Rigdon had thus selected A party, he taught them those things which he had learned in the Quorum as it is called (ie) a Company on whom Joseph had conferred the Endowment, being clothed in Garments and received the last ~~that~~ [sic] Instructions that Joseph could give them, being washed and anointed &c these things were to [be] kept sacred, as it was not to become a general thing till the Temple be finished, Rigdon was admitted there A short time be-

³³Andrew Jenson, "Plural Marriage," *Historical Record* 6 (May 1887):233-34, and Joseph F. Smith, Jr., *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1905), pp. 81-105, contain lists of the wives of Joseph Smith as well as the affidavits of other men and women who stated that they had entered into sanctioned plural marriages during the lifetime of Joseph Smith. Agnes Smith was shown as "Mrs. A**** S****" in the list of Joseph Smith's wives in John C. Bennett, *The History of the Saints; or, An Expose of Joe Smith and Mormonism* (Boston: Leland & Whiting, 1842), p. 256. In 1892, a formal plural wife of William Smith testified that when she married Smith in polygamy in 1843 she was living with Agnes M. Smith who was at that time a plural wife of Joseph Smith. This testimony was omitted from the abstract of evidence published by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. See Testimony of Mary Ann West in U. S. Circuit Court (8th Circuit) Testimony (1892), Manuscript Transcripts, Church Historical Department, d 1160, box 1, folder 8, #23, questions 676-679, and compare with *Complainant's Abstract of Pleading and Evidence* ("Temple Lot Case") (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald House, 1893), pp. 381-82. Elizabeth Davis Durfee was listed by Bennett's *History of the Saints* as "Mrs. D*****" and she was identified elsewhere as a plural wife of Joseph Smith. (See Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd ed. rev. [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972], p. 469.) Mrs. Durfee was sealed by proxy to Joseph Smith for eternity under her maiden name Elizabeth Davis on 22 January 1846 in the Nauvoo Temple. Marinda Nancy Hyde was sealed to Joseph Smith in February 1842 according to an entry in the Joseph Smith Journal on the page following the entry for 14 July 1843. The best recent studies of Nauvoo polygamy are Danel W. Bachman, "A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage before the Death of Joseph Smith" (Master's thesis, Purdue University, 1975), and William Lawrence Foster, "Between Two Worlds: The Origins of Shaker Celibacy, Oneida Community Complex Marriage, and Mormon Polygamy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1976), pp. 189-360.

fore these troubles took Place, almost the last that was admitted [as of the writing of this entry at the end of 1844].³⁴

The Quorum of the Anointed met for the true order of prayer and for ordinance work at least weekly in four separate locations during Joseph Smith's lifetime: from September to November 1843 in the front upper room of the Mansion House, from November to December 1843 in the southeast room of Joseph Smith's Homestead, from December 1843 until June 1844 in the Assembly Room over Joseph Smith's store, and on a few occasions in January-February 1844 in Brigham Young's house. After 1844 Emma Smith no longer participated in the Holy Order, and its meetings were held in the homes or stores of other members of the Anointed Quorum. Attendance at the prayer circle of the Holy Order varied from half a dozen to forty persons at each meeting.³⁵

Although this first prayer circle organization of endowed persons was called "the Quorum," there is no evidence that the Quorum of the Anointed functioned in any sense as a priesthood quorum in governing administrative matters of the Church and Kingdom of God. It is true that male members of the Anointed Quorum often met together for prayer meetings and to conduct administrative business, but in the context of these meetings it is obvious that these men were acting in their capacity as church leaders or as members of the political Council of Fifty. Had the Quorum of the Anointed itself been conducting church business, then female members of the "quorum" would also have been involved, which was not the case. Even when male members of the Anointed Quorum conducted administrative business, they sometimes made a distinct separation between meeting in their church capacity to discuss administrative

³⁴Joseph Fielding 1843-1859 Journal, pp. 63-64, entry for ca. Fall of 1844, Church Historical Department. In addition, Ebenezer Robinson, an editor of the *Nauvoo Times and Seasons* who became disaffected from the Church and left Nauvoo in 1844, later wrote: "We here state a few facts which came under our personal observation. As early as 1843 a *secret order* was established in Nauvoo, called the HOLY ORDER, the members of which were of both sexes, in which, we were credibly informed, scenes were enacted representing the garden of Eden, and that members of that order were provided with a peculiar under garment called a *robe*." *The Return* 2 (April 1890):252, reprinted in E. Cecil McGavin, *Mormonism and Masonry*, 4th ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), p. 136.

³⁵For meeting places during Joseph Smith's lifetime, see Joseph Smith Journal, 28 September, 12 November, 2 December 1843, 22 January, 27 January, 12 May 1844. In Heber C. Kimball 1844-45 Journal are the following specific references: 11 August 1844: "we met in the Holly order at B Young," 1 October 1844: "had a meeting at my hous in the Evning of the Holy order praid fore the sick and fore the Govner," 26 January 1845: "in the Evning the Holly Preasthood meet Over Elder Parley P Pratt Store Elder Page Recieved his admittance in to the holy order," 20 March 1845: "The holly order met in the Evning at B Nobles," 4 April 1845: "Last Evning the holly order met at W Richards we felt the pawor of God," 29 October 1845: "The Brethren of the Holy Order met at John Taylors Morning and evening for prayer."

matters and meeting as the Quorum of Anointed to have a prayer circle about the matters discussed. For example, on 25 June 1845, five apostles and the two general bishops of the Church met to discuss letters from William Smith and General Jonathan Dunham. They ended their meeting at noon and reconvened three hours later with two other members of the Anointed Quorum to hold a prayer circle in which they prayed about the letters discussed at the earlier meeting. The difference between priesthood council and the function of the Holy Order was distinct.³⁶

The clearest evidence that the Quorum of the Anointed or Holy Order was not a governing council in the Church and Kingdom of God can be seen in a crucial incident that occurred on 11 December 1845 in the Nauvoo Temple. The men and women of the Anointed Quorum conducted a prayer circle in the Celestial Room of the temple, and "After we got through president Young called the following persons into Heber's Room viz. H. C. Kimball, P. P. Pratt, J. Taylor, O. Hyde, John E. Page, George A. Smith, Amasa Lyman, Newel K. Whitney, George Miller and Wm Clayton." Brigham Young presented to them a letter from Samuel Brannan which indicated there would be opposition by the U.S. government to the movement of the Latter-day Saints from Nauvoo into the Western regions. The men (eight apostles, the two general bishops of the Church, and the clerk) discussed this serious matter, prayed in the true order about it, and "After we got through there was a unanimous feeling that the Lord would answer our prayers and defeat our enemies. Prest Young said we should go away from here in peace in spite of our enemies."³⁷

If the Anointed Quorum had been a governing council, then it would have been presented with this potentially disastrous information and would have discussed and prayed about it. Instead, Brigham Young dismissed the Quorum of the Anointed and called together only the apostles, the general bishops, and a clerk for the meeting. Moreover, eight members of the Council of Fifty were excluded from this crucial meeting even though they had participated in the prayer circle of the Anointed Quorum immediately prior to the priesthood council.³⁸ All available evidence shows that the Holy Order's only

³⁶Heber C. Kimball 1840-1845 Journal, 25 June 1845.

³⁷Heber C. Kimball 1845-1846 Journal, 11 December 1845; Manuscript History of the Church, 11 December 1845; *HC* 7:544.

³⁸The members of the Council of Fifty who participated in the prayer circle of the Quorum of the Anointed but who were not invited to this important meeting immediately thereafter were—Alpheus Cutler, Isaac Morley, Orson Spencer, Joseph Young, Cornelius P. Lott, John Smith, John M. Bernhisel, John D. Lee, and William W. Phelps (Heber C. Kimball 1845-1846 Journal, 11 December 1845).

administrative function pertained to the conduct of the endowment ordinances from 1843 to 1845. For example, on 14 December 1845, the Anointed Quorum voted to sustain the rules Brigham Young had presented to them for the future conduct of temple ordinances.³⁹

Having thus conferred the keys and form of the true order of prayer, Joseph Smith apparently also authorized members of the Anointed Quorum to practice the order of prayer apart from the rest of the prayer circle. While Heber C. Kimball was campaigning for Joseph Smith's presidential candidacy in Washington, D.C., he recorded in his journal on 6 June 1844: "Last nite I clothed my self and offerd up the Sines of the Holy Preasthood—and called one the nam of the Lord he hurd me fore my heart was mad comfortable," and a month later he and Apostle Lyman Wight obtained confirmation of the actuality of the martyrdom in answer to the order of prayer.⁴⁰

During the life of Joseph Smith, the limited membership of the Anointed Quorum tended naturally to make its members feel that they were part of a spiritual elite. After the death of Joseph Smith, the perils of mob action and apostasy combined to cause the apostles and other leading men of the Anointed Quorum to decide on 9 August 1844 to add no new members: "Quorum [was] conversed about voted no ~~women~~ men to be admitted in the Quorum till times will permit."⁴¹ Both the camaraderie and isolation of the members of the Holy Order during this period are indicated in a letter of Wilford Woodruff to Heber C. Kimball on 12 May 1845: "Please remember me to all of the (Holy) Quorum. I should esteem it a great favour to meet occasionally with you or even to meet with any one who had received their endowment."⁴²

The membership of the Holy Order was temporarily restricted because, as Joseph Fielding had written in 1844, Joseph Smith intended the endowment "not to become a general thing till the Temple be finished." Apparently no new members were admitted between 14 May 1844 and 25 January 1845. Existing evidence indicates that only fifteen persons joined the Holy Order from January to December 1845.

In contrast to the composition of those admitted to the Holy

³⁹Ibid., 14 December 1845.

⁴⁰Heber C. Kimball 1844–1845 Journal, 6 June and 12 July 1844.

⁴¹Willard Richards Journal, 9 August 1844, Church Historical Department.

⁴²Woodruff to Kimball, 12 May 1845, Heber C. Kimball Papers. Parentheses in the original.

Order during the lifetime of Joseph Smith, most of the 1845 additions to the Quorum of the Anointed gave obvious prominence to the practice of plural marriage. Louisa Beaman, Eliza R. Snow, and Olive G. Frost had been sealed as plural wives to Joseph Smith during his lifetime, and after his death were married “for time” to Brigham Young prior to these three women’s joining Brigham Young in the Holy Order in 1845. Zina D. Huntington Jacobs had been sealed to Joseph Smith in 1841, and she apparently joined the prayer circle of the Holy Order in 1845. Lucy Decker married Brigham Young as his first plural wife in 1842, and she joined him in the Anointed Quorum in 1845. Her mother, Harriet Page Wheeler Decker, was sealed in polygamy to Brigham Young’s brother in 1843 and joined the Holy Order in 1845 sometime after her daughter was admitted. Sarah Ann Whitney Kingsbury and Sylvia P. Sessions Lyon had been sealed in plural marriage to Joseph Smith in 1842 and were admitted to the Holy Order in 1845, about the same time that they were also sealed “for time” to Heber C. Kimball. Apostle Kimball’s daughter Helen Mar Kimball, another plural wife of Joseph Smith, also entered the Holy Order in 1845. Joseph B. Noble had performed the first polygamous marriage at Nauvoo when he sealed his wife’s sister Louisa Beaman to Joseph Smith, and both Brother Noble and his wife Mary Adeline entered the Holy Order in 1845. Brigham Young’s effort to institutionalize the practice of plural marriage is reflected in the fact that of the fifteen persons admitted to the Holy Order in 1845, nine were women who had entered plural marriage with the sanction of the Prophet Joseph Smith.⁴³

⁴³Heber C. Kimball 1844–45 Journal, 25–26 January, 20–21 March, 17 April, 2 May, 31 July 1845, and Zina D. Huntington Jacobs Diary, 3 July 1845, both at Church Historical Department; and the list of members of the Holy Order in Newel K. Whitney’s 1833–45 Account Book, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU. Aside from those listed in the text, the above sources also show that John E. Page and his wife Mary, Charles Hyde, and Maria L. Tanner Lyman also entered the Holy Order in 1845. Whitney’s record presents the list of members in a manner that corresponds with the dates the individuals or couples (according to the husband’s entry date) were admitted into the Holy Order, with the last verified admission prior to the Martyrdom being that of Lyman Wight on 14 May 1844. Following Wight’s name are the names of thirteen persons, and the first seven of these names in Whitney’s list seem to correspond to the entries for 25–26 January 1845 in Heber C. Kimball’s journal. The last name in Whitney’s list is “Mrs Noble,” which would date his list about 20 March 1845 when Kimball’s journal shows that the Holy Order met at the home of Joseph B. Noble. Married women in Whitney’s list are indicated by the surname only, and two of these “Mrs” entries are smudged so that the surnames cannot be deciphered, even though other partially smudged names in the list can be deciphered. It is possible that these unreadable entries refer to Mrs. Lyman and Mrs. Jacobs. The entry date for Mary L. Lyman is not certain, for none of the other manuscript sources presently available about the Holy Order mention her until 17 April 1845 when the Kimball journal refers to her receiving the second anointing with her husband Amasa. Amasa Lyman was shown as an early member of the Holy Order by entries in the Joseph Smith Journal for 28 September and 12 October 1843, but he was not named again in any available source about the Holy Order until 26 January 1845 when his own journal indicates he attended a meeting of the Anointed Quorum. Serious illness, a proselyting mission, and change of residence

The exclusiveness of the Holy Order was soon to give way to the general admission of worthy Latter-day Saints to the endowment ceremonies in December 1845. Male members of the Quorum of the Anointed met for prayer circle in the Nauvoo Temple on 29 November, 30 November, and 5 December 1845, and at the later meeting it was decided:

On Sunday Morning at 9 O'clock all of the holy order will assemble fore prair and council. Our wives will come and pertack with us: the Sacrament will be administer[ed] the Sacrament [sic], and spend the day in those thing[s] that the spirrit shall teach this was the advise of President B Young ~~I will~~ this gave great joy to our wimmen.⁴⁴

When forty-two members of the Anointed Quorum met on Sunday morning, 7 December 1845, it was with a sense of pride that Heber C. Kimball recorded: "The following Persons are members of the Holy order of the Holy Preasthood having Recieved it in the Life time of Joseph and Hiram, the Prophets."⁴⁵

From this time onward, the membership restrictions that had been imposed on the prayer circle of the Holy Order gradually ended. On 7 December 1845, "Elder B Young said this quorum should meet here evry Sabath, and take the Sacrament." Exactly one hundred persons were newly endowed in the Nauvoo Temple from 11 December to 13 December 1845, but only four of these new people joined the Sunday prayer circle of the Holy Order on 14 December 1845. On 21 December, forty-five additional persons (less than a tenth of the newly endowed) attended the prayer circle of the Anointed Quorum and were formed into two concentric prayer circles. On 28 December 1845 "about 200 persons were present, clothed in priestly garments. . . . A circle was formed composed of about 20

kept Amasa Lyman from Nauvoo's meetings of the Holy Order. Zina H. Jacobs was attending a weekly prayer meeting prior to February 1845 that did not involve the Holy Order and which was apparently for the purpose of conventional prayer. See her diary, 23 January 1845, where a "Brother House" (not a member of the Holy Order according to Whitney's list for this period) took charge of the prayer meeting she was attending, an event that would never have occurred in the Holy Order where apostles attended and presided each week. The entry in the diary of Zina Huntington Jacobs for 3 July 1845, however, seems to refer to a meeting of the Holy Order: "At the thursday Prayer meeting Father John Smith made some exelent remarks concerning the Priesthood Prayer Endowments &c." If the smudged names of the two married women on Whitney's list do not refer to Mrs. Lyman (who definitely joined the Holy Order at least by April 1845) or to Mrs. Jacobs (who may have done so by July 1845), then at least two persons admitted to the Anointed Quorum prior to December 1845 are unidentified. Data on these 1845 additions to the Holy Order have been cross-checked with the findings of another researcher, Andrew Ehat.

⁴⁴Heber C. Kimball 1845-1846 Journal, 5 December 1845.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 35, 7 December 1845.

persons, most of whom had received the ordinances, and been admitted to the first quorum at a previous time.” Therefore, the exclusiveness of the Holy Order’s special prayer circle was temporarily preserved in December 1845 by admitting only about ten percent of those who were being endowed for the first time in the Nauvoo Temple. By January 1846, several thousand persons had been endowed and it was no longer possible for the single prayer circle of the Holy Order to exist even by restricting its membership to ten percent of those who were endowed. On Sunday, 4 January 1846, there was no meeting of the Anointed Quorum’s prayer circle “on account of the floor being not stiff enough to support so large a company as would have come in, without swaying too much.”⁴⁶

Thousands of persons received the endowment in the Nauvoo temple, and they became full members of the Quorum of the Anointed. In this regard, Heber C. Kimball told some newly endowed persons in 1846 that “it is necessary for *all who have been through the Temple to meet in quorum*, in order to become familiar with the signs and tokens, because they are the Keys of the Priesthood, in this the SEVENTH DISPENSATION.”⁴⁷ The Holy Order, or the Quorum of the Anointed, organized by Joseph Smith in 1843 had at last achieved its ultimate purpose of including in its membership all the worthy Latter-day Saints who could receive the temple endowment. Those who had been privately introduced into the Holy Order during the lifetime of Joseph Smith would continue to feel a special attachment and status, but the sense of distinction and elitism that had characterized the Holy Order during the period 1842 to 1845 was now available to all endowed persons.

An odd result of the expansion of the Anointed Quorum to include all Latter-day Saints was the altered status of women in prayer circle meetings after 1845. The Anointed Quorum organized by Joseph Smith had included both men and women but stopped its separate meetings in December 1845. Heber C. Kimball indicated on 21 December 1845 that women could continue to participate with men

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 7, 11–14, 21, and 28 December 1845, 4 January 1846.

⁴⁷Catherine Lewis, *Narrative of Some of the Proceedings of the Mormons* (Lynn, Mass.: Catherine Lewis, 1848), p. 11; italics added. She was relating her own observations of the teachings and practices of the Latter-day Saints at Nauvoo, where she received the endowment in the temple under the direction of Apostle Kimball, in whose home she lived. In Utah, the phrase “endowment company” was substituted for the use of “quorum” to designate persons participating in the endowment ceremony. Also, by the 1870s in Utah, LDS leaders had so long discontinued the earlier use of “Holy Order” that they used the term to describe the economic United Order and to refer to polygamy. See remarks of Brigham Young and Erastus Snow in James G. Bleak, “Annals of the Southern Utah Mission,” Book B, typed, p. 221, and Book C, MS., 15 December 1878, Church Historical Department.

in separate prayer circle meetings when he stated to newly endowed persons: "The Sisters ought not to gather together in schools to pray unless their husbands or some man be with them."⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the available records of the special and ecclesiastical prayer circles from the 1850s to the 1950s describe only one instance in which women met with their husbands in prayer circle meetings. A meeting of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in January 1896 shows that it was the policy after 1846 to exclude women from men's prayer circle meetings:

The subject of permission to the sisters to meet in prayer circles was discussed, as the question had been asked whether it would be right or whether they could be permitted to meet with their husbands in a prayer circle, seeing that sisters had been admitted to prayer circles in the Nauvoo Temple. It was shown, however, that on such occasions it was for the purpose of teaching the order of prayer as it is now the custom in the Temples. It was decided that if the sisters desired to meet for prayer they could do so as members and officers of Relief Societies in their regular places of meeting, but that it would not be advisable for them to meet at circles or to participate in prayer-circle meetings.⁴⁹

So far as the records of men's prayer circles exist, there was one occasion in 1958 when Elder Joseph Fielding Smith authorized members of the newly organized Smithfield (Utah) Stake Prayer Circle to include their wives in a prayer circle meeting once a year.⁵⁰ From the records in the LDS Church Archives it would seem that in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries after 1846 it was uncommon for women to participate with their husbands in prayer circle meetings that convened apart from the endowment ceremony. This policy, perhaps unintentionally, restricted the status of women.

Despite the disapproval of women's joining their husbands in prayer circle meetings, there is evidence that Latter-day Saint women in the nineteenth century met in their own prayer circles. It appears that under the direction of Eliza R. Snow, female members of the Church met for prayer circle during the pioneer exodus and in the Utah settlements.⁵¹ Although this was not in accord with Heber C.

⁴⁸Heber C. Kimball 1845-1846 Journal, 21 December 1845.

⁴⁹Journal History of The Church, 30 January 1896, p. 2, Church Historical Department.

⁵⁰Smithfield (Utah) Stake Prayer Circle Minutes, 25 May and 1 November 1958, Church Historical Department.

⁵¹The Eliza R. Snow Journals for 1847-1849 at the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, make many references to her attending prayer meetings with the sisters of the Church. In a conversation with Hugh Nibley on 28 March 1975, he said that his mother had participated in a Relief Society prayer circle organized by Eliza R. Snow in Utah.

Kimball's 1845 instructions, such practice appears to have had priesthood sanction, at least in some cases. In 1893, for example, a General Authority and member of the Salt Lake Temple presidency approved the prayer circle meeting of some sisters in preparation for the rebaptism of a sister: "The sisters, quite a number, came to have a prayer meeting, so bro. [John R.] Winder took us up to the Elders room where there was an altar around which we knelt, Aunt Zina [Young] being mouth and the rest repeating after her. I was then baptized, Frank Armstrong officiating."⁵² Even after the decision of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve in January 1896 advising against Relief Society prayer circle meetings, some ward Relief Societies continued holding occasional prayer circles:

We then attended a prayer meeting in the afternoon of the Relief Society. All the sisters are members of our society was presant at this meeting but one member all of us fasting that day. and part of us having kept our fast for two days that the Lord would hear our prayers that me and Cecelia would be healed.

We knelt in three different prayer circles. Then I offered up a prayer by my self. I felt if the Lord would heal me I would devote the remainder of my days to His service.⁵³

Rarely privileged to join their husbands in the separate prayer circle meetings after 1846, Latter-day Saint women also discontinued even occasional Relief Society prayer circles by the early twentieth century.

During the five years after the Saints' departure from Nauvoo, separate prayer circles appear to have been restricted to a few ecclesiastical and administrative units. The elders, seventies, high priests, and high council had separate prayer circle meetings in the Nauvoo Temple, and it is possible that they continued to do so during the exodus to Utah and the establishment of Church headquarters there. The only groups for which existing records show a pattern of prayer circle meetings between 1846 and 1851 were the Council of Fifty and the combined First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.⁵⁴

⁵²Mary Ann Freeze Diary, 19 September 1893, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

⁵³Hannah Adeline Savage Journal, p. 25, 7 May 1896, Church Historical Department; also diary of Lucy Hannah White Flake, 1 March 1895, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

⁵⁴Willard Richards May–August 1846 Journal, 30 May 1846, p. 42; *William Clayton's Journal*, pp. 40, 203. For the meetings of elders, seventies, and high priests prayer circles in the Nauvoo Temple, see HC 7:390, 552–54 and Heber C. Kimball 1845–1846 Journal, after entry for 11 December 1845.

SPECIAL PRAYER CIRCLES (1851–1929)

In 1851 the conduct of prayer circle meetings was restructured in a manner reminiscent of the Anointed Quorum organized by Joseph Smith in 1843. Beginning in February 1851, a separate prayer circle was organized in Salt Lake City for each day of the week, but admission was not according to one's membership in any particular priesthood quorum or organization. The presidents of these nightly prayer circles in 1851 were—Sunday, William C. Staines; Monday, John Young; Tuesday, Albert P. Rockwood; Wednesday, William Snow; Thursday, Norton Jacobs; Friday, James Fife; and Saturday, Heman Hyde. Although a member of the First Council of Seventy, Albert P. Rockwood, was the president of the Tuesday Evening Prayer Circle, only two other members of the First Council of Seventy were members of his circle, whereas five bishops of Salt Lake City wards were admitted to his circle. This mixing of ecclesiastical positions in the membership of the Salt Lake City prayer circles of 1851 suggests that when a man was appointed president of one of these special prayer circles, he could recommend for membership anyone worthy of such opportunity, regardless of ecclesiastical position.⁵⁵ For ease of identification, these circles will be denominated here as special prayer circles, in contrast to ecclesiastical prayer circles where membership was determined by Church position.

The special prayer circles of the 1850s were not restricted to Salt Lake City or even to Utah. Although data are insufficient to identify the locations of all special prayer circles during this period, it is possible that they were functioning in each of the major Mormon settlements established in the American West. The Mormon colony in San Bernardino, California, and the St. Louis (Missouri) Stake were both far distant from Church headquarters, yet the former had a prayer circle as early as 1854 and the latter organized a prayer circle in 1857.⁵⁶

The tendency for special prayer circles to include men of various quorums of the priesthood, as well as men not presiding in any office, was also reflected where it might be least expected: in the prayer circle of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve

⁵⁵Attendance rolls of these prayer circles, 1851–1853 at Church Historical Department, catalogued either under the name of their president or being transferred to the Prayer Circle Collection from the Utah Territorial Collection at Church Historical Department.

⁵⁶San Bernardino Mission 1852–1855 Journal, entries beginning 23 April 1854, Amasa M. Lyman Papers, Church Historical Department; Erastus Snow Journal, 9 February 1857, Church Historical Department.

Apostles, which also met on Sundays. The 1853–1854 rolls, for example, show that in addition to the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, the circle membership included Edward Hunter (the Presiding Bishop), Jedediah M. Grant and Daniel H. Wells (prior to their becoming counselors in the First Presidency), Joseph Young (a member of the First Council of Seventy), Thomas Bullcock, Truman O. Angell, Nathaniel H. Felt, William W. Phelps, Edwin D. Woolley, Albert Carrington, Levi Richards, and Isaac Morley.⁵⁷ Whether presided over by a General Authority or by another priesthood member, these special prayer circles made it possible for men to fellowship in this sacred ordinance who were united in ways other than by membership in a particular priesthood quorum.

The basic structure of these special nightly prayer circles remained intact until 1858. On 25 July 1858, Wilford Woodruff recorded in his journal the next development in the history of the prayer circles: "The Presidency wished the Twelve to get up a company, each one of them to Form a Prayer Circle."⁵⁸ Whether every member of the Quorum of the Twelve in 1858 became president of his own prayer circle is not presently certain, but available records show that the following members of the Quorum organized their own Salt Lake City circles in 1858: John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, George A. Smith, Ezra T. Benson, Erastus Snow, and Charles C. Rich. The prayer circles of these six men and that of the combined First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve on Sunday night accounted for one special prayer circle each night of the week. Members of the Quorum of the Twelve continued to act as presidents of special prayer circles for seventy years.

Although apostles were made presidents of these special prayer circles after 1858, non-General Authorities continued to preside over other such circles. These special prayer circles, like those organized in 1851, were independent of stake or quorum organization. Contemporary with the prayer circles after 1858 that were presided over by apostles, additional special circles met in the Salt Lake Endowment House, presided over by such men as Edwin D. Woolley, Joseph Horne, Alonzo H. Raleigh, John D. T. McAllister, Amos M. Musser, Elijah F. Sheets, Jeter Clinton, James W. Cummings, Samuel W. Richards, Elias Smith, Edward Snelgrove, and George C. Lambert.

⁵⁷Sunday Prayer Circle of President Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve, Record of Attendance, 1853–1854, being transferred from the Utah Territorial Collection to the Prayer Circle Collection.

⁵⁸Wilford Woodruff Journal, 25 July 1858.

Occasionally, a non-General Authority became president of a special prayer circle when an apostle had to resign the presidency because of a church calling. Thus, Joseph Horne took over the presidency of John Taylor's prayer circle in 1882 in view of President Taylor's responsibilities as President of the Church, and Jeter Clinton took over the circle of Erastus Snow in 1862 when the latter received a mission call.⁵⁹

Whether presided over by an apostle or by a man with lesser priesthood jurisdiction, the operation of these special prayer circles was the same. Established by the authority of the First Presidency, the prayer circle was actually organized by either a member of that body or of the Quorum of the Twelve. Prospective members were nominated by the president and current members of the circle. After being unanimously voted on by the prayer circle members, the names of prospective members were recommended to the First Presidency for approval. Once approved by the First Presidency, the men were admitted.

In 1851 these special prayer circles met in dedicated rooms of residences, but subsequently convened in the Lion House or in the Salt Lake Endowment House (1855–1889), in the Gardo House or private residences (1889–1893), and in the Salt Lake Temple (1893–1929). In some cases, prayer circles distant from a temple met in residences rather than in chapels. It was common for the circle president to admit his relatives since these special prayer circles included men irrespective of priesthood calling. Moreover, these special prayer circles often included men from various wards and stakes in the Salt Lake Valley. Men were released from a special prayer circle only in the event of unwillingness to attend regularly or if they ceased to be members of the Church in good standing.

It was a distinct honor to be a member of such a prayer circle, but it was an honor denied to thousands of worthy men who resided both inside and outside the Salt Lake Valley. By 1929 the growing membership of the Church had highlighted the inequity of having such special prayer circles for the privileged few. Because of their increasing exclusiveness, special prayer circles were discontinued by the First Presidency in 1929. On 29 March 1929, Apostle James E. Talmage explained this decision to his own prayer circle:

⁵⁹See the prayer circle rolls in Church Historical Department, catalogued according to name of the president of the circle, or located in the Prayer Circle Collection.

Bro. Talmage acknowledged the benefit of the administration he received last week. He also explained the history of the organization and carrying on of prayer circles both in and out of the Temple and then explained that it was decided by the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve that all special circles would hereafter be discontinued. . . . He explained that membership in circles was of necessity a special privilege which of necessity couldn't be extended to all who were worthy and might desire membership, whereas the temple ordinance work, which is of greater importance and included the circle ceremony is available to every worthy Latter Day Saint who desires to avail himself of the advantage.⁶⁰

The inequality of these special circles was reduced in the ecclesiastical prayer circles that continued to exist in the stakes and wards of the LDS Church after 1929.

ECCLESIASTICAL PRAYER CIRCLES (1845–1978)

Although the high council of the Nauvoo Stake had a separate prayer circle as early as December 1845, the history of subsequent stake circles is incomplete due to an absence of records in the LDS Church Archives. Available records indicate the existence of stake prayer circles for only ten percent of the stakes that were organized during the period for which stake prayer circle records can be found. Nevertheless, sufficient information about stake prayer circles is available to provide a general outline of their history.

Stake prayer circles have continued to be organized down to the mid-twentieth century. A recent formation of a stake prayer circle occurred on 8 December 1957, when Elders Joseph Fielding Smith and Mark E. Petersen organized the Smithfield (Utah) Stake Prayer Circle. Other stake prayer circles may have been established in more recent times. Although Provo (Utah) Stake had a prayer circle almost immediately after the stake was formed in 1939, other stakes indicate the opposite trend. In most instances a prayer circle was not begun until the stake had existed several years.⁶¹

These delays in forming stake prayer circles may have derived from two factors. Oftentimes the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve considered organizing stake prayer circles only after a formal request for that privilege had been made by the stake president.

⁶⁰James E. Talmage Prayer Circle Minutes, 1912–1929, 29 March 1929, Church Historical Department; James E. Talmage Journal, 29 March 1929, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

⁶¹See the records of Juab, Bear Lake, Sevier, Summit, Wasatch, Maricopa, St. Joseph, and Smithfield stake prayer circles, Church Historical Department, catalogued according to the current name of the stakes, and compare to the dates the stakes were organized.

If the president of the stake did not feel inclined to have a prayer circle, such an organization was usually not imposed upon his jurisdiction by the General Authorities. Moreover, there also seemed to be a preference for having a current or former temple worker as a member of the stake prayer circle. This may have been the primary reason for the delays in forming stake prayer circles.

Membership in the stake prayer circles was determined by one's position in the stake, but this criterion varied from stake to stake. Some stakes included only the stake presidency, high council, and stake clerk. It was more common, however, for the stake circle to include the stake presidency, high council, stake clerks, patriarchs, and high priest quorum presidency. The largest known stake prayer circle was that of the Alberta (Canada) Stake, which in the 1948–1950 period had more than eighty members, including the previously mentioned officers, plus all ward bishoprics, seventies presidents, and seminary teachers of the stake.⁶² Even though the officers to be included varied between stakes, the inequalities of the special prayer circles were avoided by making membership in the ecclesiastical prayer circle a result of one's position in the stake rather than by the choice of the prayer circle president and members. With membership established on the basis of stake position, entry and release from the prayer circle automatically reflected each man's tenure in Church positions.

In addition to stake prayer circles, ecclesiastical prayer circles have been conducted by wards, priesthood quorums (e.g., the Salt Lake Stake Elders' Quorum, 1893–1929), and by temple presidencies and temple workers. Usually, these ecclesiastical prayer circles, even in local wards, were organized by members of the First Presidency or the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. For example, on 18 December 1880 the President of the Church, his counselors and two apostles organized prayer circles in each of the Ogden, Utah, wards.⁶³ Nevertheless, the presence of an apostle was not always required, since in 1937 Edward J. Wood, president of the Alberta (Canada) Stake and president of the Cardston Temple, organized a prayer circle in the Hillspring Ward.⁶⁴ The number of ward prayer circles is not readily apparent, but in 1900 Apostle Reed Smoot said: "I hope that there will not be a ward but what will have a prayer circle inaugurated for

⁶²Alberta (Canada) Stake Prayer Circle Minutes, 1948–1950, Church Historical Department.

⁶³Robert McQuarrie 1845–1887 Journal, 18 December 1880, p. 435, Church Historical Department.

⁶⁴Journal History, 2 May 1937, p. 8.

it is a strength to the Church.”⁶⁵ With such encouragement, it is probable that ward prayer circles have been as common by proportion as stake circles.

Whether a man became a member of a prayer circle by virtue of his ecclesiastical position or by the choice of a special prayer circle, a question remains as to whether there were any special requirements for membership. The example of the Juab (Utah) Stake Prayer Circle is probably representative. When that prayer circle was organized in 1880, the following questions were asked of each member:

1. Do you strive to live the principles of righteousness according to the requirements in the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants?
2. Do you pay your tithing and offerings according to your covenants, agreeable to the Law of God and the requirements of the Holy Priesthood?
3. Are you striving to pay all your just debts, that you may “owe no man anything,” according to the exhortation of the Apostle?
4. Do you strive to magnify your calling, have family and secret prayer, and sustain faithfully the presiding Priesthood by your vote, faith, and prayers?
5. Are you willing to consecrate your time, talents, and means for the upbuilding of the Kingdom of God and the establishment of His righteousness, to cease to speak evil, find fault, and all manner of unrighteousness?
6. Have you any hard feelings or bitterness in your bosom to anyone, or is there any of the undersigned whom you could not meet with in a prayer circle?⁶⁶

It is to be noted that despite the emphasis by the LDS Church leadership on entering into plural marriage during the 1880s, there is no evidence that membership in the prayer circle elite was dependent in any way upon entering into Mormonism’s polygamous elite. Nevertheless, prospective members of prayer circles were cautioned that they must believe in *all* gospel principles, as indicated in the 1909 instructions of Apostle Francis M. Lyman to a ward prayer circle:

Also that members must believe in every principle of the Gospel. Spoke especially on the principle of plural marriage said that members should be firm believers in the principle but it was to be clearly understood that the carrying out of the principle was in abeyance at the present time.⁶⁷

⁶⁵Juab (Utah) Stake Prayer Circle Minutes, 1898–1914 Book, 21 October 1900, p. 34, Church Historical Department.

⁶⁶Ibid., 1880–1887 Book, loose pages at front of book; punctuation added.

⁶⁷John M. Whitaker 1908–1910 Memorandum Book, 7 November 1909, John M. Whitaker Papers, Western Americana, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

A more recent summary of the requirements for membership in a prayer circle states: "They should be men who are true, tried, active, devoted, strong in testimony, integrity, faithful, honest, obedient, submissive, prayerful, loyal, sustain authority without hard feelings and without guile, whose houses are in order."⁶⁸ Having complied with the requirements of worthiness, members of prayer circles met weekly, biweekly, or monthly (as the particular circle might choose).

PURPOSES OF THE PRAYER CIRCLE

At a minimum, the prayer circles have been for the observance of the true order of prayer, but additional activities have also been conducted in prayer circle meetings. As discussed previously, the first organized prayer circle was a vehicle for the administration of the anointing and endowment ceremonies of the priesthood from 1843 to 1845. This facet of organized prayer circles was of short duration, but other activities characterized prayer circle meetings throughout their history in the Church. At these meetings, it was often customary to consecrate bottles of oil for the anointing of the sick.⁶⁹ Prayer circle meetings from the days of Joseph Smith to the present have also been occasion for testimony bearing and discussion of basic, inspirational gospel doctrine.⁷⁰ In addition, prayer circles were occasions where participants covenanted to live more fully certain commandments.⁷¹ Rarely has extensive Church business been conducted in connection with the prayer circle meeting, the exceptions to this being the prayer circle meetings of the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve, those of the Council of Fifty, and those of the Salt Lake Stake.

It might be wondered whether the prayer circle is intended to be a means of summoning special revelations or manifestations. The primary purpose of any prayer is to commune with God and to receive

⁶⁸"Requirements and Instructions for Setting Up Prayer Circles in Stakes," undated, typed document, d4564, Church Historical Department.

⁶⁹For example, on 17 December 1845, seven men participated in a prayer circle in the Nauvoo Temple for the purpose of dedicating and consecrating forty-five bottles of oil for use in temple ordinances (Heber C. Kimball 1845–1846 Journal, 17 December 1845).

⁷⁰Wilford Woodruff Journal, 7 January 1844: "Mrs. Woodruff and myself met with the quorum and we had an interesting time of instruction. I spoke during the day upon the relationship that we sustained towards our Progenitors & posterity in the resurrection of the dead." Salt Lake (Utah) Stake Prayer Circle Record, 1904–1920, p. 8: "On April 5, 1905 it was decided that at each meeting of the prayer circle held thereafter, or until other arrangements should be made, a member of the circle should give an address on a section of the Book of Doctrine and Covenants."

⁷¹Heber C. Kimball 1840–45 Journal, 24 July 1845: "The Holly order met at the usual place for prair," and Willard Richards Journal for 24 July 1845: "4 P.M. prayer meeting—after which the Quorum agreed to take no more snuff & tobacco for 6 weeks."

the instruction and influence of God. Under difficult circumstances, faithful persons may seek special manifestations of God's power, as on 9 June 1844 when Vilate Kimball wrote to her husband that the weather at Nauvoo had been so cold and wet that Newel K. Whitney and Dr. John M. Bernhisel thought the Anointed Quorum needed to assemble to ask the Lord to change the weather to avoid an epidemic of sickness among the Saints.⁷² Also, with the approval of the Prophet Joseph Smith, the members of the 1833 School of the Prophets joined in prayer for a special visionary manifestation.⁷³

According to the will of the Lord, divine manifestations may accompany or follow prayer, but there is little evidence that the order of prayer observed in prayer circles was intended to summon special manifestations. In fact, there is at least one occasion in which members of a prayer circle were admonished not to seek such signs. On 22 March 1846, Samuel W. Richards recorded in his journal that in the prayer circle of his seventies quorum it was proposed "that we pray for the Prophet Joseph to come into our midst and converse with us." The uncomfortable similarity between such an act and a spiritualistic seance was apparent, and "it was decided by the President, that we had no right to pray for that thing, and all was again right."⁷⁴ Obviously, a prayer circle may result in divine manifestation of a spectacular nature, but the available records concerning prayer circles indicate that rarely is such a manifestation sought.

The purposes of the prayer circle are outlined in a recent instruction from the LDS Authorities:

The purpose of the prayer circle: The true order of prayer, Get Close to the Lord, Spirits drawn out to God and His Son, Hearts Humble, contrite and at peace, Soften hearts of participants and draws them near to God, Perfect love and harmony, Pray for the sick, Pray for the advancement of the Lord's work with His blessings upon the people and His leaders.⁷⁵

For men who were generally unable to attend religious instruction in priesthood quorums and Sunday Schools due to administrative assignments, the special and ecclesiastical prayer circle meetings were opportunities to receive the spiritual instruction that was paradoxically denied to them by their Church callings. Moreover, the

⁷²Vilate Kimball to Heber C. Kimball, 9 June 1844, continued as a letter dated 24 June 1844, Church Historical Department.

⁷³See fn. 19, above.

⁷⁴Samuel W. Richards Journal, 22 March 1846, Church Historical Department.

⁷⁵"Requirements and Instructions for Setting Up Prayer Circles," Church Historical Department.

prayer circles encouraged the bonds of fellowship and loyalty naturally expected of men who served in Church leadership. Although the organized prayer circles may have given the impression of a church-within-a-church, they provided a great spiritual strength to thousands of priesthood leaders during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁷⁶

The conducting of separate prayer circles has continued until recently in some wards and stakes. However, on 3 May 1978, the First Presidency announced that all prayer circles except those conducted as part of the endowment ceremony in the temples were to be immediately discontinued. As the number of stakes in the LDS Church reached nearly a thousand, the Council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of Twelve Apostles decided that it would be too difficult to comply with all the requests for new prayer circles.⁷⁷

⁷⁶The estimate of "thousands" is not extreme in view of the fact that the published history of a single prayer circle lists 286 members. See *History of the Elders' Quorum Prayer Circle, Salt Lake City, 1893-1929*.

⁷⁷Spencer W. Kimball, N. Eldon Tanner, and Marion G. Romney to All Stake Presidents and Bishops, 3 May 1978. A comment about this announcement appears in "Update," *Sunstone* 3 (July-August 1978):6.