

Letter to the Saints

by The Coordinating Council of the Conference of Restoration Elders

Our Dearest Brothers and Sisters,

We, the Coordinating Council of the Conference of Restoration Elders, desire to visit with you in a most sincere and open way. As you read this, may you feel and receive the assurance of the Good Spirit that motivates us to write. We greet you as brothers in Christ. We make no claims to any high position or boast that we are anything other than fellow laborers in the great cause of Zion.

Many issues face us as Restoration Branches today, but two stand out as critical at this time. (1) The hurts and discouragements we inflict on each other are weakening the collective opportunity to provide effective ministry to a world desperately in need of the gospel of Jesus Christ. What is it going to take for us to once again love, respect and trust each other? (2) How do we collectively as Restoration Branches come together, how do we structure ourselves to be more effective and more efficient in supporting ministries in the many fields our Lord is opening up in front of us?

In dealing in relationships, we are all painfully aware that the potential for joy is in direct proportion to the opposite possibility for sorrow. In other words, we can only hurt to the extent of our love. Joy is possible as we risk being open and vulnerable with each other. With this also comes the risk of being hurt. When we have been hurt, it is natural for us to protect and isolate ourselves so we cannot be hurt again. Sadly, as we try to protect our hearts from more pain, we also forfeit the possibility to love unconditionally as our heavenly Father wants us to. This can leave us in a state of numbness where we live our days not hurting, but also not really loving. We appeal to every brother and sister to take the chance to continue to be open with each other, to continue to work with one another, to risk loving each other again.

We would encourage all to look up and embrace the truth. This great work goes forward, often in spite of us and not because of us. Our heavenly Father has promised great things for those who love Him and who keep His commandments (1 Corinthians 2:9). As members of Christ's Church, we know these promises not only apply to us as we pass through the veil at mortal death, but also for us living on earth today who work for the cause of Zion. His work will not be frustrated and His miraculous purposes will come to pass, else, as the Book of Mormon says, "He would cease to be God" (Mormon 4:82).

We know very well of the confusions, discouragements and suspicions expressed throughout the Church today. As a people who have loved and been hurt, it is understandable that we are hesitant to once again reach out to each other to trust, to respect, and to express love through our actions.

Though it is a hard thing to do, we have no other option than to remain engaged in this active love... else we cannot fulfill our part of the everlasting covenant. Jesus said, "These things I command you, that ye love one another" (John 15:17).

Central to the gospel of the Kingdom message is the Everlasting Covenant (Genesis 9:22-23). Our role in bringing forth the cause of Zion, by definition, requires a corporate response. Unlike the vast majority of the Christian world today that preaches individual salvation, the Restoration looks to a Zion community on earth as our goal. Our labor for Zion always has been, is today, and always will be, a group effort. Our Zion task is summed up in three parts. "And the Lord called his people, Zion, because, (1) they were of one heart and of one mind; (2) dwelt in righteousness; and (3) there were no poor among them" (Genesis 7:23). The above points our Lord uses to describe His people as Zion, cannot possibly be fulfilled unless we love, respect and trust each other and work together. While working out our own salvation is a personal thing, our role in striving for Zion is social in the purest form.

If Zion is a collective effort, then how can any of us be content to live out our lives in our individual branches? How can any of us remain satisfied with our ministries when we know so much more could be accomplished if we would but labor together?

Our heavenly Father is touching the hearts of those in the "highways and byways" of the world. Many are responding to His touch. Our Father has caused that we are made aware of those who He has touched and thus requires us to respond by providing ministry. Effective ministry requires cooperation, planning and resources. It must be approached in an organized and efficient manner. No individual branch can provide ongoing support to the numerous fields of ministry our Lord is calling us into today. As members of Christ's Church, are we willing to work together so our ministries may be as efficient and effective as possible? We commit sin if we knowingly do less than our best (James 4:17).

Sometimes people say we cannot do anything to better our ministries because we would be “running before the Lord.” Isaiah 52 is sometimes incorrectly applied to support the notion that we have no further role to play in the Zion task since the Lord Himself will bring Zion. Of course, our Lord will bring the government of Zion from above. There is no disagreement about this. However, we are responsible to be the Zion people on earth as God described in Genesis 7:23. The “Song of Zion,” as revealed in Section 83:17, tells us that the Zion from above and the Zion from beneath will come together. We are the Zion from beneath.

Some are concerned that any effort to work together is a veiled attempt to “restructure” the Church with a higher quorum organization. If one follows this line of reasoning, the logical conclusion would be for nothing to be done until the Lord fixes the problem. Our job then would be to “preserve” the Restoration by hiding it from possible dangers. This is a familiar logic consistent with the parable of the talents. We remember that the servant who hid his talent to preserve it was punished by the Lord and described as a “wicked and slothful servant” (Matthew 25:26).

The restructuring of the Church is an issue that the Lord will deal with. Zenos Gurley is quoted as saying in regards to the early days of the Reorganization, “...yet the recollection of that event has enabled me to rest satisfied that He who delivered us then still holds the reins in His own hands, and will bring His work to a glorious consummation, in His own way and in His own time” (*Church History*, Vol. 3, pg. 220). Until the time that the Lord chooses to move in restructuring the Church, it is our responsibility to seek a more efficient provisional structure that will act as a vehicle to streamline and maximize our ministries.

We call on all brothers and sisters, all branches, to focus on practical, functional, more efficient ways to work together for the purpose of maximizing our collective ministry. Working together may mean increased, systematic giving for outreach. It may mean the tasking and support of willing brothers and sisters to go to places we cannot go and minister temporally as well as spiritually. It might mean more telephones, computers, copy machines, and mass printing equipment. It might mean an agreed upon, uniform process for membership transfers between branches, or a central data collection point to report and record ordinances. It may mean finding ways to share in the providing of ministry when Branches are located in geographic proximity to each other. It may mean agreeing on what steps are necessary to help those who have come out of factions to once again have full fellowship within the Body of Christ. These are but a few examples of ways to work together.

From its beginning, the CRE has provided a venue for Restoration Elders, and to some extent the Aaronic priesthood

and members of Restoration Branches, to come together to consider the needs of the Church in its current scattered state. Many who have labored within the CRE have accomplished a lot of work over the years. Some of this work is reflected by the accumulated reports, curriculums, pamphlets, study guides, etc., that have been developed since the inception of the CRE. Over the years the many members of the various CRE councils have also offered ministry and encouragement to isolated Saints and Restoration Branches throughout the US and various parts of the world. The CRE has also provided opportunities for the Saints to come together and worship, pray, testify, and discuss issues.

While the CRE has provided good ministry, and will continue to do so, it was never intended to be the Church. It is also apparent that the CRE has not been the means to bring the majority of Restoration Branches together. So, what else is needed? What else can be done at this time to further the work of the gospel as the collective body of Jesus Christ? In what venue will most Restoration Branches come together? Certainly whatever the final venue, it must account for the representation of the Branches and Members. Could the Joint Conference of Restoration Branches become the provisional organizational venue to begin to collectively meet the above need? Possibly, but certainly there are a number of Restoration Branches and Saints who question this. The question is why?

One reason is that some of the legislative items in previous JCRB conferences that dealt with legal precedents appear to some as preliminary steps toward forming another upper quorum organization. The Coordinating Council does not believe that these types of legislative items should be a primary focus of any provisional organizational venue that is working towards the bringing together of the Restoration Branches and the Saints. It is our perspective that consideration of these types of items has contributed to the climate of distrust that currently exists within the Restoration Branch Movement. If the JCRB is to become a viable vehicle for the majority of Restoration Branches to work together, it would seem that this is one area that should be carefully reviewed at this time.

It is our hope that the JCRB will concentrate its current efforts on functional ways to coordinate and enhance ministries. We further believe that opportunities to labor together in accomplishing the work that is set before us will go a long way to reinforce mutual trust, respect, and love for each other. To this end we would encourage that the primary focus of the JCRB be on supporting “inter-branch” cooperation and activities that seek to establish the cause of Zion, and take the gospel of the Kingdom to the world.

The Coordinating Council is working with the JCRB and others who are actively engaged in activities that are consistent with the purpose of the CRE. We continue to see the CRE as a

viable place for Melchisedec priesthood from all Restoration Branches to come together to confer with each other, to seek the mind and will of God in our time, and to worship, pray, and fellowship with one another. We also continue to see the CRE as a viable means of coordinating and providing missionary outreach, and needed ministry to isolated Restoration Branches and Saints. However, this will only happen if the priesthood and Saints currently worshipping within the Restoration Branches embrace the CRE as an acceptable mechanism for engaging in these types of activities.

Whether it is the CRE, the JCRB, both of them together or another completely different group yet to emerge, the need

for Restoration Branches to find ways to work together seems apparent to most. If this is true, then coming together to find ways to work with one another is as close or as far away as our willingness to love, trust and respect each other. If we are willing to take these steps with one another, how could our Lord not look upon us with favor? He will indeed set His Church in order, in His own time and in His own way. However, in the meantime, we could and should embrace the opportunity to do so much better than we have done thus far. May God bless us as we endeavor together to do His will.

Russ Reid, Danny Hight, Vim Horn, Garry Piatt, Lyle Smith, Dan Sherer, John Mundy



Publish Glad ‘Tidings’

by Steve Mapes, CRE Treasurer

The chorus of a popular hymn calls us to “publish glad tidings, tidings of peace, tidings of Jesus, redemption and release!” I have always enjoyed singing that song which is appropriately named, “O Zion, Haste” (#86 in the Blue Hymnal by Mary A. Thompson). I was pondering the best way to share with the Saints the good news and bad news—i.e. the good news of increased overall giving to the Conference missionary groups and the shortfall we have in general donations (General Fund) that pays for publishing the *Tidings of Zion*. As I was thus pondering, my mind was brought to this beautiful song and the challenge we have to literally publish the “glad” *Tidings of Zion*.

When we look at the graphics of CRE missionary contributions, it is encouraging to know that Saints are responding and giving MORE to specific missionary boards such as the missionary work to Africa. Our challenge is not to shift giving from the missionary boards, but to recognize that the *Tidings of Zion* is a wonderful missionary tool that also needs our increased level of support as well. Going into 2007 we will not be able to publish as many editions of the *Tidings* without some positive change, a change in our response to share the gospel through this magazine.

We have a challenge before us. The hymn “O Zion, Haste” is a call to share this very day. “All thou spendest Jesus will repay. Publish glad tidings, tidings of peace, tidings of Jesus, redemption and release.”

