

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS  
PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS  
50 EAST NORTH TEMPLE STREET  
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH 84150  
(801) 531-2205

# NEWS

## 900,000 WOMEN DEVELOP ABILITIES THROUGH MORMON RELIEF SOCIETY

"One of the purposes of this life is to give opportunity for us to make the most of our own abilities," Mrs. Barbara B. Smith, the new president of the Relief Society of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, said as she discussed the future of that organization.

"The Relief Society, which serves nearly 900,000 women around the world, offers a diversified program which provides spiritual and educational classes, assists in providing welfare services to the individual, the family and the community, and encourages women to give countless hours of compassionate service on a voluntary basis," she explained.

As the leader of Mormon women in a world where the questions relating to the so-called women's liberation movement are being argued and debated daily, Mrs. Smith is keenly aware of the continuing discussions.

"In our religious thinking," she observed, "each woman is an honored, revered daughter of God. A woman in the Church has every right and the responsibility to develop fully her capabilities and potentials to their ultimate.

"God gave the man and woman joint and individual responsibilities," she continued. "Together they were to subdue and beautify the earth, multiply and replenish it. From the beginning men and women were to



share a warm, mutually supportive companionship. *etc.*

"We believe in the family as the basic unit of society," she pointed out. "The unique roles of men and women as delineated in Church doctrine are clearly ones of love and caring for each other and their offspring; mutually supportive and sharing--not one being superior or inferior, but with a balance of responsibilities."

While there are some basic differences between men and women, Mrs. Smith declared, "Men and women have similarities in intelligence, talents, and creative abilities and both should have opportunities to develop these gifts to their fullest."

The Relief Society program is designed for all adult women of the Church, Mrs. Smith explained. "There are single women as well as those who are married and have families within its membership."

"We are increasingly aware of the variety of needs of the Relief Society membership and in recognition of these different needs, the governing board of Relief Society is made up of married women, single young women, single older women, widows, working women, younger and older women who represent the point of view of all women as plans are made and programs are developed."

"From the beginning of the organization, women have been encouraged to gain an education. In fact Brigham Young who led the members of the Church to the Rocky Mountains told the people that if he had to choose between educating a son or a daughter, he would educate the daughter because then the family would be educated whereas if the son were educated then only one person would be educated," Mrs. Smith said.

Early in the history of Relief Society education classes were organized. Today women are studying courses in the scripture and



doctrine of the Church, cultures of different nations, social relations, and are involved in many different homemaking mini-courses suited to meet their special interests and needs.

The Relief Society is organized according to the pattern of the Church with local ward or branch organizations to serve the smallest geographical units of the Church. These organizations have memberships ranging from a very few in the smaller branches to more than one hundred in the larger wards. Relief Society stake and district boards are organized to direct and assist the ward and branch officers in keeping activities on a uniform basis and maintaining high standards in all phases of this work.

From time to time special classes have been organized to meet special needs. In the early days of the Church the Relief Society taught members the skills of midwifery and nursing and, in fact, encouraged several women in their medical training because of the lack of doctors in their communities.

The Relief Society was organized to help women accomplish many things and one of the primary goals was and still is to assist in meeting welfare needs.

The Relief Society has pioneered in the field of social services. Through its management and administrative supervision, specialized adoption and child placement services were established as were counseling services for youth and other personal social welfare needs met. Relief Society assisted also in organizing and forwarding the Indian Placement program, and in the 1940's began a variety of health services including maternity hospitals and child care clinics, responded to the call to store wheat, and many other programs.



Some of these programs have grown so large that they now have a separate entity in the Church, Mrs. Smith noted. There is now a department called Welfare Services. It includes the social service in the Church, a welfare program, and a health services program.

"Our challenge now becomes one of seeking out the areas of unsolved problems and finding ways to be meaningfully responsive to current needs," she declared.

"Mormon women also have a proud heritage in the field of community involvement and government," Mrs. Smith continued. They were among the first in the United States to be able to vote and they labored diligently for many decades afterwards to help other women gain this right.

"Shortly after the right to vote was achieved, the Relief Society provided classes in government and law."

Mormon women today are serving in their communities, in town councils, and in countless organizations designed to improve the civic life.

Mrs. Smith, herself a wife and mother, heads the worldwide women's auxiliary of the LDS Church. She also is a member of the board of trustees for the Welfare Services Corporation of the Church, the board of directors for the Promised Valley Playhouse, and sits on the governing committees for the Deseret Industries. She is also a member of the editorial boards for the Ensign and the Friend, two monthly publications of the LDS Church. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the National Council of Women of the United States and is affiliated with the International Council of Women. Mrs. Smith is also a member of the Church Board of Education and a member of the Board of Trustees of Brigham Young University.



A life-long member of the Church, she was born in Salt Lake City where she lives with her husband, Douglas H. Smith. They are the parents of seven children and they have twelve grandchildren.

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