

“This Is a Woman’s Church”

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I have got to compliment FAIR. One of the greatest kickbacks that I got from this invitation was that my Dad was so impressed. “You are going to speak at FAIR!” He’s a great fan of FAIR.

It’s really my pleasure to be here. But I have to tell you, because of the topic and because of how diverse people feel about this topic, I don’t really see that there are a lot of ways for me to be successful in this. Somebody is going to be irritated by the time that this is over. And last night when I was getting ready, I thought, “Why did I even say ‘yes’ to this assignment?” I’m not a scholar, I’m not a FAIR contributor, I’m not a church spokesperson. There’s very little to recommend [me] and I’m not going to say anything very startling here today that you’re going to think, “Wow, that was new!” So I started to think, “Why did I say yes?” But the reason I said yes when they called was I want to go on record from my own experience. And my own experience has been incredibly empowering. The doctrine and the practice of the church, for me as a woman, has given me things that I care more deeply about than anything else in my life. So, I want to go on record, and if you will give me 40 to 50 minutes, I’m going to talk about that. Because it will be my personal experience, but that’s the best testimonial that I have, and I feel passionately about it because it’s my own.

There has been some recent press that sort of alleged that the LDS church is sort of oppressive, or that it is stodgily conservative, or that it somehow might be a “toxic” environment for women to participate in. And I just think about that, with maybe a couple of colorful exceptions, my experience in the church as a woman has been incredibly empowering. Of course everything I’m going to talk about is my own experience. There are two sections of this talk. The first part I want to talk about is the doctrine and why the doctrine about women is important. And in the second piece I want to talk about practice and how we actually put our doctrine into practice, and some of the things that we might be able to do that could improve the way that we live up to our doctrine.

In an ideal world I would have some very beautiful slides that you would be looking at instead of at me, but there aren't any, so don't even look.

At the end I'm going to try and answer this question (it may have been a poor title for this talk): Is this a woman's church? But I'm going to tell you a story about that and then I'll try and answer that question afterward.

The scope and the field that is open to me as a woman as revealed in LDS doctrine is more empowering than I can wrap my brain around. There is nothing else like it in any other faith tradition. There is nothing that I know about, that talks about our identity, and purpose and infinite artistry that's available to us in this unique way.

I'm going to start out by talking about the doctrine of intelligences. This is, I think, unique to Mormonism. It talks about that we existed as intelligences and that it can't be created and it can't be made. We've always existed in this way. But, we chose to ally ourselves with God. We had personality and we had volition, and we chose to ally ourselves with a Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Mother who could put us on the road to exaltation.

So, they gave us a spirit body. And they made the opportunity for us to get a mortal, physical body. And then through the work of the atonement, through Jesus Christ, He gave us the ability to have a resurrected body, and to have exaltation and eternal life. This kind of progression that we are on starts off with an intelligence. This is just my word, but I'm going to call that the First Self. My First Self has a personality that is completely unique. There is nobody that has the combination of gifts and individuality that I have or that you have. And that's important because it's the core of who I am. And it has always existed.

On top of that First Self, we are given the chance to take on additional stewardships and additional roles. And so for me, the first one of those is: I am a woman. And so Jesus Christ, as His intelligence, He says in the scriptures, "I am the self-existent one, I Am." And He was the strongest and probably the most intelligent of all the intelligences. But we all followed Him. We

said, "I am also, I exist." If you want to talk about how we are defining ourselves, we define ourselves as intelligences, that we say, "I Am."

And then as we take on our roles, we define ourselves in these roles by saying, "I Am, in relation to..." some other things.

So the first one is I am a woman. And that means I'm defining myself in relation to gender. And gender, and all the things that make up gender, it has attributes, it has responsibilities, it has stewardships, it even has bodily processes. And all of those make up a Woman. So now my intelligence is also being defined as a woman in relation to gender.

When you are a woman, I believe that you have certain roles and responsibilities that have to do with binding, connecting, bridging, gluing. Something about those words, we are in a reflection of the Divine Feminine, and I wish that we knew more about that, and maybe someday we will. But I know from my own experience, being allied, or in a mirror of the Divine Feminine, the Eternal Feminine, part of those things that I mentioned, those are the things I'm responsible for.

Now just as a complete side-note, the Romans had the goddess Hestia or Vesta. She's a very interesting goddess. She's a virgin goddess. She doesn't have family, but she is in charge of all family relationships. And her symbol is the fire on the hearth and it symbolizes life and she is guarding that life. And she's also the patron goddess of civilization. She's the mother of Rome. And so her role is to connect all family relationships into a family unity and a local unity and a community and a civilization. So her work is all about weaving things together. And I think that that's a nice symbolic representation of the role of women.

In our scriptures, although we often talk about this scripture in terms of the temple (and some people think it's about the building of the temple, but I don't), this is Doctrine and Covenants 88 verse 119. And it's familiar. It says: "Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house..." I don't think it's talking about a physical house or even the temple. I think it's talking about a generation of life. It's talking about a house in the same way that the Lord

promised Jeroboam or David a house. It says: "...establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order..." It's a house of God. And that's what I think women have stewardship, to establish that house. They have a particular, gender-based role to establish that house. And men have a corresponding gender-based role to establish that house or that generation of life.

The next role I want to talk about is a daughter. This means who I am in relation to deity. I have Divine Parents and so that means that I belong to belong to their household of God and I have rights and privileges and blessings that are associated with being their child. And one of those rights and blessings is that nothing can separate me from my communication with them. There is no intermediary. I have the right, as their daughter, to communicate with them through prayer and revelation and the Holy Ghost. They don't put anybody in-between. And so it means that they are teaching me and I can seek and they promise that I will find. I can ask and they promise "You will receive". I am a daughter and I am hungry for knowledge and wisdom and information and progression. That is why I am here on the earth, because I am hungry for those kinds of things.

The next role that I would talk about is to be a sister. This is who I am in relationship to Jesus Christ. I am now under covenant to Christ, that I will choose him, that I will try to be like him, that I will do his works, that I will be filled with his Spirit. It means I am a Christian, it means I am a member of the church, I am a sister in the gospel, and I have made covenants that I will sacrifice and consecrate and serve and lead and it means that I am a disciple. So being a sister is who I am in relationship to Jesus Christ, the Savior.

I also have the opportunity in this life to be a wife. And this is who I am in relation to this chosen equal half. I am going to use this word, I just made it up. But it is helpful to me because we don't have a word for this. I call the opportunity to be bound together in a marriage relationship and sealed under the everlasting covenant, I am going to call that a divine pair. Because right now I am integrating my intelligence and my spirit body and my mortal body and I am pretty much

fully integrated and I am one. In this life we have the chance and the opportunity to take that unity and integrate it into this divine pair. We are not perfectly similar, but we are going to use our parallel attributes and we are going to become one.

I do not think “sealing” is an idly chosen word. And it is asking us to become unified in the same way that we are unified in this way. And so it takes probably a lifetime and beyond to create this unified, divine pair. But it is a transition from self-interest, and worried about me, to worrying about the unit. And basically we are saying in our sealed, divine unit – “I trust you and I have your best interests at heart, and I will be your advocate, I will look out for you and I will look for your greatest good.” And probably everybody in this room thinks that that is a very long and a probably interesting journey. But when you are sealed by authority, that divine pair has not only the ability but the authorized right to be creators. And so they are authorized to bring and nurture life. And that’s an incredibly powerful position. It’s a divine position that we’re here in on the earth.

And it leads to the last role I want to talk about today, which is to be a mother. And this is who I am in relation to my creation or my progeny. As a creator, Eve was so desirous to be a mother that she sacrificed Eden for it. And she did that willingly and knowingly. Adam called his wife’s name “Eve” and you know what it means. It means she was the mother of all living. But I find it so interesting she had no children when he called her that. But she was given a title, a divine title, that means there is heritage in this. And so whether you have children in this life or not, when you have your endowment and you are given the name, you are an inheritor of that. And it means that you have the title to be a mother. And so for somebody like me in the gospel, fifty years old, single, no children, and all that I’ve gone through emotionally to get to this point in my life, the gospel gives me the inherent title to be a mother. And it is mine through my covenants. And whether I actually attain that in this brief span on the earth, or afterward, it is my promise in the kingdom. And to me that is so incredibly powerful. It’s powerful to me on a personal level. And I can’t get that anywhere else.

Now there are corresponding roles for men to be a man, to be a son, to be a brother, to be a husband, to be a father. Those are all largely parallel roles. But for women and for men, these roles that I've been talking about, and how they expand our identity and our individuality, how they do that is so lasting. It lasts beyond the grave. It lasts past this mortal life and it is everything I want to take with me.

So I am just going to summarize because I don't have a slide for you to look at.

- I am a unique structure – I am one of a kind – I also have the ability and the responsibility to heal and bind and create a generation of order.
- I have been given the role and the right (which nothing can separate me from) to communicate with my Heavenly Parents.
- I have the chance to bind myself to Jesus Christ who is the life force at the gate and because of Him I can repent, and I can change, I can improve, and He will bind my most important acts to last beyond this life.
- I select and I begin the process of integration with another unique crystal structure.
- And together we gain the right and the ability to create life. And then we nurture and school those children in the echo of our Divine Parents.

So this doctrine is unique on the earth. And it's part of the restoration and it is part of the truth and think if we are just talking specifically about women, we could talk about men too, think what it means if you understand this and believe it. It makes everything different. And if I did not have this restored knowledge in my life, I would be so poor.

There are a lot of doctrines in the church that have to do with how I will and won't use my body. I think that has to do with, it is part of the purpose of mortality. We have gained a body, and we are using it. We are practicing the right ways and the wrong ways to utilize it. And there is a lot of distortion and disinformation about bodies also. I think about it in terms of a war or a campaign that is being waged and there are two fronts on that campaign. The first front says: I am free to do whatever I want with my body. And if it's pornography, if it's promiscuity, if it's

an unwanted pregnancy, if it's abortion, if it's addiction, I am free to choose, which is true, and I am free to use my body. And when I use my body in this way, it is freedom. So that is the first.

There is also a very large section, and maybe I am more exposed to it because of my work, but I think about all of the people in the world who either because of politics or because of poverty, they don't have full control over their own body. So human trafficking, prostitution, abuse, malnutrition, ethnic and religious cleansing, war crimes, all of those things restrict what people are able to do with their bodies and with their agency. Both of these approaches, these campaigns, disproportionately affect women in extremely negative ways.

Our doctrine is combating both of those views, which are harmful and which are negative. And if you take away the restored truth and all of the echoes that exist in different places in the world, the world doesn't have very much else to offer that is going to be useful or helpful or empowering or healthy to a woman. Mostly they try to devalue those roles and say that other things are important. But everything that they bring up, doesn't last past this life. So I have got to tell you, that does not have very much staying power for me.

I find it a little bit ironic that the world is trying to instruct the "poor LDS women," who are so oppressed, and in the backwater, and if they could only come out into "enlightenment"... Because I just don't see where that enlightenment is.

I recently spoke at the United Nations and it was interesting because we are faith-based, I represented a faith-based organization. Because we are conservative morally, a lot of people thought that our doctrine about women and men was conservative. Far from being restrictive and conservative, and we sometimes get labeled that way, my contention is that the Church's doctrine about the roles of women in the family, and the church, and the community, and the nation, and the temple and how men and women relate to each other and interplay and support each other and work together is the most moderate, and powerful, and enlightening and energizing doctrines that I know about. And if people truly understood it, it would blow their

mind. And even being in this church all my life, I'm just scratching the surface of what this doctrine means for me.

There is one thing I'm going to personally reject, and that is the mistake of labeling promiscuity as somehow "freedom." That that is a freedom. Fourth Nephi has a little scripture and it is right after what happens to the people there after Jesus Christ has visited the Americas and then ascended back into heaven. So this is Fourth Nephi 1:16. And it says:

And there were no envyings, no strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.

And as I studied that scripture, I started asking myself, what would it be like if there were no whoredoms? What would that society be like? So here's my list:

- Teenage couples don't get pregnant and have to get married to the wrong person.
- Lives don't get warped and stalled by sexual abuse.
- There is no fear of rape or violence.
- There is great security on the streets, there's no serial killers, there's no kidnappings.
- There is no market for prostitutes.
- There is no sex trade or there is no sexual slavery.
- Spouses don't have affairs or commit adultery.
- Marriages stay intact and children aren't raised in the insecurity and divided loyalty of divorce.
- Cities don't have seedy, creepy neighborhoods that are filled with adult theaters and deviant bookstores.
- There is no appetite for pornography – it doesn't degrade the people who make it or who watch it. It doesn't warp the sexual development of young people and rot the relationship between a husband and a wife.

- There are no children being raised by a generation of women and painfully wondering where their fathers are.
- All of the energy and the money that goes into all of those activities above the above, is available for something else.

How is that not more free and not more desirable for women, for men, for children, how is that not?

The Book of Mormon gives this very powerful example that we hardly ever talk about, about people who actually, in that time period, fought to eradicate a culture of vice that hurt women. And it makes their position in society precarious and vulnerable. And they succeeded! They got rid of it. They lived in a time where there were no whoredoms. And there are actually three examples that I can think of. You have got this example in Fourth Nephi. You have got the widows of the stripling warriors, those widows, those mothers who raised them, and then you have got Enoch and his city. And all three of those examples are our spiritual heritage, [and they] figured out how to do that. And it exists in our scriptural tradition and we are trying to do it ourselves.

Now we live in a world that says “It is not possible. You cannot expect those kinds of things from people. People will not react in those ways. This is just natural, who we are. We can’t make those expectations.” And yet our God has said, “I expect these things.”

President David O. McKay has a quote and he’s talking about the effect on women when the men in their lives live with discipline and faith. So I will just read it. He says:

Who can measure... such a covenant? How far reaching! How comprehensive! It excludes from man’s life profanity, vulgarity, idleness, enmity, jealousy, drunkenness, dishonesty, hatred, selfishness, and every form of vice. It obligates him to sobriety, to industry, to kindness, to the performance of every duty in the church and the state. He

binds himself to respect his fellowmen, to honor the Priesthood, to pay his tithes and offerings and to consecrate his life in the service of humanity.

How does that not bless everybody in civilization?

I am going to tell you a story, and it actually happened to Lillian DeLong, a friend of mine. She served on a Relief Society board years ago. And she was assigned to go to Ghana. And she had her husband with her. And they were in a very rural part of Ghana. So, they did their training. She was there to do Relief Society Training. And it is a very simple structure and they were in different rooms, and her husband was in Priesthood and she was in Relief Society and they did their training. After it was over, a woman came up to her, in her beautiful Ghanaian church dress, and she shook her hand and she kept saying “This is a woman’s church.” She’s just crying and tears are just streaming down her face. She kept saying, “This is a woman’s church.” Lillian didn’t really know what she was talking about. And she’s smiling and saying, “Yeah.” But the woman just kept pumping her hand and saying over and over again, “This is a woman’s church.” And finally Lillian said, “What do you mean, ‘This is a woman’s church?’” And she said, “We have just been in the marvelous Relief Society that teaches us not only spiritual things but temporal things about how to make our lives and our children and our families better. And at the same time your husband is in the Priesthood room and he is teaching our husbands that the culture of the church does not allow for them to beat their wives and their children.”

And she said, “In this church, my husband and I get to go to the temple and we are going to seal our children to us. And I have seven of my eleven kids that are dead. And I want my children with me and this is a woman’s church, because it protects me and gives me all of those things.” I never forgot this story that Lillian told me. And although it maybe is a poor title for this talk, it is why I titled this talk that, because our doctrine gives us those things.

Now, I’m going to talk about the practice. I’m going to talk about some of the things that we do to practice our doctrine. But before I do that, I just want to reiterate why this doctrine is so

empowering. One of the reasons is that there is no double standard for men and for women. No kind of winking about the morality and what is expected. It expects self-discipline and empathetic respect for others, and it shouldn't tolerate pornography, or adultery, or abuse, or neglect, or oppression or inequality.

I also think that participating in the church—and in my work we talk a lot about development: How do we help poor, vulnerable societies? How do they develop? Well, I think the best grassroots development on the planet is the Church. Because you cannot be a member of this Church very long without learning leadership, public speaking, decision making, persuasive discussion, budgeting, nutrition, influence, watch-care, going into somebody's house, literacy, research, resource development, gardening, food preservation, immunizations, it just goes on and on. All of those things come to us from being a member of the Church. So I think it is one of the greatest development programs, ever. And I had somebody in the Peace Corps tell me, "You guys are the Mormon Peace Corps. You are doing it in 30,000 communities in 170 countries." And we are.

And I also love about our doctrine, that rather than a single priest or a nun, as the highest form of worship, our sealed divine pair is the highest expression of holy covenants made with God. And I love that. I love everything that that means.

Ok, now I am going to go to practice.

I have to be candid that there are lots of people who would not agree that this is a church for women. And I think that the reason they feel that way is because of a disconnect that comes between our doctrine and sometimes the way that we practice our doctrine. And there has been a lot of discussion and a lot of disagreement and people have had painful experiences. There is just stuff that is plain wrong. And there are consequences, too. It would be absurd for me to stand up here and say that our political and our traditional and our cultural practices always live up to our doctrine. I'm not even sure that we fully grasp our doctrine. And to be honest, in my opinion, we can improve in many, many ways. We should and I think we will.

One of the things I want to talk about, and I was just discussing it before the session, is that we need new language. As I want to talk about these kinds of things, I find that I don't have the vocabulary. There are no terms to talk about the things I want to talk about. I had a friend. She was an elderly woman. She was from Estonia. She was translating the Book of Mormon into the Estonian language, even while it was still behind the Iron Curtain. And she had dictionaries, and she had grown up under Communist rule and she was struggling with how to talk about certain terms in there because they had been stripped out of the Estonian language by the Communists. They had taken those words and removed them from practice and speech and from books and there were no terms anymore to talk about priesthood, for example. The words didn't exist for that and she really struggled with "how do I translate the Book of Mormon without these concepts?" And if you don't have language, you don't have an understanding of the roles.

I think a really good example of this is: we don't know what to call a mission president's wife. And we don't know how to describe the role that she plays. We know in our gut that there is a role, and that it is indispensable and that nobody else is filling it if she isn't there, but we don't even know what to call that. Now, we do, interestingly, know what to call a matron. A temple matron has a name for what it is that she does. And it has a role description, and it's different from what the temple presidency does. And everybody understands that. In that one instance, we found the corresponding parallel. But so much of our language is missing because we don't know what to call things. Now, nobody write this down, and please don't put it online and I hope no reporter is here to write this down. But I'm going to tell you in a ridiculous way that without the ability to talk about the female contribution to priesthood, and we're just starting to talk about it as a faith community, in my brain, because there is no word for that, I call it mriesthood. I call it that because I'm trying to talk about patriarchy and matriarchy and how they both fit into that. Now, see, I'm embarrassed that I've even gone there. But Valerie Hudson, who is a FAIR contributor, two weeks ago she talked about this. She said, for example:

...Over the last several years, we have come to understand that "the priesthood is the eternal power and authority of our Heavenly Father," suggesting that there is another

eternal power and authority on the earth, that of our Heavenly Mother, wielded by Her daughters. We are a faith community of priests and priestesses, and then when united in the new and everlasting covenant of marriage, men and women together hold the fullness of the Priesthood, in capital "P."

So I'm just searching in my own lexicon for a way that would talk about that idea that she is saying. What are my contributions to the divine sealed pair under the umbrella of the priesthood? What is it that matriarchy contributes to that, along with patriarchy? And we need to find the language for that. And some of it will be done by study, and by inventiveness, although I probably won't contribute to that. And some of it will be done by revelation, as we learn to understand that better. We are already getting some through revelation. The apostles are trying to give us new language. In just the last year, Elder M. Russell Ballard said that "when endowed, both men and women are given 'power in the Priesthood.'"

Elder Oaks said, "Women may possess Priesthood authority." We have never put those words in a sentence together before, I don't think, and really felt it was right. Elder Perry keeps talking about the "co-presidency" of men and woman. And Elder Faust said that "Every father is to his family a patriarch and every mother a matriarch as co-equals in their distinctive parental roles." They are out seeking revelation and helping us try to define that language.

I think in our practice we also need more imagination. This is not a very powerful example, but I think that young women may be in danger of learning passive helplessness on their road to adult membership and the temple. Young men are setting up chairs and gathering palm fronds and shoveling walks, and home teaching. And I don't know that we've been as imaginative as we ought to be. To think about what are the parallel paths that young women walk so that they are prepared for their adult roles. I also think we need better and more visible role models of men and women working together with their strong strengths that they each bring. I think we need to be more visible about that, not only in our congregations and in our families, but to the world. I think we are so interesting with this moderate doctrine of this way that men and women bring

complimentary powers towards solving a solution. And both halves are needed. We ought to be more articulate and more visible about that.

And I guess I will say, there are lots and lots of things that I think we could do to improve our practice and understanding of our doctrine. But I also want to give a plea, can we please keep the big picture in mind?

I am the director of LDS Charities, which is the humanitarian arm of the church. And yesterday, while I should have been preparing for this talk, it was a really interesting day. The first thing was, I was in a panel. We weren't presenting, but we were in a discussion about the social costs of pornography, which is why I've been referring to it today. And we were talking about how early use of pornography creates an earlier onset of sexual activity. People are younger, in studies. They are four times more likely to hire a prostitute. They are way more likely to commit adultery. They are more likely to lose their jobs. They are more likely to get divorced. They are more likely to contract disease. There are all of these social costs that are involved with pornography, and I was in this panel, we were talking about this. Big, big difficult, thorny issues. In the middle of that, I got a phone call because the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria is marching and going through cities and they are purging out Christians. And so, you have got 800,000 Christians that have fled these cities and they are up in Northern Iraq where the Kurds live. And they are showing up. And as they leave the cities they are from, their houses are confiscated. There is a big Arabic word on their house that says this now belongs to ISIS. And as they walk out of town, their belongings are searched and everything of value is taken from them. Their money, their clothing, their cellphones, their passports, all their identity papers, their wedding rings. And then they are kicked out of town and they are told, "If you come back, you will be executed."

Now think about if this was happening to us. You have got men and women. You have 15 to 20 people crammed into a tiny little vehicle, and all their luggage is strapped on top. It is everything they have in the world. And they are fleeing into the Kurdish region or they are walking on the

road carrying suitcases. And when they get there, where do they go? Well, they show up in the church. There are 5,000 people in the vicar of Baghdad's Anglican Church. Think about your stake conference and then quadruple it, and all those people are there and they don't have anything to eat that night. And the vicar is saying, "What do I do?"

Well, we have one missionary couple up in Kurdistan. A very intrepid couple from Salt Lake, Walt and Peggy Plum, and they are calling me on the phone to say, "What do we do?" Now I'm not trying to be funny and I'm not trying to be aggrandizing about my job, but these are the issues that are going on.

Also yesterday, that house that you have been seeing, the victim of the mudslide, that's the street above me. This is my ward. And so that house that is folded apart, and destroyed, that is the paid-for home of the ____ family from Peru. And they had 15 minutes warning, and they got out in their pajamas. So both their cars are in the garage, everything they own is in the house.

There are so many things that we need to worry about and I sometimes think the stuff that we are concerned about on the Wasatch Front, we are kind of losing the big picture. And the things that are of concern in the international church, and in the world at large, are not necessarily the things that we spend a lot of our time worrying about. So, I ask myself all of the time: "Where should I be spending my energy and my intellectual curiosity and what should I be worrying about?" And it's not very political to say this but sometimes I think we have the luxury to worry about things that are less significant.

I say that because I recognize the pain of when we don't live up to our doctrine. But I also think that, is it really about wearing pants? Is it really about how much we contribute to the scouting program? I don't want to keep giving those examples, but what is it I really want to say with my energy and my life? And if it has to do with the choice between some of these things or do I help the (family whose house was destroyed by a mudslide) figure out what are they going to do tomorrow, or do I provide food for fellow Christians who have just fled an incomparable

experience? What am I going to do? And I think we can take maybe the higher road and the big picture in some of these things.

I'm going to quote Sister Oscarson. She's the General Young Women's President. She says:

One thing to remember is that faith is a choice. We choose where we are going to go. We don't have all the answers for why things are the way they are or things in church history. But we can choose whether or not we are going to stick with what we have already felt. There are not answers to everything but we choose whether we will be true to what we have felt from the Holy Ghost. Let's keep working to make things better, but let's keep our faith in the meantime.

There's no question that our practices are going to continue to change in the Church. And we are going to learn to apply our doctrine in better and more perfect ways. And I hope that the next generation is even more fair and more equal in its practice of the gospel. But I also believe that the large foundational stones are in place. And I also believe that opposition strengthens us, too.

I was in the Huntington Gardens in California just a little while ago, and they have an indoor exhibit where it is a tropical rain forest. And they have these trees and these ponds and fish. And I noticed on the side of the building there are these gigantic fans and they are blowing air through that building. And there is a little sign that says, "Tropical environments rely on a steady trade wind." And they develop in certain ways because of that. And one of the ways that they develop as trees is they need to be resilient to hurricanes. And so the trade winds constantly blowing on them make them sway and move around back and forth all of the time. And it actually changes the cellular structure of the bark and the tree. And then they are able and stronger to withstand hurricanes that come across those islands. And I think that that's true of us. It's one of the great beauties of FAIR. Not all of us are going to agree with each other, and this is a beautiful forum for us to talk about things and express our opinions and be respectful, but also be different. And that wind makes us stronger for the hurricanes that are going to come along in our lives. And we

need to help the young generation and the people that we love and care about be able to learn how to sway in the wind a little bit and not be so rigid. Because it will help us with the things that are coming.

Briefly I'm just going to talk about two little vignettes from pioneer history. And the first one is describing when Brigham Young got here in the valley. This is Wilford Woodruff writing. He says:

No plow had even broken its soil. Brigham knew nothing of its fertility, nothing of the seasons, the weather, the frost, the severity of the winters, the possibility of insect plagues. Jim Bridger and Miles Goodyear had nothing good to say about the place. And Sam Brannan had pleaded with him to go on to California. He listened to none of them. He led his people to this hot, and what must have appeared to be a very forlorn, place. When he arrived, he looked across this broad expanse of salt sea in the west and said, "This is the right place."

Sorry, it wasn't Wilford Woodruff, it was Gordon B. Hinckley.

Here's Wilford Woodruff. He's describing what it was like when they stopped in the canyon. He said:

When we came out of the canyon into full view of the valley, I turned the side of my carriage around, open to the west, and President Young arose from his bed and took a survey of the country. While gazing on the scene before us, he was enrapt in vision for several minutes. He had seen the valley before in vision, and upon this occasion he saw the future glory of Zion and of Israel, as they would be, planted in the valleys of these mountains. When the vision had passed, he said: "It is enough. This is the right place. Drive on."

I put this in here because this is how I feel. The right place doesn't mean there is not going to be blinding salt flats and black crickets and all kinds of naysayers and killing frosts and all of those things. But it is still the right place. And I also think we ought to be probably driving on. Rolling up our sleeves and doing the thing that our doctrine allows us to do which is to say: Everybody is valuable. Everybody has unique individual gifts. The Lord's plan allows for everybody to use their gifts. I can be respectful. I have responsibility to do it and I'm going to roll up my sleeves and go to work.

There is that famous quote by Joseph Smith. I'm going to paraphrase it. The men have given a great testimony and then he stands up and he says: "Brethren, I have been energized by the testimonies that I've heard. But you no more understand the destiny of this Church than a little baby upon its mother's lap."

And I think that that's true about us too. But isn't it exciting to live in a time when we are trying to understand and live our doctrine? And interpret it and ask the questions? Of course the Lord could just give it to us. But I work in welfare, and welfare says you have got to be self-reliant. You have to do the work yourself or you don't value it, you are not ready for it. The Lord is waiting for us to interact with each other and with our doctrine and find out new things. And when we are ready for it, He will give it to us.

I think at the core of some of the recent press is this question, should we seeking for more revelation? Should we be asking questions? I'm going to quote Sister Linda Burton, who is the General Relief Society President. She says:

What a healthy discussion to have about the priesthood. What is cultural and what is doctrine? It is enlivening and wonderful. It helps us define: what is authority, what are the keys? But let's go to the right sources for answers. Why would we believe the internet and not the prophets? We can figure out how to ask the questions in a way that facilitates cooperation and brings honest concerns to the table. If you aren't in a leadership

position, bring questions to your leaders in an honest and humble way. See what we can figure out together. Offer solutions. What would you do if you were the leader? But be patient and humble.

Elder Holland says:

Who is it that whispers so subtly in our ear that a gift given to another somehow diminishes the blessings we have received? Who makes us feel that if God is smiling on another, then He surely must somehow be frowning on us? You and I both know who does this—it is the father of all lies. It is Lucifer, our common enemy, whose cry down through the corridors of time is always and to everyone, “Give me thine honor.” But God does not work this way. The father ...does not tantalize his children. He does not mercilessly measure them against their neighbors. He doesn’t even compare them with each other. His gestures of compassion toward one do not require a withdrawal or denial of love for the other. ...Toward both of his children he extends charity.

I revel in that reality that there is not a finite amount of honor or love or trust or anything. That God is abundance. That there is no hurry or scratching or sitting quick before someone else gets there. The Lord has a space and a role for every single one of us.

Let me give a quick example from my own work. I have a chance often to interact within the church hierarchy with councils. And I belong to a council, because I am the director of LDS Charities. I have a board of directors. And that board of directors is the three bishops in the presiding bishopric and the general Relief Society presidency. Those three and three make up the board of LDS Charities. And I was recently in a council meeting and I was the only one who felt this way. There was an issue we were talking about and I was the only one. And it is such a mark of their understanding of how councils work and their leadership and their openness to dissent, if you want to call it that, that they didn’t shut me down. They asked a lot of questions. They asked

me to describe again what it was I was feeling and then they didn't make a decision. They put off the decision and said, let's keep talking about this.

I am so empowered and energized by that kind of an approach. That's a council approach. And we are just barely beginning to understand how a council actually operates. It isn't that somebody is in charge and a bunch of people are just rubber stamping that. We have the opportunity in a family council, in a neighborhood council, in the ward and branch council, in the highest councils of the church, to learn the government of God. And boy, that government has to do with unanimity and unity and not jangling and advocating and getting our piece in there, but waiting until everyone feels good about the solution. I don't think we understand how to do that. I know that I don't. But I see some echoes of it and I have been the recipient of it a couple of times and I have been really grateful for that.

Joseph Smith, before he died in Nauvoo, took time to speak to the Relief Society and he took time to speak to the School of the Prophets. And he basically told them the same thing. He quotes 1 Corinthians and he says, "And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." And then he writes in 1839 from Liberty Jail what is now Section 121, he said the rights and powers of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven and can't be "controlled" or "handled" but must be used instead by persuasion, long suffering, gentleness, meekness, and love unfeigned. And he told this exact same thing to the Relief Society when it was founded. He said, "Not war, not jangle, not contradiction but meekness, love, purity – these are the things that should magnify us."

Now if Joseph had only told that to the women, that no jangle, no contradiction, try to be meek and loving – that would be a recipe for disaster. But he didn't. He said the same thing to what he was calling "those great big elders." Because of that, he is now setting up the foundation path for matriarchy and patriarchy to lead to a certain thing. And he's giving us the clue. It's not going to be done by competition, or advocacy, or wrangling. It's got to be done the way the priesthood is, through unity, through understanding, through meekness, through patience.

I guess I'll close by saying this. I believe there is a great hunger in the world. I have seen it when I travel. I have seen it when women observe the church and they see the values that are there. And they want purpose for their energies. They want to meet men who want to be faithful, and they want to build families. I'll give you an example.

As a missionary, when I was in Finland, I was riding a train. I think I was alone. I was probably going to some new city. But I met a British dancer. She said she was a dancer. Now when I asked, "Is it ballet? Are you in concert halls?" she kind of said, "I'm a dancer." I don't know what this means, but this is our conversation. But she is British and I am American, and so I'm enjoying speaking English to somebody. So we are chatting. She says, "Now why are you here in Finland?" So I go through. And she said, "You don't smoke you don't drink?" We talked about this for a little while. And she says, "You don't believe in any kind of sex before marriage?" No I don't. And she starts off with disdain of how weird is this. But as we kept talking, in the middle of this she said, "I guess if you were dating men who felt the same way as you, maybe that would be possible." And then later on in the conversation she said, "Are there any men who felt the same way as you?" At the end when I got off the train, I left a very wistful woman. It was so interesting. She listened to all that and I could see her reviewing her own life and the options that were available to her and she felt wistful. And I believe in that very famous quote from President Kimball, that in the ways that we are different from the world, it will attract women because they will want those things. Why? Because it is good for them. It is healthy. It is everything that they want.

It is not always easy doctrine, and I think that maybe some people go back from following it. But the thing that I want to say is that what you are hungry for is here. It is in this church. The doctrines embody the greatest desires of my heart. The practices may not be perfect, but they are responsive, they are living, they are full of hope. And we believe He will yet reveal many great and important things that are pertaining to these kinds of things. I think faith is a choice. And the answer to the question, "Is this a women's church?", rather than give you a premise and a thesis and back it up by a bunch of quotes, I'm only going to rely on my own experience and I'm going

to tell you that my witness from being here and around the world is what I am going to say to my sisters. What you are hungry for, what you want most, is in this church. And my prayer is that we can learn to practice and live up to our doctrine. Because if we do, the angels cannot be restrained from being our companions. And I say that in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Scott Gordon: They are giving you a standing ovation.

I can't wait to call my dad! The first question that I got is (speaking in Finnish) someone is asking me if I still remember Finnish. So I'll say (speaking in Finnish) Sort of, imperfectly.

Question: Are your remarks written? Are they recorded? I know several women who would need to hear this.

Scott Gordon: Yes, they are recorded. Yes we will transcribe them.

There you go.

Scott Gordon: Yes, they have been recorded. Let me put in a plug, you can purchase the \$25 streaming and then watch it later, next week. Or you can wait until we get it transcribed, which does take longer for us. And then we will be putting it up on the website, but it may take a month or two, we don't know. So it depends.

The second question is, has the church sent any aid to the Christians in Iraq?

This is why I had to leave that meeting yesterday. The church authorized an emergency funding, \$100,000, to just buy oil, beans, rice, and bedding. I got a picture last night of a woman, she is probably seventy years old. And she is lying on the street on some kind of a foam pad with a pillow and she has her slippers, she has a tin cup, she has a bottle of water, and she has a flashlight. And she is not able to stand up. And she is just lying between a window, a wall, and the street where the traffic is going by. And I think that is the condition all over the city. So it's

not the amount of money. It's finding people who can deliver the aid. And so we will continue to do that. We authorized the \$100,000. We will continue to authorize that money as fast as they are able to distribute. And yesterday's money will go up to that vicar who has five thousand people in his church yard and is looking every day to say, "How do I feed these five thousand people?"

And we will continue to do that. We are also doing the same thing in Gaza. But it is very hard to spend money in the right kind of way that it actually helps the people with a good transparent partner. Thanks for the question about that.

Question: What makes you, for lack of a better word, okay with not being able to hold the priesthood?

Maybe I should have addressed this in the talk. I didn't. But I believe that anyone who is endowed holds certain aspects of the priesthood and the church is just on the verge of understanding what that means.

Question: Comment on why we don't hear the wives of the general authorities speak and tell us about their responsibilities and roles.

I don't know, but it would be great. We ought to have more of that.

Question: How can we moderate or improve our rhetoric in instructing our youth, especially regarding the way we teach chastity, modesty, and virtue to young women and to young men? For example, I can't read the writing. I think it means we pay more attention to young women's modesty than we do to young men's.

The church right now, I happen to know from some of the councils I sit in, is very interested in curriculum to address some of these things. Because obviously it has to be addressed. Maybe curriculum in the past isn't as developed as we wanted it to be. I think the youth curriculum sort of addresses this because it turns it over to youth and says "you lead this discussion. What do

you know? What do you want to talk about? What do you see?” And then it’s pretty tailored to what they need. And I think that is a really empowering development in the church. We ought to follow it as adults.

Question: What are your thoughts about allowing Young Women to be visiting teachers in the same way that Aaronic Priesthood holders are home teachers? Any discussion of that on the Relief Society General Board?

There wasn’t when I was on the General Relief Society Board with Sister Beck, but, and I don’t have any authority, whether we do this exact suggestion or find some other way, I think we need to improve the experiences that young women have so that they learn some of the same things that young men have. I don’t think that has to do with being ordained to the priesthood, but it does have to do with: What experiences do you have that deepen your testimony and show your depth of service and how do you get prepared to go to the temple? As I said in the talk, I think we can be more imaginative in that way.

This question. I worry about what seems to be a crumbling society in Africa. Yet it seems that the church is growing a lot there. My question is, is there hope for Africa?

Africa, in a lot of ways, in my mind is more hopeful than our own society. And it is because they are not as burdened with secularism. I recently got my hair cut in “The Jehovah is My Witness” hair salon in Kenya. But they have a much more developed ability to integrate their spirituality into everyday life. And when I’m there, I really feel the lack of that. I’m pigeon-holing my life and trying to figure out what I say and in what language to different audiences. And I think in lots of ways, Africa is more developed in those ways than we are. They have lots of social problems and the West is trying to pour in a lot of money, and largely that money has not done what we hoped it would do. The real hope for Africa in a church setting, is what the members of the church do. We can’t impose solutions that worked in Salt Lake 150 years ago. It’s not the right thing for Africa. But Africans know the answers to those things. And a second reason that I

have hope for Africa is they are incredibly family-oriented. Not just LDS people, but as a society. They worry about extended family. They take on the adoption of orphans. And there isn't a woman there, well I can't say this, but I witnessed African women bristle when somebody from the UN or somebody says "why did you have all these children? Wouldn't it have been better if you didn't have all these children?" They say no. These children are my heritage. And they get really resentful when people say that they should have limited their children with birth control.

Question: Finally a Latter-day Saint woman who represents me.

I wish I could ask all of these.

Question: Are you as excited about thousands of young women serving missions as I am?

Yes, ma'am. A mission was one of the greatest things that ever happened to me in my own personal life. I was a very shy person. In fact I could have never given this talk. And my mission helped me learn how to articulate in front of people and handle questions and talk about what's important to me. We can deepen people's understanding of doctrine, their ability to be articulate and to serve as leaders in the church. And missions do that. Absolutely, I think it's fantastic.

Thank you very much.