

How Do We Develop Disciples To Serve? Kassandra Unger

Developing disciples to serve is one of the Mission Initiatives identified by the Community of Christ as a way in which individual members and the Community of Christ collectively can live out Christ's mission as their own.¹ Two of the questions that are always before us is how do we collectively and individually develop disciples to serve and are we adequately equipping them for service? By undertaking a historical journey and examining the educational opinions, opportunities and resources as one avenue by which disciples can be developed to serve perhaps we might be able to see our current position and how we can better embody this initiative. Throughout this process, we will examine education in both a generic sense and specialized training for ministerial preparation, for the two are at times interconnected with the overarching goal of preparing all disciples for God's service.

Throughout the Community of Christ's (and the Reorganised Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS)) journey there have been numerous focuses on the education of its membership, especially priesthood. However, in the early reorganisation movement there existed contradictions in the value of education. There was even a time in which education was met with opposition.² Perhaps it arose out of our very humble beginnings or out of the tense interactions with many professional clergy³ but there was a strong belief amongst many members that possessing an education may prevent individuals from providing ministry by detracting from God's power.⁴ While these beliefs may have been held within the membership they were never supported by the presidential leadership.

Joseph Smith Jnr was an avid advocate for continued education, deriving great joy from his own lifelong learning and supporting the participation of others. He articulates this joy

1 Ministry and Priesthood, 'Serving Together to Fulfill Christ's Mission' (Herald Publishing House: Independence, 2013)

2 Richard P. Howard, *The Church Through the Years, Vol 2*. (Herald Publishing House: Independence, 1993) 159.

3 Alan Tyree, 'Love the Lord with All Thy Mind.' *The Saints' Herald* 123 (October 1976) 594.

4 Joseph Smith III, 'Education.' *The True Latter-Day Saints' Herald* 7 (May 15, 1865), 147.

clearly in a journal entry whilst teaching at the School for the Elders, “attended the school, and read and translated with my class as usual. My soul delights in reading the word of the Lord in the original, and I am determined to pursue the study of the languages until I shall become master of them, if I am permitted to live long enough. At any rate, so long as I am permitted to live I am determined to make this my objective.”⁵

The most significant document that supports Joseph Smith’s advocating for continued education is found in the revelation given in Section 85:21 b-e

“And I give unto you a commandment, that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom; teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that is expedient for you to understand; of things both in heaven, and in earth, and under the earth; things which have been; things which are; things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home; things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations; and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries, and of kingdoms, that ye may be prepared in all things when I shall send you again, to magnify the calling whereunto I have called you, and the mission with which I have commissioned you.”⁶

This was not just a call for priesthood to familiarise themselves with the teaching of the church or gospel, but that one should prepare themselves in all topics, to read all good books, so that they might be prepared when and however God so choose to use them. The early Saints responded to these words with the establishment of the School for the Elders, in which they taught grammar, theology, Greek, Hebrew, geography, mathematics, history and logic.⁷ This encouragement and fostering of learning and education continued throughout the Reorganisation under the guidance of Joseph Smith III.

When William H. Kelly was in need of guidance regarding his continued pursuit of education, he wrote to Joseph Smith III. Joseph encouraged Kelly to ignore the pressure from others to remain uneducated or ignorant in service to God but rather encouraging him towards

5 *History of the Reorganised Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, Volume 2 (Herald Publishing House: Independence,) 26.

6 Joseph Smith Jnr, “Section 85:21 b-e” *Doctrine and Covenants* (Independence: Herald Publishing House, 2007) 111.

7 Alan Tyree, 595.

education that would assist his future service. “I am persuaded that God respects a man more who tries to be up and doing, preparing himself for the useful in the great battle of life than he does the man who slothfully hoots at the acquirement of knowledge because the Spirit of God can accomplish so much for man.”⁸ He provided him with the assurance he needed to continue his education before he ended up dedicating many years of his life in service to the church.

This was just the start of Joseph Smith III’s encouragement and support for the development of education for enhancing ministry. He upheld that “beliefs needed to be based on both faith and knowledge,”⁹ for the two were interconnected. In *Latter-Day Saints’ Herald* articles in 1865 he recognises that it is not possible to provide service without the Spirit of God, irrespective of the level of education, however one “should become as learned and wise as it were possible for men to become.”¹⁰ This would enable them to “advance their usefulness as propagators of the gospel.”¹¹ Joseph recognised that knowledge is power, and that “power is desirable if used for a good and noble purpose.”¹²

While he recognised the fear towards education that some of the membership possessed he strongly advocated that ministers be developed through educational programs.¹³ This led to an April 1869 General Conference, and the following two subsequent conference, discussing the establishment of a school in which young men of the church could obtain a suitable education that would equip them to ‘go forth into the mission field.’¹⁴ During conference discussions, they discussed what this school would entail, as there was conflicting

8 Joseph Smith III to William H. Kelly, August 25, 1865. W. H. Kelly Papers, RLDS Archives, Independence, Missouri.

9 Mark A. Scherer, *The Journey of a People, The Era of Reorganization, 1844 to 1946*, (Community of Christ Seminary Press: Missouri, 2013) 422.

10 Joseph Smith III, 81.

11 Joseph Smith III, 81.

12 Joseph Smith III, ‘Education’ *The True Latter-Day Saints’ Herald* (May 15, 1865) 145.

13 Richard P. Howard. 162.

14 S. A. B, “Ideals of Education and the School of the Prophets” *The Saints’ Herald* (February 4, 1920) 98.

views. For example Jason W. Briggs was a strong advocate for a broad education without any sectarian. “He wanted a school that would prepare young men for the ministry rather than a school for the ministry.”¹⁵ The resulting motion proposed “the school of the prophets be organized with Joseph Smith as its president.”¹⁶ This did not come into fruition, as Joseph Smith was not prepared to undertake the duties that would be required. It again fell to the individual to pursue his own educational avenues. It would take almost another 30 years before the establishment of Graceland College, a place where “their children and the children of others can be educated without constant contact with sectarian bigotry, denominational dogma, and the blind partisan [sic] zeal which will ‘compass sea and land to make one proselyte’ to their creed-bound systems...”¹⁷ The first graduate of Graceland, and only member of his class, was Fredrick M. Smith.

Although both Joseph Smith Jnr and Joseph Smith III were encouraging of education and supported the development of education institutions it was really under the tenure of Fredrick M. Smith that huge leaps were established for the RLDS’s development of educational programs and resources for the development of disciples to serve.

There are few who can deny that education was of great significance to Fredrick M. Smith. He strongly “believed it was necessary for a person to accomplish all possible within their own powers before appealing for divine assistance.”¹⁸ Thus, while he shouldered many of the responsibility of leading the RLDS he still persevered with his own studies, to prepare himself for the task ahead. It was not just his own education that he was concerned with, but also equipping others for the ministerial tasks that they would face. In a speech given in 1912 to the First Presidency, Twelve and Seventy had advocated for further education. “I do not

15 Richard P. Howard, 163.

16 S. A. B, 98.

17 Richard P. Howard, 167.

18 Mark A. Scherer, 426.

believe we are justified in permitting ourselves to remain in ignorance.”¹⁹ He saw that there was an interconnection between the spiritual and the intellectual, and both needed to be developed. Yet, “I would not have you neglect spiritual things for the intellectual, for the church will demand a higher plain of spirituality and with this higher plain of spirituality will be a higher plain of intellectuality than we have ever occupied in the past. When this time comes I trust we shall be able to appreciate and enjoy the spiritual gifts more than we have. We will appreciate what God is doing for us. We will have a stronger and more intellectual body of men. It is up to us, and I trust we will make good.”²⁰

During the General Conference of 1914, there was a committee established that would create a program that would allow for the development of knowledge and skills in a home study or extension work capacity. The Graceland Extension Institute, under the direction of Fredrick M. Smith, developed courses that could be taught in different parts of the country. Over the course of the year, there were thirty-seven enrollees, mostly missionaries, almost all priesthood. However, reports of the activities of this education unit was short-lived indicating the institute was also of a similar nature.²¹ However, birthed out of this was the establishment of scholarship program, supporting young church workers to attend a year of intense study at Graceland.

Out of Fredrick Smith’s desire to develop and assist priesthood with their ministerial education, he chose to be heavily involved in the publishing of a monthly magazine (*The Unity, The One, The Priesthood Journal*) during 1917 to 1923. The production of this magazine was ceased for nearly a decade as a conscious effort was made with the *Herald* articles to ‘educate and inspire the priesthood.’²² However, it was re-established from 1934 to 1943 to educate priesthood.

19 The First Presidency, “Educational Program for Church Leadership” *The Saints Herald* 120, 6.

20 The First Presidency, 6.

21 Richard P. Howard. 172-173.

22 Richard P. Howard. 353.

It was around this time (1917-1923) that there was increasing concern for the education level, and thus its impact on ministerial capabilities, of the church. While they recognised that their collective college education exceeded the average for the United States there was still a necessity to better prepare the youth.²³ The educational methodologies were examined and the differing educational potential for each person was recognised. Identifying that education needed to be targeted to the needs, interest and capacity of the individual, encouraging each to achieve to their highest potential, so they might be able to serve humanity best.²⁴ This emphasis was enhanced by using the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30) to ensure each disciple did all that they could with what God had given them.²⁵

During the hiatus in *The Priesthood Journal*, there was an exciting development in the educational and ministerial preparation of members and leaders. For a two-week block, in the Spring of 1929, more than 400 students gathered to be part of Zion's Training School of Religious Education. There was a lot of enthusiasm in the program, as ten different classes were conducted and many reported of the usefulness and applicability of that which they had been taught. Many recognizing this as one of the first, and definitely the best, opportunities for members to engage in religious education.²⁶

In a speech given to the World Conference in 1942, Fredrick Smith indicated the need for members to obtain their own education (both college and ministerial) as part of their preparation for ministerial service. "Preparation before entering the priesthood should have demanded of these people such application of the foundations of ministerial work as will enable them to acquire the education which is necessary." This led to the development of an expansion of Graceland into a four year college, with a greater religious department, more

23 S.A.B, "The Church and Education" *The Saints Herald* 66 (September 3, 1919) 858-859.

24 Fredrick M. Smith, "The Educational Problem of the Church" *The Saints' Herald* 70 (July 11, 1923) 653.

25 S. A. B. "Ideals of Education and the School of the Prophets" 98.

26 "Zion's Training School of Religious Education" *The Saints' Herald* 76 (March 27, 1929) 355-356.

scholarships and the establishment of auxiliary schools, so that more people could access the education it had to offer.²⁷

With increased funding, following World War II, general church appointment became more common. These appointees were provided with one or two weeks worth of intensive orientation, however it quickly became clear that this was not sufficient in developing the education and skills required.²⁸

The major educational advancement the RLDS produced under the leadership of Israel Smith was the establishment of the School of the Restoration. The school was established in 1956 and was important in providing education and guidance to assist with kingdom building. What was most significant about the school was that it could be accessed in three formats: residence study, extension classes and home study (or correspondence) courses. These home study classes offered a unique opportunity for a total worldwide education program.²⁹ Even the extension classes were offered in locations where eight students and a suitable instructor could be obtained, allowing classroom study outside of Independence. There was even a branch established in Australia and New Zealand. The aim of the school was to “offer adult education in subjects which are not offered at other institutions,”³⁰ with the ability to work towards a certificate, diploma or Graduate diploma in religious theory and practice. The School of the Restoration was also catering for the more formal needs of the church, providing full-time appointee ministers two-week intensive classes every second year, with the intention of formulating a six month program for new appointees to fulfil the needs not acquired in the two week intensive. By 1962, the School of the Restoration had held its first

27 The First Presidency, 6. P.A.W, “The Next Sixty Years in Education” *The Saints’ Herald* 102 (September 19, 1955) 895.

28 Richard P. Howard, 357.

29 William D. Russell, “The School of the Restoration Is Growing” *The Saints’ Herald* 109, (May 15, 1962) 364.

30 William D. Russell, 365.

of four, six week summer educational sessions targeted at appointees covering the essentials of church administration, basic beliefs and ministerial work.³¹

In 1959, it became clear that the training provided to field minsters, especially those in foreign cultures, was not sufficient. Thus, Charles Neff put together some guidelines for the selection and preparation of those that would be ministering abroad. As part of these requirements, he proposed that appointees receive a “minimum of one year at the School of the Restoration and/or other institution of learning” and this should be, where possible extended to their wives.³²

The sixties and seventies brought with them reassessment of RLDS history, theology and vision and with that a need to educate or re-educate its membership, especially local leadership. Theologically the church was moving away from the ‘one true church’ and preaching chart theology, that had been foundational since the restoration, and moving towards embodying the body of Christ and mission outside of congregations. Numerous books were produced by RLDS theologians to assist the comprehension of this theological shift and the implications this would have on discipleship expression. For example, F. Henry Edwards’ *Fundamentals: Enduring Convictions of the Restoration* underwent numerous edits and reprinting between 1937 and 1960, providing a resource which people could study together to better understand the church’s faith and theology,³³ but this was just one of many. The Committee on the Church and Higher Education set out numerous objectives for the educational state of the church. Most significantly upholding education as a responsibility for self-development as part of one’s stewardship. “Encouragement by the church first takes the form of teaching that every person is a steward over the gifts of God to him and that he is expected to search for an increasing understanding of God’s world and his place in it and to

31 Richard P. Howard. 358.

32 Charles D. Neff. ‘Statement of Principle Mission Abroad’. Correspondence between Charles D. Neff and W. Wallace Smith, April 21, 1959. Archived Independence.

33 Richard P. Howard, 358.

sharpen his particular skills for the sake of the contribution he can make to that world.”³⁴ This concept of educational stewardship was reflected in Jean Gollnick letter to the Editor, in which he highlighted the need for the Saint to not only read good books (he was especially enjoying the Basic Beliefs Series) but to study them, and there were plenty of books produced to study.³⁵

As part of the search for church identity, mission and beliefs, in 1966 a ‘Statement on Objectives for the Church’ was produced identifying a need to “clarify the theology of the church and unify the membership in their faith.”³⁶ This was followed by a series of ‘Goal Conferences’ that were held throughout the apostolic fields and intensive seminars on various theological and historical topics.³⁷ At this same time, the Department of Religious Education started creating a new graded curriculum for the church that would align with these objectives and theological clarifications.

By the time the RLDS reached the 1970’s the Commission on Education had identified the theological framework of the church as being a “missional church” and needed to determine how the provided Christian education could assist the church in going in such a direction. They identified a need for two elements “education in the faith and education for the mission.”³⁸ This resulted in the production of more materials that challenged all to “learn, think and act in missional ways.”³⁹ More than fifty appointees had already undertaken a year of training at the School of the Restoration to ensure they were ready for the mission ahead.

As revelation was revealed upholding the connection between ‘seeking light and truth’ and achieving the mission of the church, “for have I not told you that my glory is intelligence

34 The First Presidency “Educational Objectives of the Church” *The Saints’ Herald* 111, (February 1, 1964) 81.

35 Jean Gollnick, ‘Educational Stewardship’ *The Saints’ Herald* 115, 388.

36 Joint Council of the First Presidency and the Council of Twelve, “Statement on Objectives for the Church,” 18.

37 Richard P. Howard, 364.

38 Richard P. Howard, 368-369.

39 Richard P. Howard, 370.

and by faith will be rewarded in this life and the life to come?"⁴⁰ (149:5) and one of the foundational purposes of the erection of a temple being "the teaching of my priesthood." (150:8)⁴¹ there was a resurgence on providing education for church leadership. A 1972 committee set to work, with the First Presidency, to "respond to the urgent need to provide the leadership of the church educational support as flexible as possible with minimal financial and personal time costs."⁴² The intention was to ensure all leaders had a bachelor degree education, with access to continued, or refresher, education and continued theological study. There was reassessment of the nature by which ministerial education is taught, recognising the variety that exists within individuals and the needs of congregations. While they recognised the essential need of all ministers for theological and pastoral skills, there was also a need for "more and better ministry of music in most congregations, better teachers, cook, counsellors, electricians, communications experts, journalists, ecologists, interior decorators, child care specialists, doctors and nurses."⁴³ Here the definition of ministry and who we minister to was again expanded beyond the congregation indicative of the theological shift from ministry for oneself and congregation to the wider community. It was recognised that the individual's stewardship over their mind had the potential to affect the direction of the church, as individual members reached out in many directions. For it was not enough to simply love God with all thy heart and soul but with 'all thy mind.' (Matthew 22:36).⁴⁴

The School of the Restoration was phased out and replaced by Temple School in 1974. It began offering classes to all congregational leaders, including church appointees and employees that would enable them to maintain their skills and proficiencies. Again, the home

40 W. Wallace Smith, "Section 149," *Doctrine and Covenants* (Independence: Herald Publishing House, 2007) 194.

41 W. Wallace Smith, "Section 150," *Doctrine and Covenants* (Independence: Herald Publishing House, 2007) 197.

42 The First Presidency "Education Program for Church Leadership" *The Saints' Herald* 120, 7.

43 Dr Deam H. Ferris "Education for Ministry, Priesthood and Other Leaders" *The Saints' Herald* 121 (April, 1974) 66.

44 Alan Tyree, 593.

study program offered the most significant growth as it allowed people to study at their own convenience.⁴⁵ After *The Priesthood Manual* was almost completely rewritten in 1982,⁴⁶ and Wallace B. Smith's revelation for a higher standard of service by priesthood (Section 156:7) in 1984, Temple School started producing Priesthood Guidelines to provide new and continuing priesthood members with clearer outlines of ministerial duties and expectations and well as foundational education to the RLDS. These were a very well received, with record numbers of Temple School enrolments⁴⁷.

With the coming millennium, there was concern for the educational state of the church. It was strongly recognised that great change would be resulting in the wider society in the lead up to 2000 and the question was if the church could keep pace with it, both within the church doors and extended communities. While recognising the impending significant changes to the work force, both in employees and nature, Dale Lick reaffirmed the importance of education and fulfilling ones stewardship obligations over their mind.⁴⁸ This was in line with the Educational Mission Statement and Educational Goals set forth by the Higher Education Advisory Board in 1990. This Statement and Goals looked at addressing five areas of education and redirecting people's attention to some of the new, and existing, resources that could enhance education and ministry. These five areas of awareness, accessibility, leadership, theology and church related institutions, emphasised the plethora of educational opportunities found within the Temple School resources, the Living Faith Series, Herald House scriptural and theological study texts, the Master of Arts in Religion and other classes offered through Graceland University.⁴⁹

45 Paul M. Edwards, "Temple School Growth Continues" *The Saints' Herald* 133 (March 1986) 94.

46 *The Priesthood Manual* (Herald Publishing House: Independence, 2004) 3.

47 Paul M. Edwards, 94.

48 Dale W. Lick "Change, Education, and the Church" *The Saints Herald* 137 (October 1990) 403.

49 Wayne Ham, "Our Educational Mission" *The Saints' Herald* 137 (October 1990) 403-404, 410.

Since 2000, there has still been an emphasis on education. In 2007, Steven Veazey challenged people of every age to engage in the educational and community development endeavours of the church so that they might be able to share Christ's peace. That they might be able to engage in new problem solving methods to deal with the plight of our societies. (Sect 163:4c.) He also challenged the complacency of priesthood in their calling, reminding them of the expectations that are upon them, "to continually magnify their calling through spiritual growth, study, exemplary generosity, ethical choices, and fully accountable ministry is always present. How can the Spirit fill vessels that are unwilling to expand their capacity to receive and give according to a full measure of God's grace and truth?"⁵⁰ Pivotal documents, such as the *Sharing in Community of Christ*⁵¹ and *Ministry and Priesthood*,⁵² have helped to ensure the membership has a common understanding of the identity, mission, message, beliefs and service of both the church and its membership. This has been coupled with the recent revision and released of priesthood training Temple School courses, including a specific course covering the ministry of the disciple. There have also been countless other resources produced by Herald House to provide educational opportunities and growth within the membership, to ensure a firm theological foundation from which disciples can serve.

What has been evident throughout this journey through the RLDS and Community of Christ history is the value and significance that has been placed on education, both a general education and ministerially specific. When we ask how we do collectively and individually develop disciples to serve and are we adequately equipping them for service? It is clear that this education has been foundational to providing the skills, basic beliefs and confidence to enable disciples to serve. While education may not be the only method, it has been a

50 Steven M. Veazey, "Section 163," *Doctrine and Covenants* (Independence: Herald Publishing House, 2007) 221.

51 *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 2nd Edition, (Independence: Herald Publishing House, 2010).

52 *Ministry and Priesthood*.

foundational method in our history. There is a recognition that for all members, not just priesthood, to efficiently serve God they should do all that they can in the form of study to enhance the giftedness bestowed by God. What is the significance of this for the current and future development of disciples to serve? It highlights the historical significance of preparing oneself and each other for the ministry to which God is calling us. Throughout the RLDS/Community of Christ journey many resources, institutes and committees have been established to help develop disciples to serve. While it is the Spirit behind ministry, this is only enhanced through preparation. However, the journey is not over, and ministry is still required, thus it is essential that individually and collectively we continue to pursue that which can help prepare us for where God is calling us to go.

As it was constantly presented in the revelation by past presidents, this is an active pursuit, a required part of discipleship. The challenge for those I interact with, my ministry and myself is to fully accept this challenge, to access the multitudes of available resources and prepare for how I can serve God. As to our current development of disciples adequately equipping them for service. The resource produced are numerous and varied to cater to the needs, interest and giftedness of the membership however, preparation can only go so far, there is a point in which we must put our faith and trust in God and be sure that God will path the way.

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