










RELIEF SOCIETY GENERAL PRESIDENTS

<p>1842–1844</p> <p>Emma Smith</p>  <p><i>Emma Smith</i></p> <p>"We are going to do something extraordinary. . . . We expect extraordinary occasions and pressing calls."</p> <p><small>Nauvoo Relief Society Minutes, Mar. 17, 1842, 12</small></p>	<p>1866–1887</p> <p>Eliza R. Snow</p>  <p><i>Eliza R. Snow</i></p> <p>"There is no sister so isolated, and her sphere so narrow but what she can do a great deal towards establishing the Kingdom of God upon the earth."</p> <p><small>Woman's Exponent, Sept. 15, 1873, 62</small></p>	<p>1888–1901</p> <p>Zina D. H. Young</p>  <p><i>Zina D. Young</i></p> <p>"May we as women of Zion, ever know and honor our true position."</p> <p><small>Woman's Exponent, Apr. 15, 1889, 173</small></p>	<p>1901–1910</p> <p>Bathsheba W. Smith</p>  <p><i>Bathsheba W. Smith</i></p> <p>"Cease not while life lasts to study diligently, for the knowledge which is of greatest worth."</p> <p><small>Woman's Exponent, Jan. 1906, 41</small></p>	<p>1910–1921</p> <p>Emmeline B. Wells</p>  <p><i>Emmeline B. Wells</i></p> <p>"I want the sisters to study the scriptures and become familiar with the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Let them be holy books unto you."</p> <p><small>Relief Society Magazine, Aug. 1919, 439</small></p>	<p>1921–1928</p> <p>Clarissa S. Williams</p>  <p><i>Clarissa S. Williams</i></p> <p>"We have been given such blessings as have never been given to women in any other age, and we should in every way endeavor to live up to them."</p> <p><small>Relief Society Magazine, Dec. 1921, 696</small></p>	<p>1928–1939</p> <p>Louise Y. Robison</p>  <p><i>Louise Y. Robison</i></p> <p>"Go where you're needed; do what you can."</p> <p><small>In Belle S. Spafford Oral History, LDS Church Archives, 40</small></p>
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<p>1940–1945</p> <p>Amy Brown Lyman</p>  <p><i>Amy Brown Lyman</i></p> <p>"Little did the original members of the organization realize, as they walked to and from their meetings in Nauvoo, how great their beloved Society would become."</p> <p><small>Relief Society Magazine, Mar. 1944, 139</small></p>	<p>1945–1974</p> <p>Belle S. Spafford</p>  <p><i>Belle S. Spafford</i></p> <p>"There is within this society a great life-giving element . . . binding together women of all nationalities into a great sisterhood, unifying them in purpose and impelling them on to worthy accomplishment."</p> <p><small>Relief Society Magazine, Mar. 1949, 148</small></p>	<p>1974–1984</p> <p>Barbara B. Smith</p>  <p><i>Barbara B. Smith</i></p> <p>"Women can begin in their own spheres—with their little children at home, among adult friends, in their extended families, and in their professions. But the important thing is to reach out in love to serve someone every day."</p> <p><small>Ensign, May 1984, 17</small></p>	<p>1984–1990</p> <p>Barbara W. Winder</p>  <p><i>Barbara W. Winder</i></p> <p>"And so it is that I feel for the sisters of the Church this love, and sense the worth of each individual. I want so, and desire so, that we be unified, one together with the priesthood, serving and building the kingdom of God here today and spreading the joy of the gospel to those who are so in need of it."</p> <p><small>Ensign, May 1984, 59</small></p>	<p>1990–1997</p> <p>Elaine L. Jack</p>  <p><i>Elaine L. Jack</i></p> <p>"I look forward with a perfect brightness of hope to the offerings of Relief Society sisters in the new century that is before us. Our joy in the gospel of Jesus Christ and our place in His plan will draw people to us and change lives. We will lift and inspire a world so desperately in need of goodness."</p> <p><small>Ensign, May 1997, 75</small></p>	<p>1997–2002</p> <p>Mary Ellen W. Smoot</p>  <p><i>Mary Ellen W. Smoot</i></p> <p>"When we are truly converted, our focus shifts from self to others. We can find inner strength through service. Nothing would please the adversary more than for us to be distracted by selfish concerns and appetites. But we know better. Service will help us to stay on course."</p> <p><small>Ensign, May 2002, 13</small></p>	<p>2002–</p> <p>Bonnie D. Parkin</p>  <p><i>Bonnie D. Parkin</i></p> <p>"If I could have one thing happen for every woman in this Church, it would be that they would feel the love of the Lord in their lives daily as they keep their covenants, exercise charity, and strengthen families."</p>
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RELIEF SOCIETY GENERAL PRESIDENTS

The following are short biographical sketches of the Relief Society general presidents.

Emma Smith became the first president of the Relief Society when it was organized in Nauvoo, Illinois, on 17 March 1842. Under her leadership the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo raised funds for the Nauvoo Temple, sewed clothes for the temple workmen, petitioned Governor Thomas Carlin to protect Joseph Smith, nursed the sick, cared for the poor, and gave relief where it was needed. During the early years of the Church, Emma suffered many trials and persecutions with the Saints. A revelation given to Emma in 1830 through the Prophet Joseph Smith gave her instructions and promised great blessings, even “a crown of righteousness” (D&C 25:15), if she obeyed the commandments. She was married to Joseph Smith, and they had eight children, including adopted twins.

Eliza R. Snow served as the Nauvoo Relief Society’s first secretary and later carried the organization’s Book of Records to the Salt Lake Valley. She was a gifted writer and poet who wrote many Church hymns and supported education. She was also vigorously involved in temple work. In 1866 President Brigham Young called her to help bishops organize a Relief Society (and later a Primary and an organization for young women) in every ward and branch of the Church. Sister Snow’s presidency emphasized spirituality and self-sufficiency. The Relief Society sent women to medical school, trained nurses, opened the Deseret Hospital, operated cooperative stores, promoted silk manufacture, saved wheat, built granaries, and began publishing the *Woman’s Exponent*. By 1888 the Relief Society had more than 22,000 members in 400 wards and branches. Sister Snow was sealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith in Nauvoo and later married Brigham Young.

Zina D. H. Young, a midwife and an educator, worked closely with Eliza R. Snow in the Relief Society. In 1870 Brigham Young called Sister Young to promote silk production among the women of the Church as part of the Church’s emphasis on home industry and self-sufficiency. During her presidency the Relief Society affiliated with the United States National Council of Women and campaigned for women’s suffrage. Sister Young continued the Relief Society’s emphasis on health care, grain storage, education, and compassionate service. Widowed by her first husband, she raised two sons from that marriage, one daughter from her later marriage to Brigham Young, and four of Brigham Young’s other children.

Bathsheba W. Smith belonged to the original Nauvoo Relief Society and, like her predecessors, endured persecution and trekked west with the Saints. She was known for her charm, graciousness, and hospitality. During her lifetime she saw the Relief Society grow from a small group of sisters in Nauvoo to more than 40,000 members. While Sister Smith was president, the Relief Society continued to train nurses, store grain, and emphasize compassionate service. The needs of a new generation of sisters prompted the start of mothers’ classes, the first formal Relief Society instruction. Sister Smith and her husband, George A. Smith, had three children.

Emmeline B. Wells traveled with the Saints from Nauvoo to the Salt Lake Valley. In 1876 President Brigham Young had her encourage women to prepare for famine by gathering and storing wheat. A talented writer, she became editor of the *Woman’s Exponent* in 1877. During her presidency the Relief Society experienced many transitions. In 1912 President Joseph F. Smith made the Relief Society responsible for burial and temple clothing. In 1914 the Relief Society introduced a standard study course. In 1915 the *Woman’s Exponent* was replaced by the *Relief Society Magazine*, which included visiting teaching lessons and lessons for weekly Relief Society meetings. In 1918 the Relief Society sold its wheat to the United States government to help war victims and encouraged wartime conservation and many kinds of relief efforts. Under Sister Wells the Relief Society emphasized the sacredness of motherhood, raised funds for temples, supported legislation for women and children, and cooperated with community welfare agencies. As a widow with two young daughters, Sister Wells married Daniel H. Wells, and they had three daughters.

Clarissa S. Williams was a schoolteacher and a woman of humility and exceptional executive ability. Her presidency witnessed an increase of Relief Society involvement in the community. At her recommendation the interest accrued from the Relief Society wheat fund was used for health, maternity, and child welfare projects. The Relief Society Social Services Department, established in 1919, trained social workers, found employment for women, and offered adoption services. The Relief Society also trained nurses, aided refugees, and established a maternity home as part of an emphasis on maternity and health issues. Sister Williams considered the success of health care efforts one of the highlights of her presidency. She and her husband, William N. Williams, had eleven children.

Louise Y. Robison grew up in Scipio, Utah, where she learned much about compassionate service from her mother, a stake Relief Society president. Sister Robison loved the temple and enjoyed the Relief Society’s role in the Burial Clothing Department. She also loved music, and during her presidency the Relief Society singing mothers’ choruses were organized. She led the Relief Society during the difficult years of the Great Depression, during which the organization cooperated with government relief agencies and the Red Cross and helped lay the groundwork for the Church welfare system. In 1937 the Relief Society opened Mormon Handicraft, a shop where women could sell their handwork to supplement their family income. Sister Robison and her husband, Joseph L. Robison, had six children.

Amy Brown Lyman, a gifted administrator, cared deeply about social work. For 16 years she directed the first social welfare department of the Church, which was part of the Relief Society until 1969. She also served in the Utah legislature. While her husband was president of the European mission, she presided over the Church women’s organizations in Europe. During her presidency the Relief Society celebrated its centennial with a membership of 115,000. She led the Relief Society during World War II and emphasized wartime thrift and emergency preparedness as well as relief for war victims. At a time when war industries were pulling many women into the workforce, Sister Lyman focused on strengthening families and championed the role of mothers in the home. She and her husband, Richard R. Lyman, had two children.

Belle S. Spafford, an able teacher, writer, and administrator, led the Relief Society for nearly 30 years. After World War II the Relief Society helped with relief efforts for the people suffering in Europe. The organization shipped clothes, bedding, soap, and other necessities to war-torn areas. During the 1950s the Relief Society increased its emphasis on education, especially homemaker education, and on social services. Sisters around the world raised funds for the Relief Society Building, which was dedicated in 1956. Membership rules for the Relief Society changed during the 1970s to automatically enroll all Latter-day Saint women ages 18 and older. Sister Spafford was widely known and respected outside the Church as well, and from 1968 to 1970 she served as president of the National Council of Women. She and her husband, Willis Earl Spafford, had two children.

Barbara B. Smith demonstrated sound judgment and tolerance as president of the Relief Society during a time of intense conflict over women’s issues. She was often interviewed about her stand against the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution. She encouraged Latter-day Saint women to be involved in their communities and represent Church attitudes about women without being combative or divisive. Sister Smith continued the Relief Society’s emphasis on disaster relief, emergency preparedness, and welfare. She also emphasized homemaker education and the importance of the family. During her presidency the Relief Society grew to about two million members worldwide. Sister Smith asked the women of the Church to personally commit to a lifetime of learning and active service. She and her husband, Douglas H. Smith, have seven children.

Barbara W. Winder is a woman of great compassion and humility. Under her direction the Relief Society emphasized personal spirituality and gave special attention to the needs of single adult sisters and the family. Sister Winder summarized the mission of the Relief Society in four basic principles: building faith and testimony, strengthening families, giving compassionate service, and sustaining the priesthood. During her presidency the general officers of the Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary moved into the remodeled Relief Society Building, where they could work more closely in a sisterhood of organizations. By the end of Sister Winder’s presidency, the Relief Society had more than three million members in 135 countries and territories. She envisioned the Relief Society as an organization that could bless each woman and family and an organization in which each woman could fully participate. She and her husband, Richard W. Winder, have four children.

Elaine L. Jack was raised in Cardston, Alberta, Canada. Her vision of Relief Society was characterized by her great confidence in the goodness of women, in the unique contributions women make individually and collectively, and in the importance of strengthening families. She encouraged sisters to make Charity Never Fails a motto of such personal significance that the whole world would be blessed. During the 1992 Relief Society sesquicentennial, sisters throughout the world engaged in service projects to help their individual communities. An expansion of this service is the ongoing gospel literacy effort. This effort was initiated by the Relief Society to help all Church members gain the basic reading and writing skills necessary to read the word of God and to encourage lifelong gospel study and self-improvement. Charity, literacy, and family not only characterize Sister Jack’s administration, they are the hallmarks of her life. She and her husband, Joseph E. Jack, have four sons.

Mary Ellen W. Smoot is a woman of great humility, dedication, and foresight. Sister Smoot emphasized the importance of working closely with priesthood leaders to help women and their families come unto Christ. Leading a worldwide Relief Society membership of nearly five million, Sister Smoot traveled more than 200,000 miles during her administration. On one journey she helped with the humanitarian efforts in Kosovo, relieving the suffering of many individuals there. Her desire to support families was evident as she served on the World Congress for the Family Committee. She also published the Relief Society declaration to help women realize their divine potential as daughters of God. Homemaking meeting was replaced with Home, Family, and Personal Enrichment meeting. The monthly visiting teaching message was reformatted to focus on gospel principles, scriptures, and quotations from Church leaders; the messages also encouraged women to bear their testimonies to one another. Sister Smoot wanted the women of the Church to be spiritually prepared to meet their challenges; to be examples of gospel living; and to move forward with faith, courage, and spiritual, mental, and emotional strength. Sister Smoot and her husband, Stanley M. Smoot, have seven children and fifty grandchildren.

Bonnie D. Parkin, the mother of four sons and grandmother of many, leads more than five million Relief Society sisters in 165 nations across the earth. Filled with charity and a deep and abiding love for the women of the world, she wants all women to feel the love of the Lord each day as they keep their covenants, exercise charity, and strengthen families. With a deep personal commitment, Sister Parkin has focused on preparing and nurturing young women in the transition from youth to womanhood. Her desire is that in Relief Society, the Lord’s organization for women, sisters of all ages will find a place where they feel at home and where there is a bond of trust, friendship, and support. Sister Parkin has a testimony of visiting teaching being the very heart and soul of Relief Society and sees this program as a measure of the heart, an unselfish work, and a sacred trust that blesses both the giver and the receiver. Women throughout the world are also encouraged to practice welfare principles as they build up and then share their time and talents in their wards and stakes. As a covenant woman consecrated to the cause of Jesus Christ, Sister Parkin encourages others to “choose that good part” daily by serving the Lord and others through acts of service and love (see Luke 10:42).

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