

Names for Temple Ordinances [#1]

[#2] The purpose of the restored Church of Jesus Christ is to help members qualify for exaltation by fulfilling divinely appointed responsibilities. **[#3]** One such responsibility is enabling the salvation of the dead by performing vicarious ordinances in holy temples.

[#4] The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve have reemphasized that the primary responsibility for supplying names for temple ordinances rests upon individual members, families, and local units.

The latest step in teaching the members of the Church that family history and temple work are one work is a First Presidency letter dated October 8, 2012, addressed to the “Members of the Church.” It will be read in sacrament meeting. It reads:

“Dear Brethren and Sisters:

Names for Temple Ordinances

[#5] “When members of the Church find the names of their ancestors and take those names to the temple for ordinance work, the temple experience can be greatly enriched. Members with limited ability to do their own family history research are encouraged to perform vicarious ordinances with names provided by other members or by the temple.

[#6] “We especially encourage youth and young single adults to use for temple work their own family names or the names of ancestors of their ward and stake members. Priesthood leaders should assure that young people and their families learn the doctrine of turning their hearts to their fathers and the blessings of temple attendance.

[#7] “Some Church members have large numbers of family names reserved so they can personally attend to the temple work. We encourage them to release these names in a timely manner so the necessary ordinances can be performed.

[#8] “We appreciate your efforts to seek out the names of your ancestors and to provide essential temple ordinances. We pray that the spirit of this sacred work will increase in the hearts of all members of the Church.”

Sincerely,

The First Presidency

This direction is not a wholesale or immediate change, but a large and important next step in a line upon line and precept upon precept pattern of accomplishing the work of salvation for the living and the dead.

We each have a responsibility to help members learn the doctrine

The First Presidency Letter of 29 February 2012 reinforces the importance of following established guidelines for submitting names. It states: “Our preeminent obligation is to seek out and identify our own ancestors. Those whose names are submitted for proxy temple ordinances should be related to the submitter.”

Elijah returned, keys were restored, and hearts are turned so ordinances can be performed to create a welding link and bind families together forever – so the whole earth will not be utterly wasted at the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What we are reviewing today is not new. Presidents of the Church have taught clearly, emphatically, and repeatedly the importance of the family in temple work – from Joseph Smith to Thomas S. Monson. However, the Brethren are bringing renewed emphasis to truths essential for the salvation and exaltation of the living and the dead.

[#9] The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that

“The greatest responsibility in this world that God has laid upon us is to seek after **our** dead. The apostle says, ‘They without us cannot be made perfect’ (see Hebrews 11:4); for it is necessary that the sealing power should be in our hands to seal **our** children and **our** dead for the fulness of the dispensation of times – a dispensation to meet the promises made by Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world for the salvation of man” (History of the Church, 6:312-13).

Please note the use of the word **our** – not the dead and the children but **our** children and **our** dead.

[#10] President Wilford Woodruff declared in general conference in April of 1894 that

“We want the Latter-day Saints from this time to trace **their** genealogies as far as they can, and to be sealed to **their** fathers and mothers. Have children sealed to **their** parents, and run this chain through as far as you can get it” (Millennial Star, May 28, 1894, 338,339,341).

Note the use of the word **their** – not the genealogies and the fathers and mothers but **their** genealogies and **their** fathers and mothers.

[#11] Please now consider the following scriptures in light of the prophetic teachings we have just reviewed.

“Your dead” is used four times in three verses in Section 124 and three times in two verses in Section 127 (see D&C 124: 32, 33, 36; D&C 127:5-6).

[#12] In our day President Spencer W. Kimball has spoken with unmistakable clarity about our responsibility.

“Thousands of our faithful people seldom go to the temple, and of those who do go, most are not working on their own ancestral lines. *They are not saving their own dead.* They seem to believe they are fulfilling their responsibilities by merely attending the temple occasionally. This is simply not so.

“We all must learn to save our own dead. We must properly identify them so that we can then perform the work for them in the temples . . . **[#13]** Saints in every temple district must be taught to provide their own names. Japanese people should provide the names for their own Tokyo temple. South American people should provide the names for their own Sao Paulo temple. Likewise, in Mexico and Seattle and in every other established area. If they do so, then they will save their own dead. If they do not, and depend on Salt Lake City to send names, they do not save their own dead, but instead they work on other people’s ancestry” (Spencer W. Kimball, Regional Representative Seminar, September 30, 1976, pg. 7).

[#14] Section 2 of the Doctrine and Covenants includes an extract from the words of the angel Moroni to Joseph Smith on the evening of September 21, 1823. Included in this revelation is a quote from Malachi which states, “the hearts of the children will turn to their fathers...”

This particular doctrine must have had a great impact on the Prophet Joseph as he continued to learn line upon line regarding the Great Plan of Salvation. This is illustrated as part of church history as well as future revelations regarding this doctrine.

In the latter part of the 1830’s the members of the Church were compelled to leave the state of Missouri due to the ever-increasing persecution. The extermination order issued by Governor Boggs of Missouri, dated October 27, 1838 had left them no alternative.

Unfortunately, the persecution followed the Prophet to Nauvoo. Officials from Missouri continued their attempts to arrest Joseph and extradite him on various charges. The persecution became so intense that Joseph found it necessary to go into hiding to protect himself and the Saints in Nauvoo.

While the Prophet was in hiding he wrote two letters or epistles to the Latter-day Saints in Nauvoo. They are known today as sections 127 and 128 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Both sections contain directions on baptism for the dead with accompanying instructions on the proper way to record sacred ordinances. Also included are statements of doctrine that reveal the importance of family history and temple work for the dead. Here are a few examples of this doctrine as taught by the Prophet Joseph and found in Section 128 of the Doctrine and Covenants:

“And now, my dearly beloved brethren and sisters let me assure you that these are principles in relation to the dead and the living that cannot be lightly passed over, as pertaining to our salvation. For their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation, as Paul says concerning the fathers – that they without us cannot be made perfect – neither can we without our dead be made perfect.”

The Prophet Joseph goes on detailing doctrine on this important subject in verses 17 and 18 in Section 128:

“...I will give you a quotation from one of the prophets, who had his eye fixed on the restoration of the priesthood, the glories to be revealed in the last days, and in an especial manner this most glorious of all subjects belonging to the ever-lasting gospel, namely, the baptism for the dead; for Malachi says, last chapter, verses 5th and 6th : Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, (please note the specific language used – **their** fathers, not **the** fathers) lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

“I might have rendered a plainer translation to this, but it is sufficiently plain to suit my purpose as it stands. It is sufficient to know, in this case, that the earth will be smitten with a curse unless there is a welding link of some kind or other between the fathers and the children, upon some subject or other – and behold what is that subject? It is the baptism for the dead.”

So it is that Joseph Smith, the Prophet of the restoration, in two letters to the Saints in Nauvoo clearly defines the importance of the relationship between the living and the dead as well as the saving ordinances that link us together.

Family History and temple work accomplished in this world truly blesses the dead in the next world. As previously mentioned in Doctrine and Covenants 128: 18: “they without us cannot be made perfect.”

[#15] President Howard W. Hunter, referring to this doctrine stated, “The dead are anxiously waiting for the Latter-day Saints to search out their names and then go into the temples to officiate in their behalf, that they may be liberated from their prison house in the spirit world. All of us should find joy in this magnificent labor of love.”

President Henry B. Eyring in the April 2005 General Conference spoke to this principle in a very compelling and powerful way.

[#16] He said: “It is important to know why the Lord promised to send Elijah. Elijah was a great prophet with great power given him by God. He held the greatest power God gives to His children: he held the sealing power, the power to bind on earth and have it bound in heaven. God gave it to the Apostle Peter. And the Lord kept His promise to send Elijah.

[#17] “Elijah came to the Prophet Joseph Smith on April 3, 1836, just after the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, the first temple built after the Restoration of the gospel. Joseph described the sacred moment:

"Another great and glorious vision burst upon us; for Elijah the prophet, who was taken to heaven without tasting death, stood before us, and said:

[#18] "Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi—testifying that he [Elijah] should be sent, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord come—

To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse—

[#19] “Remember that the names which will be so difficult to find are of real people to whom you owe your existence in this world and whom you will meet again in the spirit world. When you were baptized, your ancestors looked down on you with hope.

[#20] “Perhaps after centuries, they rejoiced to see one of their descendants make a covenant to find them and to offer them freedom. In your reunion, you will see in their eyes either gratitude or terrible disappointment. Their hearts are bound to you. Their hope is in your hands.”

[#21] A real life example of the doctrine just articulated by President Eyring is illustrated in the life of Georgia Elias, a recent convert to the Church.

Georgia was newly widowed when she was introduced to the Church. She was especially drawn to the doctrine of temple and family history work. Within weeks of her baptism she prepared some of her family names for temple ordinances, obtained a limited-use recommend, and took the names to the temple.

[#22] She said “The moment I realized that I could have my connection with my family I just got very excited. I realized I could have my husband... I want him to be with me forever.”

President Eyring addressed his remarks to particularly to new converts in his talk. Imagine the joy felt by Georgia’s mother and husband at having these ordinances performed for them—in addition to the joy Georgia that herself experienced.

[#23] Temple and family history work also blesses the living. “For we without them cannot be made perfect” (D&C 128:18). This work aids continuing conversion and real growth.

[#24] President Howard W. Hunter taught us that family history work represents one half of a great blessing and temple work represents the other half.

“We must accomplish the priesthood temple ordinance work necessary for our own exaltation; then we must do the necessary work for those who did not have the opportunity to accept the gospel in life. Doing work for others is accomplished in two steps: first, by family history research to ascertain our progenitors; and second by performing the temple ordinances to give them the same opportunities afforded to the living.

“Yet there are many members of the Church who have only limited access to the temples. They do the best they can. They pursue family history research and have the temple ordinance work done by others.

[#25] “Conversely, there are some members who engage in temple work but fail to do family history research on their own family lines. Although they perform a divine service in assisting others, they lose a blessing by not seeking their own kindred dead as divinely directed by latter day prophets...

“I have learned that those who engage in family history research and then perform the temple ordinance work for those whose names they have found will know the additional joy of receiving both halves of the blessing.”

[#26] When this doctrine, articulated by so many of our leaders over the years, is understood and practiced by the membership of the Church great blessings and joy will come as a result.

Nick Bartley is a 15 year-old teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood. He has researched and prepared many of his own family names. He has been to the temple approximately seven times to do baptisms for family names.

He said of his experience at the temple: “It was one of the most amazing feelings I have ever felt to this day.”

Imagine a teen-ager saying the most amazing thing he has ever done is something religious. Elder Bednar promised youth who participate in this work that they will “be protected against the intensifying influence of the adversary” (David A. Bednar, “The Hearts of the Children Shall Turn,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011). That is the other half of the blessing. That is the joy Nick experiences.

Elder Bednar shared a letter that he received from a Bishop. It reads:

“There appears to be abnormal teenage behavior in our ward, and the cause is the Elijah Project. One of our youth told his dad he wanted to have a party at his home and invite a bunch of friends. His dad agreed and asked him what he wanted to do for the party. Jason said, “It’s going to be a Project Elijah party.” He invited a bunch of friends from school and church. The youth arrived, members and non-members, with laptops in hand ready to do Family History work together. Dad barbecued and encouraged the youth to find an ancestor before eating. Twenty-seven ancestors later the food was finished off, the youth were filled with the spirit and food, and they gained a valuable testimony of the work. Plans are being made for another Elijah party. These are amazing times, and I feel so blessed to be led by children.”

[#27] Implementation

- Why is this happening now?

- We have an increased number of temples throughout the world. President Monson announced last year that 85% of Church members now live within 200 miles of a temple.
- The Lord permitted the early saints to perform baptisms for the dead in the Mississippi river during the time of their poverty. But when they completed the baptismal font in the Nauvoo temple, the practice of baptizing in the river was no longer acceptable (see D&C 124:29-36). Similarly, we have new technologies now in place that enables families to work together to form genealogical conclusions and perform the temple ordinances themselves.
- Implement through councils
 - Implementing this emphasis will actually flow into Area, Coordinating, Stake, and Ward Councils.
- Not new. The presidents of the Church throughout our history have consistently taught these doctrines.
 - Line upon line, precept upon precept
- Avoid extremes
 - There is no restriction on attending the temple if members (youth and young single adults) do not bring their own names

[#28] Summary

1. The purpose of the restored Church of Jesus Christ is to help members qualify for exaltation by fulfilling divinely appointed responsibilities. One such responsibility is enabling the salvation of their dead by performing vicarious ordinances in holy temples.
2. Teach and act on the doctrines of the Church and the direction of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve that the primary responsibility for supplying names for temple ordinances rests upon individual members, families, and local units. The role of the family history department and workers is to help members fulfill this divinely appointed responsibility.
3. This should not be interpreted to mean members cannot go to the temples without bringing names of their own ancestors.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Does this mean we cannot go to the temple if we don't have our own names?

No, this should not be interpreted to mean members cannot go to the temple without bringing names of their own ancestors. Members with limited ability to do their own family history research are encouraged to perform vicarious ordinances with names provided by other members or by the temple.

2. What can our family do when it is very hard for us to find even one name?

The following opportunities are available to all members, especially to those who's family trees seem to be complete or difficult to add upon.

- Check familysearch.org often for new information and individuals as over one million names are added to the site each day.
- As your heart turns to your direct line ancestors, you can then begin to seek out all of the descendants of your ancestors beyond those in your direct line. This is referred to as descendancy research.
- Seek help to overcome difficult barriers or questions in your family tree.
- Help others especially friends, family and new and returning Church members in your ward build their family trees.
- Encourage Church members who have reserved large numbers of family names for temple work to release these names so that you and others in the ward can help perform those ordinances for them.
- If you still cannot provide names through any of the means mentioned above, the temple will be able to provide names from other members who need the ordinances performed.

3. How can we provide enough names for our big youth group?

Youth groups are blessed when they take names to the temple for those with whom they have a relationship. Emphasis on how many baptisms are performed could be replaced with an emphasis on for whom the baptisms are performed. Plenty of names can most likely be found by and for the youth as they personally engage in the work in the following ways:

- Start with their own efforts working on their own family lines
- Expand their efforts by involving immediate and extended family members
- Help other members in their ward and stake build their family trees and offer to perform the baptisms for them
- Approach the temple to see if they have names available submitted by other members who need the baptisms performed for them.

4. Who can help us to follow this instruction?

The ward council determines how to best follow and implement the instructions from the First Presidency in the ward. The High Priests Group Leader with the help of family history consultants, youth and youth leaders can coordinate the work.

5. If we provide our own names does this mean we can do more baptisms at the temple or can we go to temple with the kids more often?

As youth attend the temple individually, with families or in groups with their own names in general there are not limits as to how many names they can bring. They should contact the temple in advance to work within the schedules available for temple baptisms.

6. Does this apply to all ordinances or just to baptisms?

There is typically an ample supply of family related names for adults to perform other ordinances besides baptisms. The youth and the temples will most benefit as members provide names for temple baptisms.

7. We don't have access to records online, how can we provide names or do research?

Online records or extensive research are not always necessary for members to discover the first two to four generations of their family tree. The learning and sharing of family stories, pictures, and household records will bring the family together, invite the Spirit and edify all involved as well as reveal the necessary information to begin to build the family trees in familysearch.org.

FamilySearch is continually providing more access to more records, literally on a daily basis, so members are encouraged to check the site often for new developments.

8. Will we be looked down upon if we can't or forget to provide our own names?

No. All members are blessed and admired for exercising their faith to attend the temple and perform ordinances for themselves and for deceased individuals. As they seek to provide their own names as individuals, families and wards their temple experience will simply be enhanced as they have a personal tie to those for whom they are performing the ordinances.

9. Does this mean the Church is moving away from extraction?

It is not appropriate to submit names of those not related to submitting members to the Temple. That kind of extraction we do not do. However, indexing names and adding them to the Common Tree in FamilySearch is very much encouraged.