

Family Organization

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"They without us cannot be made perfect—neither can we without our dead be made perfect" (D&C 128:15).

We should organize our families so that we can better meet both our day-to-day and eternal goals.

In 1833 the Lord gave these instructions to Bishop Newel K. Whitney concerning his family: "My servant Newel K. Whitney also, a bishop of my church, hath need to be chastened, and set in order his family, and see that they are more diligent and concerned at home, and pray always, or they shall be removed out of their place" (D&C 93:50).

Similar counsel was given to other fathers in this same revelation (see D&C 93:41–48). The fact that this counsel applies to all family members is made clear when the Lord adds, "What I say unto one I say unto all" (D&C 93:49).

What Is Family Organization?

Family organization means organizing the living family to meet the needs of day-to-day existence and also to prepare them to be an eternal family in the kingdom of God.

What goals or purposes should each family strive toward? The list below summarizes some of the goals a family should have:

Temporal welfare

Social, intellectual, and recreational activity

Spiritual growth

Missionary work

Family history and temple work

Although these goals are frequently thought of as Church responsibilities, they are often best fulfilled through the family.

We should each consider: What advantages might your family receive from being properly organized? How might a good organization help your family members turn their hearts to one another? (See D&C 110:15.)

The principle of family organization can apply to—

1. The immediate family, living together in the same household.

2. Persons closely related who may not live in the same household, such as the grandparent family.
3. Persons who descend from a more distant common ancestor.

Let us now look at each of these organizational levels in greater detail.

Organizing the Immediate Family

The organization of the immediate family ordinarily includes the father, mother, and their children who are living at home. When there is no father in the home, the mother presides. The following story shows the steps one family head took to organize and strengthen his family.

Walt sometimes felt that he was not giving sufficient direction in his home. He wondered if he was gradually losing his children as they grew older. This concern led Walt to decide on a plan for organizing his family. The initial plan included giving greater attention to family home evenings and other family meetings, holding more consistent family prayer, making more specific assignments to family members in chores around the home, more diligently attending to Church duties and meetings, and taking time each day to study the scriptures together.

Eventually, Walt's plan had an even broader reach. He began meeting privately with individual family members, counseling them, inquiring about their welfare, and drawing closer to them through warm and sincere communication. The family began to contribute to missionary work by fellowshipping nonmembers, using their home as a place for the missionaries to teach investigators, and actively preparing the boys in the family for full-time missions. Their family missionary program also included a mission savings fund.

In time, the success of these efforts led Walt to expand his family organization to include a welfare program. This involved home storage, a family budget, and a small garden. The family carefully planned their welfare program and even officially approved it in a special family meeting. Later Walt and his sons decided to learn a useful trade together that they could use in possible time of need.

As another project, they put in order their sacred family records. They sent letters to relatives, seeking information on recent ancestors. They began to keep life histories and journals in which they recalled and preserved sacred experiences.

We could each consider how aspects of Walt's plans could benefit our families. What other things would benefit our families?

Organizing with Close Relatives

The ideal close relative organization would consist of a husband and wife who are grandparents, their sons and daughters with their wives and husbands, and their grandchildren. The organization and activities could be as flexible as needed to allow for differing family circumstances such as ages of children, distances between families, and family schedules.

Many of the functions and activities of this level of organization can be the same as those of the immediate family. For example, family meetings may continue. Such meetings permit families to know and enjoy each other and feel a sense of belonging to an important eternal unit. If distances do not allow frequent meetings, families could plan to be together for special anniversary celebrations periodically. Additional meetings, correspondence, or newsletters also could help bind the families together. Family missionary projects, including missionary savings funds, could be undertaken on a larger scale. Projects related to the temporal welfare of family members, such as having a common garden, uniting to build home storage facilities, and giving assistance to one another in time of need, are appropriate activities.

Family history activities can also be very effective at this level of family organization. There are generally many family members on this level whose time and abilities can be used in searching records—more so than in the immediate family. There may also be a substantial financial base to bear the expenses of research, and temple attendance can be organized as a family activity.

One individual can be part of more than one close relative family organization. We should each consider the circles of close family ties in our lives where a start could be made toward this kind of family organization.

Organizing with Distant Relatives

The third kind of organization is quite different from the other two we have discussed. An organization of distant relatives is generally centered around an ancestor who lived a generation or more earlier.

These organizations may be very large. For instance, those organized around ancestors who now have four generations of descendants could number in the hundreds. Those whose common ancestors lived six or seven generations ago may have many thousands of potential members. An individual might belong to many distant relative family organizations.

What objectives or purposes might a distant relative family organization have? First, there are certain purposes that such an

organization would *not* have. For example, organizations on this level could not very effectively undertake projects having to do with temporal welfare and missionary activity. Regular gatherings, because of large numbers, scattered locations, and distant relationships are generally not very meaningful or practical. Occasional reunions, however, may help to create and maintain interest in the organization and permit relatives to become acquainted with each other. Thus, the more personalized activities should be left, for the most part, to immediate family and close relative organizations.

There is one important purpose that the distant relative organization can very effectively carry out: coordinating family history activity on those lineages that all the members of the organization have in common. By organizing and working together, members can make a great amount of progress on the research of their lineages. They can share financial burdens, draw upon one another's abilities and time, and perform work in the temples for ancestors whose names have been cleared for ordinances. Even in the task of coordinating family history activity, however, a distant relative family organization may become so large that it becomes cumbersome and ineffective. Under these circumstances, it is time to divide.

Family Organization and Family History

The Lord's counsel to parents that they should set in order their families represents a great opportunity and obligation for both parents and children. There are blessings awaiting those families that bring the principle of family organizations into action. We should remember that the idea of family organization is a principle, not simply a program. For different families, and especially for different levels of family relationships, the principle may have to be applied differently, as we have seen.

We have also seen in this lesson that the principle of family organization may result in blessings not only for the living family members but also for the dead. Family organizations can research the names of ancestors more quickly and make the blessings of gospel ordinances available to these ancestors.

A family organization can help each person meet his family history responsibilities. Family organizations on different levels will be able to help in different ways.

For the immediate family organization, family history activity is primarily in the areas of—

1. Gathering information about recent ancestors and family members.
2. Compiling sacred family records.

3. Submitting names for temple work whenever possible.

For the close relative family organization, family history activity may be carried out by—

1. Assigning someone to coordinate assignments to family members and keep in contact with other family organizations.
2. Providing ways of involving all family members through individualized assignments.
3. Pooling resources to finance expenses involved in research.
4. Maintaining a family records center where documents and other materials can be kept.
5. Submitting names for temple work.
6. Encouraging temple attendance.
7. Supporting and helping to organize distant relative organizations.

For the distant relative family organization, family history activity can be carried out by—

1. Coordinating research and other related assignments.
2. Sending out updated information on lineages.
3. Combining financial resources.
4. Corresponding with other family organizations.
5. Submitting names for temple work.
6. Coordinating temple attendance.

Family history is, by its very nature, a family labor. Through our participation in it, we can open the way for eternal blessings to flow into the lives of both the living and the deceased members of our families. The Lord and his prophets have not been apologetic about giving this work to us. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "It is one of the greatest and most important subjects that God has revealed" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938], p. 337).

Just like all the other work of the kingdom of God, this great and sacred cause requires and deserves love, and this love can be expressed and fulfilled by organization, work, and sacrifice.

Suggestions for Teachers

1. To point out the importance and value of family organization, ask: How well might a business firm succeed without careful planning and organization? Is a business any more complex and challenging than a family? How long will a car last with minimal

attention? What begins to happen after many months of doing just what is necessary to keep the car running? Will the same thing happen to a family?

2. Ask: What are some goals and purposes that each family should strive toward? Let the sisters discuss. Point out that when families are organized, they are better able to achieve these goals.
3. Assign sisters to describe their own experiences with family organizations.