



Presidents David O. McKay, Heber J. Grant, and J. Reuben Clark Jr. (left to right) of the First Presidency visit Welfare Square in 1940.

Celebrating 75 Years of Welfare

By Heather Wrigley

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Several addresses during the 181st Annual General Conference of the Church were dedicated to the commemoration of the Church's welfare program, celebrating its 75th year.

On its inaugural day in 1936, President David O. McKay, then a counselor in the First Presidency, affirmed the divinely inspired roots of the Church's welfare plan: "[The welfare program] is established by divine revelation, and there is nothing else in all the world that can so effectively take care of its members."¹

Seventy-five years have come and gone. Economic cycles have run their course and begun again. The world has seen huge societal and cultural changes, and the Church has seen monumental growth.

But the words spoken of the Church's divinely inspired welfare plan on that day in 1936 are as true today as they were then.

Welfare Principles

In 1929 the United States experienced huge financial losses when the stock market crashed. By 1932 unemployment in Utah had reached 35.8 percent.

Though the Church had welfare principles in place, including a system of storehouses and programs to help members find work, many members were turning to government relief.

"I believe that there is a growing disposition among the people to try to get something from the government of the United States with little hope of ever paying it back," President Heber J. Grant (1856–1945) commented during this time.²

Church leaders wanted to help struggling members without promoting idleness and a sense of entitlement. The goal was to help people help themselves become independent.

In 1933 the First Presidency

announced: "Our able-bodied members must not, except as a last resort, be put under the embarrassment of accepting something for nothing. . . . Church officials administering relief must devise ways and means by which all able-bodied Church members who are in need, may make compensation for aid given them by rendering some sort of service."³

With the principles in place and the faith of the Saints in play, individual Church units as well as the Church at large went to work organizing classes on sewing and canning, coordinating work projects, acquiring farms, and emphasizing righteous, thrifty, and independent living.

The Church Welfare Plan

With the organization of the Church Security Plan (renamed the Church Welfare Plan in 1938), people were given the opportunity to work, to the extent of their ability, for the assistance they received. The plan taught people to turn to themselves for a "hand up" rather than to other sources for a handout.

"Our primary purpose was to set up . . . a system under which the curse of idleness would be done away with, the evils of a dole abolished, and independence, industry, thrift and self-respect be once more established amongst our people," President Grant said during the October 1936 general conference. "Work is to be re-enthroned as the ruling principle of the lives of our Church membership."⁴

Over the years, the Church's welfare system has included many programs: Social Services (now LDS Family Services), LDS Charities, Humanitarian Services, and Emergency Response. These programs and others have blessed the lives of hundreds



Whether making bread (above left), growing grapes (above right), or providing aid in some other way, the Church's welfare program aims to develop self-reliance through faith in Jesus Christ.

of thousands both in and out of the Church.

Going International

Even after the Great Depression came to an end at the outbreak of World War II, President J. Reuben Clark Jr., Second Counselor in the First Presidency, providentially advocated continuing the welfare program. In October 1945, U.S. President Harry S. Truman called on Church President George Albert Smith (1870–1951) to determine how and when supplies could be delivered to areas of Europe devastated by the war. To President Truman's astonishment, Church leaders replied that the food and clothing and other relief supplies were already collected and ready for shipping.

Over time the Church expanded its welfare facilities and programs to cover more areas of need, including more geographical areas. In the 1970s, the Church expanded its welfare projects and production to Mexico, England, and the Pacific Islands. During the following decade Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay became the first countries outside the United States to receive

Church employment centers.

With the formation of Church Humanitarian Services in 1985, the Church's international welfare efforts grew tremendously as clothing and other goods were sorted for shipment around the world in response to poverty and disasters.

Today the growth of the international membership of the Church, especially in developing nations, poses new challenges, which the welfare program is adapting to meet.

An Inspired Plan for Today

The basic principles of welfare—self-reliance and industry—remain the same today as when the Lord commanded Adam, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (Genesis 3:19).

In latter days the Lord has declared, “And the storehouse shall be kept by the consecrations of the church; and widows and orphans shall be provided for, as also the poor” (D&C 83:6). Then He reminds us, “But it must needs be done in mine own way” (D&C 104:16).

Welfare principles are at work in members' lives around the world as a daily principle in individual homes.

“The strength of the Church and the Lord's real storehouse is in the homes and hearts of his people,” Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said.⁵

As individuals develop their own self-reliance through faith in Jesus Christ, the program's long-term objective, as defined by President Clark, continues to be fulfilled: “the building of character in the members of the Church, givers and receivers, rescuing all that is finest down deep inside of them, and bringing to flower and fruitage the latent richness of the spirit, which after all is the mission and purpose and reason for being of this Church.”⁶ ■

NOTES

1. David O. McKay, in Henry D. Taylor, *The Church Welfare Plan*, unpublished ms., Salt Lake City (1984), 26–27.
2. Heber J. Grant, in Conference Report, Oct. 1933, 5.
3. In James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols., (1965–75), 5:332–34.
4. Heber J. Grant, in Conference Report, Oct. 1936, 3.
5. Robert D. Hales, “Welfare Principles to Guide Our Lives: An Eternal Plan for the Welfare of Men's Souls,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 28.
6. J. Reuben Clark Jr., in special meeting of stake presidents, Oct. 2, 1936.