

“Changing Times Bring Changing Conditions”: Relief Society, 1960 to the Present

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THE 1960S MARKED FOR LATTER-DAY SAINTS the commencement of a new era of consolidation and growth that have led to multiple changes in the Relief Society. The organization experienced the automatic enrollment of women in 1971, the change to a consolidated meeting schedule in 1980, and an increase in membership from 220,000 in 1960 to over 4 million sisters worldwide in 2000. A major force driving these changes was the correlation program, which greatly impacted Relief Society’s publications, curriculum, financing, and social services operations. Correlation aimed to realign auxiliaries and women’s organizations under priesthood direction to make programs more “priesthood centered.”¹

Scholars of Mormonism have frequently framed changes in Relief

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1. Harold B. Lee, “The Correlation Program,” *Improvement Era* 66 (June 1963): 502.

Society under correlation in terms of subordination or loss: women's loss of financial autonomy, loss of voice, loss of power, and loss of decision-making capabilities. Maxine Hanks, a Mormon feminist, has interpreted LDS women's experience of the twentieth century as one of increasing disempowerment in a patriarchal culture. For Hanks, correlation is primarily a male-focused movement concerned with reasserting males in positions of authority in reaction to their perceived loss of power. Hanks attributes this male perception of loss in large part to the changing American cultural climate in which the moral underpinnings of family and manhood appeared threatened. In reaction to outside cultural forces that both demanded and gave women more authority and credibility, the LDS Church reacted by emphasizing men's authoritative role in both Church administration and home. According to Hanks, as women generally made gains in sociological and economic terms, in access to power and choice in lifestyle, education, and reproductive issues, LDS women simultaneously lost institutional, ecclesiastical, and spiritual power.²

Tarla Rai Peterson, an LDS professor of environmental communication at the University of Utah, asserts that the move to correlation further codified hierarchical relationships within the LDS Church. These changes were particularly damaging to women "because their subordinate status, as in many religious organizations, expedites systematic domination."³ Peterson indicts "priesthood correlation" for normalizing female subordination through Church handbooks and lessons, narrowly defining gender and organizational roles, and overemphasizing technological discourse that ignores complexities of organizational life. Similarly, Jill Mulvay Derr and C. Brooklyn Derr, a husband-wife team with interests in Mormon organizational behavior, note the shift of auxiliaries from rather autonomous organizations to "helping" organizations. They interpret the professionalization and bureaucratizing of the Church as part of a

2. Maxine Hanks, editor's introduction, *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), xi-xxx.

3. Tarla Rai Peterson, "Structuring Closure through Technological Discourse," in *Communication and the Culture of Technology*, edited by Martin J. Medhurst, Alberto Gonzalez, and Tarla Rai Peterson (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1990), 80.

large trend affecting secular organizations as well.⁴ Their work offers a useful description of formal authority, contrasted with informal influence that often grows in response to human needs unmet by the formalized efficiency of bureaucracy. Informal influence, the sphere in which women have most access to negotiation within the organization, is “based on personal relationships,” “vulnerable to change,” and “tentative and erratic.” Derr and Derr comment that while over half of LDS Church membership is female, women “speak for and act in behalf of women only insofar as they can wield informal influence” because “formal representation is not just unlikely but impossible.”⁵

A number of recent sociological and cultural studies have placed changes affecting LDS women in the context of organizational change on a national scale. For example, Marie Cornwall notes that correlation within the LDS Church has paralleled a national trend toward bureaucratization, a trend which has caused women in a variety of religious denominations, including Mormon, Methodist, and Presbyterian, to experience some loss of autonomy and control over their benevolent societies.⁶ This paper similarly attempts to situate historical Relief Society changes within a broader Church context, acknowledging the practical needs of a growing international Church. I recognize much validity to the view that an increasingly formalized and strengthened hierarchical line of male authority within the LDS Church has weakened women’s voice and crippled equitable access to organizational authority. However, I also believe that a strict insistence

4. Jill Mulvay Derr and C. Brooklyn Derr, “Outside the Mormon Hierarchy: Alternative Aspects of Institutional Power,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15 (Winter 1982): 28.

5. *Ibid.*, 34–35.

6. Marie Cornwall, “The Institutional Role of Mormon Women,” in *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives*, edited by Marie Cornwall, Tim Heaton, and Lawrence Young (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 239–64, esp. 250. See also Laurence R. Iannaccone and Carrie Miles, “Dealing with Social Change: The Mormon Church’s Response to Change in Women’s Roles,” *ibid.*, 265–86; Jill Mulvay Derr, “‘Strength in Our Union’: The Making of Mormon Sisterhood,” and Grethe B. Peterson, “Priesthood and Latter-day Saint Women: Eight Contemporary Definitions,” in *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, edited by Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 153–207, 249–68.

upon this view as a complete interpretation of Relief Society's recent history is simplistic and ethnocentric. Focusing exclusively on narratives of loss neglects other valid historical narratives that contribute to our understanding of the Relief Society's past.

While I do not deny that many women have experienced loss from the changes, the Relief Society has undergone from 1960 to the present, I highlight correlation as a valuable phase of Church organization that, despite the losses, has on the whole benefitted Relief Society's worldwide sisterhood and the Church. This paper first summarizes the general history and stated purposes of correlation, particularly beginning in the 1960s. This context is important as the history of Relief Society is inextricably linked to and in part defined by what happened in priesthood correlation. I next discuss two major changes or transitions within the Relief Society since 1960 that were influenced by or were a result of priesthood correlation and the international growth of the Church. The first is the loss of the *Relief Society Magazine* and the growth of the *Liahona*, the international magazine, which serves as a guiding example of the trade-offs, losses, and gains for the Relief Society in the Church's attempts to restructure and adapt to changing conditions. Second, I will look at changes in curriculum production and content as a reflection of the changing role of the Relief Society under correlation and the growing emphasis placed on adapting to the needs of a worldwide Church.

Early Attempts at Correlation

The massive priesthood correlation efforts of the 1960s and 1970s were not the first time the LDS Church had attempted to correlate and redefine the sometimes unclear relationship among priesthood quorums, the Relief Society, and other Church auxiliaries. The first two decades of the twentieth century had likewise seen revisions. Between 1908 and 1920, President Joseph F. Smith implemented a "priesthood reform movement" in which the Relief Society and other women's organizations became "auxiliaries" with "the priesthood hierarchy supervising the women's auxiliaries."⁷ Original descriptions of the Relief Society do not relegate it to the status of an auxiliary. Elaine Jack, who served on the Relief Society board from 1972 until 1984 and as Relief Society general

7. Derr and Derr, "Outside the Hierarchy," 25. This paper will generally use the term "auxiliary" to describe the Relief Society and other women's organi-

president from 1990 to 1997, commented in 2003: "Relief Society is not an auxiliary. The church was never fully organized until 'women were thus organized after the pattern of the priesthood.' It's the Lord's organization for women. And we act as a companion role to the priesthood."⁸ This view of Relief Society lost its currency, as noted, between 1908 and 1920 when the priesthood reform movement reasserted the duties of priesthood holders in response to priesthood quorums' "identity crisis."⁹ This reform movement was also aimed at achieving "increased growth spiritually" through organizational changes at the stake and ward level.¹⁰ Committees were organized to study and create uniform courses of study for the priesthood quorums, emphasizing the quorums' central importance in Church structure. Joseph F. Smith described his vision of the Church's future: "There will not be so much necessity for work that is now being done by the auxiliary organizations, because it will be done by the regular quorums of the Priesthood."¹¹ Between 1928 and 1937, Church activities and auxiliaries were further consolidated with priesthood quorums.¹²

In their history of the Relief Society, Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher note of this period: "The division of the church organization into priesthood quorums and auxiliaries gradually decreased auxiliary autonomy and posed a particular challenge to Relief Society sisters, who would struggle to mesh two different but not

zations. While I find this label problematic and inconsistent with original descriptions of the Relief Society, it is difficult to escape the term, as Church statements currently refer to Relief Society as an auxiliary organization.

8. Elaine Jack, interviewed by Tina Hatch, July 20, 2003, 16, transcript, in my possession.

9. Derr and Derr, "Outside the Hierarchy," 40.

10. Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 107.

11. Quoted in Marion G. Romney, "Report from the Correlation Committee," *Improvement Era* 65 (December 1962): 938.

12. Meg Wheatley, "An Expanded Definition of Priesthood?: Some Present and Future Consequences," in *Women and Authority*, 151-66.

necessarily contradictory self-definitions.”¹³ Both their role as “complement or partner to priesthood quorums” established in Nauvoo and the evolving definition of the Relief Society as one of several auxiliaries under priesthood direction influenced Relief Society’s experience during the transitional years, 1901 to 1920.¹⁴ Disappointing events, such as the Relief Society’s struggle and failure to obtain a Relief Society building of its own, despite having raised the necessary funds to finance the project, established a pattern of dealing with uncomfortable change, setbacks, and shifting organizational identity with courage and resilience.

Throughout this early era, the Relief Society continued its efforts to foster sisterhood, support education, perform charity work both locally and abroad and, in Orson F. Whitney’s words, to “stand side by side” with the brethren as the Prophet Joseph Smith had instructed Relief Society women.¹⁵ Derr, Cannon, and Beecher’s reflections on this early period of correlation, accommodation, cooperation, and change fittingly frame the struggles and growth that the Relief Society would experience again in later years: “To the Relief Society, as to the flowerbed, all three operations were essential: new programs must be initiated; the soil must be maintained, loose and moist; and the perennials, those faithful vines which grew year after year, must be pruned. The cutting back, however painful it might be to the gardener, or, metaphorically, to the vine, was essential. It would provide opportunity for new growth without destroying the stock or root.”¹⁶

Correlation: A Refuge from the Storm

Similarly, correlation efforts of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s would prove painful, yet essential, and generally profitable for Relief Society, whose membership would diversify and grow exponentially. In 1960, the First Presidency addressed a letter to the general priesthood committee:

We have noted what seemed to be a tendency toward a fundamental, guiding concept, particularly among certain of the Auxiliary Organizations, that there must be every year a new course of study for each of the

13. Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 154.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Orson F. Whitney, as quoted in *ibid.*, 172.

16. *Ibid.*, 179.

Auxiliary Organizations. . . . We question whether the composite of all of them might not tend away from the development of a given line of study or activity having the ultimate and desired objective of building up a knowledge of the Gospel. . . .

We have sometimes been led to wonder whether there was a *proper observance* of the field of a particular Auxiliary of what might be termed its jurisdiction. . . . We would therefore commend to you Brethren of the General Priesthood Committee the beginning of an exhaustive, prayerful study and consideration of this entire subject, with the co-operative assistance of the Auxiliaries themselves so that the Church might reap the maximum harvest from the devotion of the faith, intelligence, skill and knowledge of our various Auxiliary Organizations and Priesthood Committees.¹⁷

This letter set in motion a number of changes in Church programs in the years to come. In 1962, Apostle Harold B. Lee called priesthood correlation a “program of defense” designed to be “a refuge from the storm.”¹⁸ It was a consolidation of forces that echoed earlier rallying cries to priesthood quorums to fulfill their duties. Apostle Hugh B. Brown appealed to Church members to fight “an ideological war, a spiritual war,” to raise their defenses against the perceived growing dangers of the outside world that threatened to displace the home and diminish traditional authority. He likened members to an army in which “absolute loyalty” was critical to survival.¹⁹

The autonomy of the various auxiliaries was viewed increasingly as an organizational impediment rather than a strength. To correct this fault, Lee’s program of defense altered the Relief Society’s publications, curriculum, lines of communication, finances, and decision-making by placing the organization more firmly under priesthood direction and correlation committees. Correlation was the means, Lee noted, “to place the priesthood of God where the Lord said it was to be—as the center and core of the church and kingdom of God.”²⁰ The aim of consolidating “the forces of the Lord” and realigning auxiliaries under priesthood direction was, ac-

17. Quoted in Lee, “The Correlation Program,” 502.

18. Harold B. Lee, “New Plan of Co-Ordination Explained,” *Improvement Era* 65 (January 1962): 37.

19. Hugh B. Brown, “Loyalty to the Church,” *Improvement Era* 65 (January 1962): 38–39.

20. Quoted in Meg Wheatley, “An Expanded Definition of Priesthood,” 154.

ording to Lee, to accomplish “the salvation of the children of men in the most effective way possible.”²¹

This consolidation and central control, he foresaw, would facilitate the “rapid expansion and growth of the Church,” funding lesson materials, buildings, increased temple work, genealogical work and welfare activities through cost reduction and simplification.²² Paul’s vision of the Church as “the body of Christ” signaled to Lee the necessity of constant correlation so that the Church could “perform as a perfectly organized human body, with every member functioning as it was intended.”²³

To reach the objectives of correlation, several committees were formed under priesthood leadership to identify the original purposes of the auxiliaries, to realign the auxiliaries to the newly defined Church goals, and to oversee all curriculum production and content for children, youth, and adult members.²⁴ These committees were responsible for keeping all Church programs, like the nervous system, “operating harmoniously together.”²⁵

What this streamlining meant in practical terms for the Relief Society’s leaders was a decreased ability to directly control content and programs for their members. Prior to correlation, the Relief Society general presidency and board chose writers and content for their lessons and magazine with relative freedom. Under correlation, the Relief Society continued to have important input on curriculum committees (see discussion below), but ultimately, the locus of decision-making and information control was shifted away from the women.

Nonetheless, I argue that the results of an increasingly bureaucratic, “priesthood-centered” church, although at times costly in terms of organizational autonomy and decision-making representation, have proved generally beneficial for the expanding and transforming Relief Society organization.

Church Magazines

Church magazines and periodicals have been a consistent and valuable part of the auxiliaries’ efforts to provide their members with a voice

21. Lee, “New Plan of Co-Ordination Explained,” 37.

22. *Ibid.*, 36.

23. *Ibid.*, 36, 34; D&C 84:108–110.

24. Lee, “New Plan of Co-Ordination Explained,” 35–36.

25. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Report from the Correlation Committee,” *Improvement Era* 65 (December 1962): 936.

and a means of disseminating important information regarding the gospel and Church members. The Church has a long history of periodicals, beginning with the *Evening and Morning Star*, a monthly paper published in Independence, Missouri, beginning in June 1832.²⁶ *The Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* followed soon after in Kirtland, Ohio. In 1837 the magazine was changed to the *Elders' Journal*, which carried on for another year. Others included *Times and Seasons* in Nauvoo, *Millennial Star* from 1840 until 1970 in England, and *Austral Star* from 1929 to 1958 representing the Australian Mission.²⁷ The list of Church periodicals in English, with name changes included, represents over forty periodicals from the beginning of the *Evening and Morning Star* until the Church's introduction of the *Ensign* (for adults), the *Friend* (for children) and the *New Era* (for teenagers) in 1971. These periodicals replaced all existing publications by auxiliaries and missions. Among the magazines retired under this new policy was the fifty-seven-year-old *Relief Society Magazine*.

Mormon women in Utah had historically supported their own periodicals. Lula Greene Richards had founded the *Woman's Exponent* in 1872, a newspaper with ever-close ties to the Relief Society, especially when Emmeline B. Wells, future general president of the Relief Society, became its editor in 1877. It was transformed in 1914 into the *Relief Society Bulletin* as an official publication of the organization and, in 1915, into the *Relief Society Magazine*. The *Young Woman's Journal* began publishing in 1889, followed by the *Children's Friend* in 1902. The Relief Society was wholly responsible for financing, publishing, and managing subscriptions to the magazine throughout its existence.²⁸ Each ward Relief Society had magazine representatives, and officers diligently encouraged women to subscribe to "their" magazine.

The *Relief Society Magazine* reached English-speaking sisters in countries such as Canada, the United States, New Zealand, Australia, and the

26. Doyle Green, "The Church and Its Magazines," *Ensign* 1 (January 1971), 12.

27. 1974 *Deseret News Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1974), 200-201.

28. Belle Smith Spafford, Oral History, interviewed by Jill Mulvay Derr, February 9, 1976, typescript, 182, James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Family and Church History Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter LDS Church Archives).

Pacific Islands. At its inception, it was characterized as “a beacon light of hope, beauty and charity.”²⁹ Fifty years later, its aim was still “to uplift women in their God-given work as wife, mother, grandmother, homemaker, and charitable neighbor.”³⁰ Its pages were filled with news from Relief Society sisters in “From Near and Far,” as well as messages, poetry, recipes, and fiction written for and usually by women. One issue notes that its stories were “fortunately” not “confined to the realm of man’s achievement.”³¹ “Notes from the Field” highlighted Relief Society bazaars, visiting teaching, Singing Mothers (Relief Society choirs), homemaking, and socials that were a vibrant part of the organization. The magazine also included lessons, editorials, and birthday congratulations to individuals.

An editorial in the January 1963 *Relief Society Magazine* celebrating the magazine’s fiftieth anniversary represented the sentiment many women felt toward “their” magazine:

The *Magazine* represents Relief Society, both in its historic aspects and in its present greatly enlarged scope and distribution. Just as Relief Society is a unique organization—organized, and in its early days, directed by the Prophet Joseph Smith—so the *Magazine* is unique, keeping always the same purpose, but being a voice to reach the tens of thousands who now constitute the worldwide sisterhood. . . . Transcending the borders and barriers of nations and of continents, the *Magazine* carries far and wide a uniting voice. . . . The *Relief Society Magazine* belongs to every member of Relief Society—a unique messenger—unlike any other magazine available anywhere—our *Magazine*, serving the purposes and ideals of the sisterhood, representing the women of the Church and speaking for them.³²

Women were encouraged to express “their hopes, fears, aspirations, needs, counsel, and conclusions . . . preserved for future generations”³³ in the pages of the *Relief Society Magazine*. In very real terms, the magazine gave

29. “The Mission of Our Magazine,” *Relief Society Magazine* 2 (January 1915), 38; reprinted in Marianne C. Sharp, “Relief Society Magazine’s Fiftieth Anniversary,” *Relief Society Magazine* 50, no. 1 (January 1963): 14.

30. Sharp, “Relief Society Magazine’s Fiftieth Anniversary,” 15.

31. “Editorial: Backward and Forward,” *Relief Society Magazine* 10 (October 1923): 254.

32. Vesta P. Crawford, “Editorial,” *Relief Society Magazine*, 50 (January 1963): 34–35.

33. Sharp, “Relief Society Magazine’s Fiftieth Anniversary,” 16.

women power and validity as authors and “image makers”³⁴ in a Church that highlights the male voice. It provided an official and creative forum for women to unite in the gospel, in their lives, and their interests. The sense of ownership and voice given to women through the magazine, and its attention to topics of particular interest to its female readers aided in creating a community of English-speaking sisters united and bonded together.

On January 26, 1966, Belle Spafford made an announcement that showed the Relief Society’s resolve to reach more of its sisters. With close coordination between the Relief Society and the translation, publishing, and distribution departments of the Church, the *Relief Society Magazine* became available in Spanish.³⁵ Comments of appreciation flowed to the Relief Society general offices from Spanish-speaking sisters delighted to be further connected to their sisters in other parts of the world. Sister Neda H. Strong, Relief Society supervisor in the Argentine Mission, responded to the news, “I am sure words cannot express the great thrill we all feel on learning that the *Relief Society Magazine* will be published in the Spanish language. This is surely a dream come true.”³⁶ Spanish-speaking sisters in Mexico adorned their special Spanish magazines with organdy covers to preserve them.³⁷ Marianne Sharp, magazine editor and member of the Relief Society general presidency, recalled that President Belle Smith Spafford and Louise Madsen, her second counselor, visited Mexico and found the Spanish-speaking sisters “so thrilled to know that they were getting just what the rest of the Church was getting. So it was just wonderful.”³⁸ The Spanish editions necessitated careful consideration of the content of the magazine, as

34. Vella Neil Evans, “Empowerment and Mormon Women’s Publications,” in Hanks, *Women and Authority*, 49–68.

35. John E. Carr, “For in *That Day*,” 1980, typescript, 83, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter cited as Perry Special Collections); photocopy of typescript in LDS Church Archives.

36. Quoted in *ibid.*, 83.

37. Spafford, *Oral History*, 184.

38. Marianne C. Sharp, *Oral History*, interviewed by Jessie L. Embry, May 19, 1977, typescript, 58, Moyle Oral History Program, LDS Church Archives.

Spafford noted, "because then we became aware that we were becoming a universal Church."³⁹

As Church membership grew, however, and correlation tugged the Relief Society in new directions, change was inevitable. Even before the push of priesthood correlation of the 1960s, a male presence was clearly evident in the *Relief Society Magazine*. While men had written only 20 percent of signed articles in 1937, by 1956, men were writing 75 percent of the lessons and 33 percent of the magazine's articles.⁴⁰ Other changes were evident as well. In later issues of the magazine, traditional items were necessarily eliminated and modified, as space to accommodate growing needs was limited. For example, "Sixty Years Ago," which featured excerpts from the *Woman's Exponent* from 1944 to 1962, was eliminated. Because the magazine could not feature all of the events being reported by stakes, it limited the number of submissions. The magazine had paid tribute to Relief Society members ninety years and older on their birthdays, a feature that was not carried over in the *Ensign*. "That was a loss to the older women who loved to see their names in the magazine," Spafford recognized. Naturally, women in other language groups also wanted the *Relief Society Magazine* in their own language, but Spafford knew it was a desire that the organization could not accommodate.⁴¹ Clearly, the day was approaching when women would have to find new and more local outlets for uniting in sisterhood and celebrating individual members.

In 1970, the publication's final year, Relief Society reported a membership of over 338,000 sisters with 301,000 subscriptions to the magazine.⁴² It meant that the magazine would have been reaching an enviable 89 percent of its potential audience, although, in fact, at least some non-Mormon women also subscribed. Marianne Sharp, the *Magazine's*

39. Spafford, Oral History, 184.

40. Evans, "Empowerment and Mormon Women's Publications," 63.

41. Spafford, Oral History, 182, 184.

42. Belle Spafford, "Reports and Official Instructions," *Relief Society Magazine* 57 (November 1970), 814. Editorial, *Relief Society Magazine*, December 1970, 895, reported the subscription figure, a number that Sharp repeated in her oral history (59). Spafford noted in her own oral history that "foreign language missions, where the sisters were not as far along in an understanding of the doctrine of the Church," received different lessons than those presented in the *Relief Society Magazine*. They dealt primarily with "the first principles of the gospel" (194).

editor, boasted, "We had a larger circulation than the Era. . . . The sisters loved it."⁴³ Spafford noted, though without details, that from time to time "somebody would come up with the idea of discontinuing the *Relief Society Magazine* and having one family magazine"; but Spafford had shown priesthood leaders—she mentioned Apostle Albert E. Bowen in particular—how a single, family-oriented Church publication could not meet the needs of Relief Society sisters and "still preserve the priesthood aspect of it."⁴⁴ Such efforts preserved the Relief Society's "voice."

By 1970, however, the climate had changed. Despite the impressive subscription numbers and a carefully written letter from Relief Society leaders requesting that the magazine be kept, priesthood leaders chose to end the magazine along with all others representing organizations, auxiliaries, or geographical regions. Aiming to simplify and consolidate, they doubted the necessity or practicality of continuing with the Church's numerous publications.⁴⁵ In 1962, correlation had called for the "elimination of the insignificant" with an emphasis on providing what was "essential in every life, everywhere in the world."⁴⁶ For enthusiastic subscribers, the *Relief Society Magazine* was anything but insignificant. The implications, however, of correlation's call to eliminate spelled out the inevitable demise of the woman's magazine. Correlation, expansion, the shift to a Church-wide budget, and an evolving vision of how to meet the needs of the greatest number of its members ended the esteemed *Relief Society Magazine*.

In the Church's effort to reach its worldwide membership, some of the old-time familiarity and "female voice" cherished by English-speakers was lost as the *Relief Society Magazine* gave way to the *Ensign* for adult English-speakers and the *Unified Magazine*, which translated selections from all three of the English publications for non-English speakers.

In the closing issue of the *Relief Society Magazine*, editor Marianne

Foreign language missions did not generally receive most other parts of the magazine.

43. Sharp, Oral History, 59.

44. Spafford, Oral History, 186.

45. See Spafford, Oral History, 186; and Sharp, Oral History, 67, for accounts of the the magazine's end.

46. Richard L. Evans, "Elimination of the Insignificant," *Improvement Era* 65 (January 1962), 37–39.

Sharp wrote a restrained editorial to console readers and reaffirm the women's support of priesthood leaders:

Changing times bring changing conditions. That is basic to Latter-day Saints who believe in continuous revelation. Changing times have brought the end of the journey to the Relief Society Magazine. The times were different when it began in 1914—and that time was the end of the journey for the Woman's Exponent. . . . And with 1970 begins a new era in Relief Society when Relief Society members join with other adult members of the Church in supporting an adult Church magazine. . . . As we detail and recall nostalgic memories, we still, obedient to the priesthood and receiving direction from them, face forward in step with the new era of the 1970's with anticipation and a sense of dedication and support for the all-adult magazine. *Moriturae te salutamus*.⁴⁷

Despite calls to face forward with the new era, adjustment to changing times was difficult for many sisters who had thrived on their magazine's tradition. President Spafford, who called change the "the handmaid of progress," experienced resistance and dismay from her Relief Society sisters. In a letter to a friend, Spafford notes, "Everywhere I go the women seem to be grieving over the loss of the Magazine. Strangely, they seem more sad over this than the change in the financing program."⁴⁸ While the *Ensign* published articles, poetry, and comments written by and sometimes directed to women, the collective effect was not the same for English-speaking sisters. Women would lament, "'Oh, we miss the *Relief Society Magazine!* . . . The *Ensign's* wonderful, but it isn't a women's magazine."⁴⁹ In 1975, five years after the end of the magazine, Spafford commented:

The women are still longing for their magazine. I think almost the last letter I got as president of Relief Society [she had been released in October 1974] was a plea to have the magazine again. . . . The *Ensign* . . . just can't do it all in the space that they have. When we had our own conferences and our own magazine we could publish verbatim the talks of the First Presidency, the talks of the Relief Society presidency. . . . Women who never in the wide world could come to conference and hear those great men, could

47. Marianne C. Sharp, "Editorial: Facing Forward," *Relief Society Magazine* 57 (December 1970): 894–95. Sharp translates *Moriturae te salutamus* to read, "We salute you in death."

48. Belle Spafford, Letter to Mrs. Ethyl Sessions, September 14, 1970, Perry Special Collections.

49. Sharp, Oral History, 59.

read their messages. And their messages were directed toward the women, not toward the Church as a whole, but to the woman, and her role, and her place in the eternal plan. To me this is a great loss.⁵⁰

An International Voice

What were the tradeoffs and benefits of this difficult change? Amid the “great loss” of the *Relief Society Magazine*, a new voice representing the Church-wide body was already underway, extending to greater numbers of Saints, both women and men, benefits hitherto enjoyed chiefly by English-speaking members, particularly those nestled along Utah’s Wasatch Front. As non-English membership increased, the need to reach more nations and more members in their primary languages in a uniform voice from the official Church became evident. The complexity of translating massive quantities of material into numerous languages at several printing locations also signaled the need for a new approach that would be more efficient and reach greater numbers at an affordable cost.⁵¹

Elder Dean L. Larsen, the General Authority in charge of the *Ensign*, reminded members in 1974 that the “international, intercultural, multilingual nature of the Church membership” had become “emphatically more pronounced” with members living in 102 countries and speaking 112 languages.⁵² At that point, the Book of Mormon had been translated into fewer than thirty-five languages, a sign of how urgently the Church needed to fully address the immediate gospel needs of international members.⁵³ Members of a “worldwide kingdom” were cautioned that there was “no room” in the “far-flung Church membership for narrow local interests and provincialism,” hinting that the time had come for a more equitable distribution of resources previously focused on meeting

50. Spafford, Oral History, 187-88.

51. Carr, “For in *That Day*,” 19, 39-66, 92, 106-9. He reports two studies (101-5), including one by Safeway Stores, of the Church’s production and distribution of published materials. It details the need for closer coordination of “writing, publication, and distribution” structures (103).

52. Dean L. Larsen, “The Challenges of Administering a Worldwide Church,” *Ensign*, July 1974, 20.

53. 1989-1990 *Deseret News Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1990), 194-95.

the needs of members in a rather small geographic area.⁵⁴ While the *Relief Society Magazine* had reached English-speaking members around the world, its content was in fact at times ethnocentric and of decidedly local appeal. Its poetry and fiction, for example, were not easily adaptable or translatable for an international audience. Given the scarce resources, it would have been difficult to make a case for translating fiction into numerous languages.

As women in English-speaking areas struggled to embrace the adult *Ensign*, correlation committees and the emerging translation and publication department simultaneously strove to reach Relief Society sisters abroad. Magazines, curriculum, teaching aids, lesson manuals, and scriptures became increasingly available as auxiliaries and correlation committees worked interdependently to meet the needs of an increasingly international church. The membership in 1960 had been 1,693,180; but twenty years later it had reached 4.5 million and, in 2000, over 11 million. This growth was made possible in part by correlation's streamlining of communication channels. Over half of the Church's membership by February 2000 was located outside the United States and Canada, with over 700,000 members in Asia, 850,000 members in Mexico, 136,000 in Africa, and over 2.4 million in South America.⁵⁵ Clearly, correlation committees and Church leaders in well-established stakes carefully weighed local interests and fond traditions against the need to bind the growing membership into the body of Christ.

While several missions had published their own magazines intermittently between 1840 and 1970, concerns were growing over the number and variety of magazines published and the range in quality and content. The process of translating and producing the various magazines was laborious and often involved mission presidents and missionaries whose efforts, time, and money could be more appropriately channeled.⁵⁶ Both the Mexican Mission and the Argentine Mission were publishing magazines in Spanish. Carr provides an in-house administrative report by Elder Gordon B. Hinckley in 1966: "Both *Liahona* and *El Mensajero* are rather ambitiously put together. They exceed in content and excel in makeup the magazines issued in the European Mission, in South Africa, and in the

54. Larsen, "Challenges of Administering a Worldwide Church," 20.

55. 1980-1990 *Deseret News Church Almanac*, 194-95.

56. Carr, "For in That Day," 70-71, 93, 246-47.

South Pacific. . . . Each magazine is edited and mailed by missionaries. The Mexico Mission advises that 360 man hours per month are required for this, with one missionary spending all of his time on the magazine."⁵⁷ Hinckley recommended "that the Church publish one Spanish-language magazine [at Church headquarters] for distribution in all of the Spanish-language missions." That recommendation was implemented, leading to several benefits for Spanish readers, including added selections from the *Children's Friend*.

In 1966, J. Thomas Fyans, managing director of the Distribution and Translation Services Department, requested the Relief Society and auxiliaries to select materials representative of their program to be included in a monthly non-English publication. He also set up monthly meetings with representatives of the auxiliaries, three English magazines, and the Translation Department to accomplish this task. After much consideration of the European mission magazines and the possible benefits of a more united effort, in 1967 the Church introduced the baldly named *Unified Magazine*, published in nine languages by the Translation Services Department.⁵⁸ The centralization and professionalization of this department represented a long stride toward the Church's goal "to unify the common message to all the world simultaneously, to effect a savings in costs, and to assure a high degree of quality worthy of the Church."⁵⁹ Belle Spafford, Relief Society general secretary Hulda P. Young, and board member Evon W. Peterson attended an April 1967 seminar for magazine representatives, managers, and auxiliary representatives working on the new magazine. Along with other auxiliary leaders, Relief Society leaders "gave hearty endorsement" to

57. Quoted in *ibid.*, 247.

58. This department had been created in 1965 by the First Presidency. Carr, its managing director, wrote in "For in *That Day*," 113, that it may have seemed "just another routine" reorganization, but in hindsight it positioned the Church to effectively manage "an explosive and miraculous growth. . . . For the first time there was an independent stewardship for translation created which would lighten ecclesiastical burdens and provide a professional service competent to keep pace with the predicted growth within the Church."

59. *Ibid.*, 250.

the project, pledging support to the new unified magazine.⁶⁰ By 1969 the magazine was published in seven additional languages, representing the sixteen “established languages” of the Church.⁶¹ In 1970, reflecting the growth of the Church, the magazine was renamed the *International Magazine*, with each language maintaining an individual name for its magazine, such as *L’Etoile* in French and *Lys over Norge* in Norwegian.

In April 1976, non-English speakers received for the first time the full texts of the entire general conference, a benefit long enjoyed by English-speaking members.⁶² In 1987, the visiting teaching message, an important vehicle for uniting and reaching the women of the Church, was moved from lesson manuals to the *Ensign* and international magazines. This change allowed greater flexibility in addressing current concerns as well as making the message more accessible to women worldwide. Today, the visiting teaching message, is published in the nineteen monthly international magazines, while fifty-five languages receive the message as a separate monthly publication.⁶³ The international magazine, now called *Liahona*, is published twice a year in approximately fifty languages for the general conference reports.

Although the Church’s women no longer had a unique forum for communication, the Church was now meeting the needs of an expanding worldwide membership in ways unfeasible and unimaginable in earlier

60. *Ibid.*, 252.

61. The Church established an introduction, Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III program for various languages depending on the number of speakers of the language, number of members speaking the language, and other factors. The “established languages” were Phase III languages that received the full “church program” including scriptures, missionary teaching packets, videos, discussions for new members, forms for ward operation, lesson manuals for youth and adults, and so on. Phases are currently called “Basic Member Program,” “Simplified Full Church Program,” and “Full Church Program.” See “Church Curriculum: Helping Us Learn and Live the Gospel,” *Ensign* 16 (January 1986): 20–24. Although Carr gives the number of languages as sixteen, he names seventeen into which the unified magazine was published as of 1969: Chinese, Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Philippines, Portuguese, Samoan, Spanish, Swedish, Tahitian, and Tongan.

62. *Ibid.*, 255.

63. Chart displaying languages into which the First Presidency and visiting teaching messages are translated, September 17, 2002, courtesy of LeRoy Chambers, Church Correlation Department.

years. As Spanish-speaking sisters in 1966 delighted in receiving the *Relief Society Magazine* in Spanish, women of many languages today celebrate a common gospel message connecting them to a worldwide sisterhood and brotherhood.⁶⁴

Over thirty years after the end of the *Relief Society Magazine* and the beginning of the *Ensign* and *International Magazine*, Elaine Jack, five years after her own release as general president, reflected her awareness of a new era for the Relief Society, challenging narratives of loss and looking to the growing Church:

I can see in the long run, you lose a little and you gain a little and you go along with the development. The internationalization of the Church has made a big difference. I think Relief Society has benefited as a result. . . . We need to look to the future. We need to look outside of our little box, because we've got to progress. If you really love somebody in Indonesia, or you really love somebody in Afghanistan, then we've got to be willing to give up something that we have for somebody else.

I don't think it [*Relief Society Magazine*] was that great of a loss. It served the purpose of its time, like the *Woman's Exponent* served that time. . . . We have developed so far since that time. . . . I think the *Ensign* has done extremely well for a Church magazine and I think they are improving constantly. Their articles are maybe not as pointed directly to women, but they are embracing all church membership in more important subjects. They have very good articles that are not for the men, not for the women. *They are for us.* We have to give up in the minute, but we got something much better. So it's okay.⁶⁵

Clearly, the termination of the *Relief Society Magazine* with the substitution of the *Ensign* and the international magazines for the Church's adults, including its women, brought moments of sacrifice and loss, raising questions about how a growing church could meet and represent the needs and voices of its members. Who would speak and what message would be told? Would women lose their voice altogether? Or would their voice be unified with men's voice in a common gospel message? Correla-

64. This response is evident in many women's responses to a 1991 Relief Society call for conversion stories and statements on what it means to be a Latter-day Saint woman. The Relief Society received hundreds of letters, 333 of which were thematically categorized by a volunteer committee and titled "Women's Voices." Photocopy of unpublished report courtesy of Cherry Silver, former general board member.

65. Jack, Interview, 14-15; emphasis mine.

tion provided answers to questions of voice and representation that were unsatisfactory to many while practical and beneficial for many others, particularly for non-English speaking Church members and Relief Society sisters who would enjoy the gospel message in greater numbers. My evaluation is that, overall, the sacrifices and trade-offs were worthwhile. They allowed the Church to move forward with a unified voice in the face of scarce time, money, and resources, and competing needs.

Relief Society Courses of Study

As with Church magazines, the effects of Church growth and the aims of correlation were significant in shaping the Relief Society's curriculum and its role in curriculum development after 1960. Elder Larsen's 1974 *Ensign* article on "The Challenges of Administering a Worldwide Church" described the phenomenal efforts involved in translating curriculum materials and adapting them "to suit a wide range of cultural backgrounds and customs." At that time, he said, the Church was working on 18,000 translations including "scriptures, lesson manuals, visual aids, organization bulletins, missionary tracts, report forms, and certain hard-bound books." The international magazine alone took one month to translate into a single language.⁶⁶ The article reminded English-speaking members in more comfortable circumstances that they enjoyed comparative affluence and access to Church materials while "some of their fellow saints" were "meeting in condemned and inadequate buildings" and could not "receive even a rudimentary education." For some of these international saints, "the price of a Sunday School manual represent[ed] a week's wages."⁶⁷

The move in new directions was spurred not only by economic concerns and problems of translation and distribution but also by a desire to correlate member instruction in principles that the Church deemed most critical to support the family and increase knowledge of the gospel. In addition, the move reflected a conscious response to concerns and suggestions given to the Relief Society general presidency from sisters throughout the world.

While changes would lessen the Relief Society's direct control over curriculum content, they would open realistic ways to accomplish the task

66. Larsen, "The Challenges of Administering a Worldwide Church," 20.

67. *Ibid.*, 22.

of producing basic materials in a more efficient, culturally sensitive manner. This point becomes apparent in examining in greater detail (1) the *process* of lesson production (from Relief Society committees to curriculum committees overseen by priesthood leaders), and (2) the changes in *content* that reflected correlation's goals of simplifying and focusing on gospel principles for a diverse, international membership.

The shift to curriculum committees which write lessons and influence the content of lesson manuals is seen by some scholars of Mormonism as evidence of the Relief Society's loss of power and authority to speak for and to its own constituency.⁶⁸ However, a closer look at the process involved in curriculum production before and after correlation raises some frequently overlooked points that create a more complex picture. First, while the Relief Society had relative autonomy in determining curriculum topics and commissioning lessons prior to correlation, it frequently used priesthood leaders and some form of external review as mediators of lesson content and quality. For instance, in 1944, the Relief Society lessons became subject to approval by the Church Publications Committee, who reviewed lessons for doctrinal accuracy.⁶⁹ Relief Society autonomy was never complete. In addition, all auxiliaries necessarily gave up some control under correlation to coordinate their efforts and meet unified goals encompassing all members of the Church. In other words, this was not a change required only of the Relief Society. Second, a close examination of curriculum production reveals a continuation of important contributions and input by women within the correlation structure as well as a general increase in the professionalization of curriculum writing for men and women's organizations of the Church.

Prior to priesthood correlation of the 1960s, each auxiliary had the responsibility to develop its own curriculum and write its own lessons, which presented both advantages and disadvantages. While it allowed the Relief Society greater flexibility in choosing the content of its curriculum, it also allowed the overlap or neglect of important topics between auxiliaries. Missions were often left with the burden of adapting or rewriting les-

68. See, for example, Peterson, "Structuring Closure through Technological Discourse"; Hanks, editor's introduction, *Women and Authority*; and Evans, "Empowerment and Mormon Women's Publications," in *Women and Authority*.

69. Evans, "Empowerment," 179; 1975 *Deseret News Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1975), F25.

sons that did not meet their needs. Additionally, prior to 1980 when the Church changed to a calendar year and twelve-month lesson schedule, missions were faced with the burden of filling the gaps created by the eight-month lesson schedule designed primarily to accommodate summer vacation months enjoyed by American and Canadian members.⁷⁰

Before correlation, the general Relief Society board commissioned its own writers, both men and women, whose work was reviewed and approved or sent back for revision by delegated members of the Relief Society board, oversaw the *Relief Society Magazine's* content.⁷¹ Although the Relief Society initially chose its own writers, Spafford notes, "We always had them approved." Relief Society leaders also sought and valued input from their priesthood advisors, including Joseph Fielding Smith (the society's senior advisor for approximately twenty-two years), Harold B. Lee, Boyd K. Packer, Marvin J. Ashton, and Thomas S. Monson, who often made suggestions on writers.⁷² Thus, the pattern of obtaining approval from and working closely with priesthood leaders was well established before correlation more noticeably altered communication channels in the 1960s, placing ultimate decision-making control further from the Relief Society. Changes that appear on the surface to represent drastic reductions in women's control over lesson material are thus more properly viewed on a continuum where women have consistently worked and negotiated with priesthood leadership, to greater or lesser degrees, in the production of lesson material.

For example, according to Spafford, before correlation efforts of the 1960s, the general Relief Society presidency established "rigid editorial policies" for the magazine that reflected their own vision for magazine content yet were sensitive to the vision of priesthood leaders. She notes, "We were cautioned against publishing articles wherein some brother or sister felt they had a—I won't say revelation—but some divine inspiration

70. (No author), "A Decade of Growth," *Ensign*, January 1984, 14.

71. It is not clear whether the magazine's editors also had oversight for the lessons published in it. According to Spafford, *Oral History*, 193, "The [lesson] writers would come up to our office and sit in that small conference room for hours with the committees and they'd talk through the plans. . . . Then the committee would bring it to the board and then the board would approve of that, or disapprove and make recommendations for modifications."

72. *Ibid.*, 96, 193.

which affected the women of the Church.” Spafford did not see this caution as restricting the Relief Society. Rather, it “safeguarded the material that went into the magazine so that it would be worthy of the Church and the Relief Society organization.”⁷³ When asked if the *Relief Society Magazine* was subject to review from the Brethren or later from the Correlation Committee, Spafford characterized correlation and some form of content review as a continuation of practices established in earlier decades rather than a sudden shift in the 1960s.

Under President Grant, from 1918 to 1945, Spafford commented, “the editors of Church publications were all aware of the scrutiny . . . that President Grant exercised over the magazines to assure that they reflected what the Church stood for.” Spafford continued, “As long as I can remember the Church has labored with correlation. At one time, early in my administration . . . we had a meeting at regular intervals where all of the auxiliaries would be represented by a member of the presidency or the superintendency.” The purpose of these meetings was similar to post-1960 correlation efforts: to avoid overlapping material and to “harmonize auxiliary policies.”⁷⁴ While articles prior to the 1960s were not subject to the same level of clearance, mechanisms were obviously at work, regulating the information flow within the Church and screening its quality. If articles were published in the magazine that a General Authority did not approve of, Spafford recalls, “you may be sure we heard about it.”⁷⁵

Today, the mechanism for regulating information has increasingly become the work of professionalized correlation committees, consisting of educators, scholars, volunteers, board members, and paid employees who devote time to researching and writing lessons. Correlation committees are under the ultimate direction of priesthood leaders. Yet, in the day-to-day operation of producing curricula, these committees consist of both men and women who participate in the writing, planning, and implementation of Relief Society curricula as well as the curriculum for all auxiliaries and priesthood quorums. The Relief Society presidency and board enjoy a generally positive and productive relationship with workers on curriculum committees. While Elaine Jack served on the Relief Society general board (1972-84), she worked with the curriculum committees that

73. *Ibid.*, 179.

74. *Ibid.*

75. *Ibid.*

wrote the mother education and cultural refinement lessons. After the curriculum department “took over the writing of the lessons,” Jack notes, “we still had some input and worked closely with them. . . . I think they probably mostly chose the writers according to the subject, but we had developed the outlines for them.” Jack found the procedure of producing outlines and then leaving the bulk of writing to professional committees to be beneficial for the Relief Society, particularly since board members who were slow to complete lessons sometimes missed deadlines. “It was a big help,” she says, “and really, there was a good professionalism and a good interchange after the curriculum committee took the lessons over. We had a lot of input.”⁷⁶

The curriculum was planned according to master charts that made sure essential gospel principles were taught at regular intervals and that parents and children learned the same concept on the same day. These charts were not just a management tool, but were designed to produce a curriculum that would create “a greater love of our Father in Heaven and our Savior, Jesus Christ.”⁷⁷ Correlation committees prioritized areas of study that all members should encounter at various stages of their lives. These areas were modified over the years and included topics such as spiritual matters, recreation, home, and family. The spiritual area was further divided into the Godhead, principles of the priesthood, and so on.⁷⁸ Planning charts indicated “the degree of complexity, the lesson objectives, supporting materials, the age group being taught, and the organization teaching the principle.”⁷⁹ Curriculum for children aimed to “acquaint” children with the gospel. Youth curriculum “reinforces” this learning and adult curriculum “solidifies a member’s understanding of the scriptures and teachings of the prophets.”⁸⁰

Priesthood lessons and Relief Society lessons had slightly different foci yet were more closely coordinated with each other. A 1986 *Ensign* article lists the major emphases in adult curriculum for Relief Society as “gospel doctrines and principles, service, parenting skills” and “human

76. Jack, Interview, 2.

77. “Church Curriculum: Helping Us Learn and Live the Gospel,” 20.

78. Jack, Interview, 3.

79. Carlos E. Asay, “For the Perfecting of the Saints’: A Look at Church Curriculum,” *Ensign*, January 1986, 16.

80. “Church Curriculum: Helping Us Learn and Live the Gospel,” 20.

relations.” For Melchizedek Priesthood, the emphases were “gospel doctrines and principles,” “priesthood service and responsibilities,” “parenting skills,” and “temple preparation.”

Elaine Jack, who worked with the Melchizedek Priesthood curriculum, recalled: “We [Relief Society] may not have had the same lesson, written exactly, but they were correlated so that men and women got the same subject. I don’t think anybody knew that, except the person who looked at the chart.” Jack describes the hours she spent over her pool table charting lessons with committee members. Her comments reflect the openness and cooperation she experienced with curriculum committees. Her experiences therefore modify the view that shifting curriculum production to correlation committees damaged the Relief Society and left women powerless. “I felt that they [members of the curriculum committee] were very *receptive* and I felt we had a good relationship and we could discuss things quite openly,” she recalled. “In fact, I sort of *felt in charge*. But I also respected their expertise. These were Ph.D.’s in the curriculum department. I’m not and I understand that.”⁸¹

In addition to coordinating materials for all age groups of the Church, correlation strove to meet the needs of a diverse adult membership. It proved difficult to create palatable lessons suited to a worldwide audience, while also meeting the needs of particular groups, such as college-age sisters, “Lamanite” sisters, and members at varying levels of gospel and cultural immersion in the Church. The changes in curriculum content, particularly the Relief Society lessons, illustrate the struggle of both the Relief Society and the correlation department to adapt to changing times and different personal circumstances while connecting the worldwide sisterhood in universal gospel principles.

A letter dated December 18, 1950, from the “Education Counselor” in Belle Spafford’s presidency (she would have been Velma N. Simonsen) communicated the difficulty the Relief Society faced in making material applicable and relevant to an international sisterhood. Her letter illustrates both the freedom and challenges created by relying on missions to adapt, discard, or write their own lessons:

As the new year approaches, we are wondering how the lesson work of Relief Society in your mission is progressing.

All the lesson material is based on gospel principles and teachings and

81. Jack, Interview, 3; emphasis mine.

should prove helpful and inspiring to Relief Society members. . . . We do not know if the optional lessons for work meeting are at all suitable for your mission but if you find they are, from reading them in the Magazine, you might be able to adapt parts of them, at least, for use on that day. Such material, however, probably, needs to be different for each mission, taking into account the living conditions of each country.

It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to write lessons entirely suited to the varying needs of sisters throughout the world, however, the gospel is understandable to all. . . . The lessons as outlined for 1951–1952 contain material on the settlement of North America with special reference to it as a part of the promised land. Do you feel this material would be unsuited to present conditions in your mission? Please advise us at your early convenience.⁸²

Changes to more culturally adaptable gospel lessons reduced work for missions, which had hitherto borne individually the burden of rewriting or finding substitutes for irrelevant lessons. The shift facilitated difficult translation, publication, and distribution deadlines to accommodate Church leaders' desire for members throughout the world to receive usable materials on time.⁸³

With Relief Society women and correlation goals in mind, the Relief Society curriculum from 1960 to the present has shifted from lessons of local appeal to more universal application. There has also been a shift from more prescriptive lessons on the practicalities of womanhood, motherhood, and Mormon living to more descriptive lessons on spiritual living and essential gospel principles, with the application of principles left generally to the individual member. Earlier lessons instructed, at times quite explicitly, what women needed to do (and how to do it) to be "good" LDS

82. Letter without salutation (a handwritten notation at the head of the sheets designates it as "to the foreign missions"), from "Counselor in Charge of Education" (no name or signature), December 18, 1950, Circular Letters, 1892–1985, item 20, CR 118, LDS Church Archives.

83. Carr, "For in *That Day*," 105–7. In January 1972 the Internal Communications Department was created with J. Thomas Fyans as managing director. The department's goal was to provide members of the Church with "approved materials and literature of high quality and sufficient quantity *on time* and at the most reasonable cost." *Ibid.*, 106; emphasis mine. Prior to 1972, units of the international Church often received essential manuals and other materials late. Centralizing and professionalizing the writing, printing, and shipping functions made an immense difference in terms of worldwide coordination.

women. Examples included how to mother, housekeeping practices, dress and grooming, gardening, sewing, teaching, budgeting, being a good neighbor, table manners, losing weight, and so on. Vinni Andersen, an employee for the Church Translation Department since 1970, describes efforts to adapt Church curriculum to an international membership: "Before, there were several problems culturally with the materials we used. For example, one lesson for homemaking was on cuts of meat. It is so different in Mexico and other countries that the lesson had no applicability. . . . Things we tell people to do sometimes may be culturally inappropriate."⁸⁴ Andersen notes that previous materials often had games, puzzles, stories or illustrations that were contemporary phenomena of Utah's Wasatch Front inappropriate for foreign cultures. For example, she recalls, "In Japan, competition is so high, that the games in lessons were simply time killers. They wanted meat, substance, not games." In other words, games that functioned positively to encourage gospel learning and stimulation in the U.S. culture proved noticeably distracting from more important lesson objectives in Japan.

Similarly, Relief Society pre-correlation curricula posed challenges for translators and adapters. "Cultural refinement," says Andersen, "was a very interesting one! It was hard to deal with. Some were very well done. Others I felt were offensive and difficult to adapt." Among the lessons which proved difficult to translate appropriately was the popular series, "Worldwide Sisterhood," which portrayed the culture and life of a Relief Society sister in each country represented by the Church. Andersen notes: "Sometimes they would quote a sister" but the literal translation into English would "mak[e] her sound unintelligent. Also, they chose women from different levels of society, which was a problem. For the lesson on the U.S., they chose a doctor's wife . . . Her life did not reflect 95% of women in the United States. They should have chosen someone from a different level of society." The literature and social science lessons proved equally difficult to translate. Andersen calls the literature lessons "bears" to adapt, remarking, "You could take those into the South Pacific and [the

84. Vinni Andersen, interview by Tina Hatch, June 30, 2003, notes in my possession.

members] could probably [not] care less! They simply didn't work for everyone."⁸⁵

In the early 1960s, lessons for Relief Society consisted of theology, work meeting, literature, and social science. Visiting teacher messages were included in the *Relief Society Magazine* for English-speaking sisters. In 1966 the lessons were renamed, although content did not shift drastically. Theology lessons became "spiritual living," literature became "cultural refinement," and social science became "social relations." Work meeting became "homemaking," a change reflecting the Church's need to reassert women's value as homemakers in a society that increasingly diminished housewives.⁸⁶ At the encouragement of Harold B. Lee, courses in mother training were added in 1972 and renamed "Mother Education" the following year.⁸⁷

Weekday lessons moved to Sunday in 1980 with the consolidated Sunday three-hour schedule. For some women, the change increased Relief Society's formality and decreased their sense of sociality within the organization. For the international membership, however, the change primarily facilitated participation and attendance for those who often traveled considerably longer distances to church than their Utah counterparts. The first Relief Society meeting of the month consisted of a spiritual living lesson. Homemaking was taught the second meeting of the month. Women chose between mother training and social relations for the third meeting according to where they felt "the greater need."⁸⁸ The fourth meeting of the month was dedicated to the cultural refinement lessons.

In 1984, the homemaking lesson was moved again, from a Sunday meeting to a monthly meeting on a weekday evening. One American woman told me: "This was really a hard transition for me as well as many of the sisters then. We needed those hours at home with husband and families

85. Ibid. See also Carr, "For in *That Day*," 79–81, for similar descriptions of translation and adaptation difficulties.

86. Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 377.

87. The Relief Society had introduced "Mother's Classes" in 1902. Sharp, *Oral History*, 64; Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 157–60.

88. Foreword, *1973–74 Relief Society Courses of Study: Relief Society Personal Study Guide* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1973), v.

to guide minds and actions and transport them to activities.”⁸⁹ But for women who worked during the day, the change to an evening meeting allowed them to attend. With homemaking during the week, all women attended mother education the second Sunday of the month.

Lessons changed during Barbara Winder’s administration (1984–90), reflecting an increased focus on spirituality and an increased acknowledgement of women’s different living conditions. The cultural refinement lessons, which had been difficult to translate and adapt, were eliminated in the study guides beginning in 1987. Winder said that the change was to “help strengthen our women” in dealing with today’s demands and to meet the needs of a worldwide Church that called for greater “simplicity, flexibility, and adaptability in the Relief Society Curriculum.”⁹⁰ The number of spiritual lessons doubled in the new manuals, reflecting, according to Winder, women’s “need and desire for spiritual instruction.” The curriculum alterations were designed to assist Relief Society sisters in their mission “to build individual faith, to strengthen families, to give compassionate service, and to sustain the priesthood.”⁹¹ The lessons addressed other concerns of women as well. Lessons included titles such as “Building Self-esteem,” “Eliminating Your Own Self-defeating Behavior,” “Conquering Loneliness,” and “Fighting Drug Abuse.” Other lessons were carried over from previous lesson manuals with minimal changes. For example, the lesson “Social Forces Challenging the Latter-day Saint Woman” in the 1982 manual appeared again in the *Learn of Me* manual used in the 1990s.

In addition to changes in curriculum, the Relief Society experienced major adjustments in its organization. In January 1987, stake boards and the stake Relief Society staff could consist of as few as four women: a president, two counselors, and a secretary-treasurer.⁹² Reported the *Ensign*: “The changes were made to better meet the needs of Relief Society

89. Merrill Lyn Hiller, Letter to Tina Hatch, June 30, 2003.

90. Barbara Winder, “A Conversation about Relief Society Curriculum Adjustments,” *Ensign*, August 1986, 75.

91. *Ibid.*, 75, 76.

92. Gerry Avant, “Relief Society Simplifies Structure,” *Church News*, August 31, 1986, 3, 11.

women worldwide, according to Sister Winder,” since staffing a stake board could be challenging in some settings.⁹³

Elaine Jack’s administration from 1990 to 1997 made curriculum a priority. Lessons that had been used since the 1970s had become outdated. Jack reflected, “I was in on the development of the first lessons, and then we compacted them from eight years to four years.” (These lessons had originally been designed to be repeated every eight years; for at least two cycles, the four-year curriculum was then repeated.) “Then some of them were still being taught in President Winder’s administration. And I thought, ‘I know the genesis of these lessons.’ . . . They needed more than refreshing. They needed rewriting.” Jack felt the lessons needed a new focus that would acknowledge developing areas and the worldwide church. Like earlier administrations, Jack’s administration sought input from Relief Society members through stake Relief Society presidencies, wives of General Authorities, and surveys. They recognized the need for including questions in the lessons that would facilitate discussion and foster relationships in Relief Society meetings.⁹⁴ Aware of the vast differences and challenges facing her Relief Society sisters, Jack emphasized the need for lessons that would help women develop an individual testimony. Such faith would allow them to resolve problems that the Relief Society could not address for individual women.

When Jack’s presidency asked to rewrite the lesson study guides, the Brethren asked them to wait. Elder Dallin Oaks and the writing committee for Melchizedek Priesthood were researching a series of lessons on the teachings of Brigham Young. At the time, the men’s study guides were also in need of serious revisions. After much consideration, the decision was made by the curriculum committees, Relief Society, and Church leaders to create a joint lesson manual to be used by Relief Society and Melchizedek Priesthood.⁹⁵ On April 1, 1996, Elaine Jack outlined the change in manuals to her board members with Elders Robert D. Hales

93. “Relief Society Organization Simplified,” *Ensign*, November 1986, 100.

94. Jack, Interview, 5.

95. See Cherry B. Silver, “International Women in High Relief, 1990–1997: The *Something Extraordinary* Era of Relief Society History,” 2003; photocopy of typescript in my possession courtesy of Silver. Used by permission. Silver was a member of the Relief Society General Board during Jack’s administration.

and Jeffrey R. Holland in attendance. The two apostles conveyed President Gordon B. Hinckley's enthusiasm for the new manuals, quoting his statement to them: "This is a momentous day. We will finally have brothers and sisters walking side by side out into the future. This will change the outlook of men and women. Let's get it done."⁹⁶ The intended inauguration date for the new series of manuals containing teachings of Brigham Young was 1997. However, to allow time for translation so that members throughout the world could commence their study at the same time, the manual was distributed in January 1998.⁹⁷ The message was clear. Men and women would learn together, and they would learn together throughout much of the world.

As this episode shows, during an era of changes, losses, and gains, the Relief Society watched and participated in a transforming Church. The international church envisioned by Harold B. Lee in 1960 was no longer a vision. It was a reality in which the Relief Society participated with some sense of loss, yet also with due recognition of the benefits.

Conclusion

The loss of the *Relief Society Magazine* and the changes in curriculum production and content offer a useful way of looking at the Relief Society's history amid changing times and conditions. Prior to correlation efforts of the 1960s, the Relief Society, like the other auxiliaries, enjoyed relative autonomy. Or as Elaine Jack put it, they were "little dominions . . . each running their own organizations."⁹⁸ The strength that came from autonomy was clear, as were the growing weaknesses. Narratives of loss elicited by Relief Society changes are valid. Still, they tend to focus on the strengths of autonomy while neglecting the benefits to members worldwide of greater interdependence and coordination.

The correlation movement of the 1960s and 1970s radically transformed the Relief Society and other auxiliary organizations. Under correlation, priesthood authority is central to the organizational system. The strengths of priesthood governance, however, simultaneously risk crippling the organization if it is out of balance. Clearly, the vision and possibilities that priesthood correlation elicits in terms of a truly unified body

96. Relief Society, Minutes, April 1, 1996, 1-2, in Silver, "International Women in High Relief," 15.

97. *Ibid.*, 16.

98. Jack, Interview, 17.

of Christ and “refuge from the storm” have failed to reach the ideal. As many have pointed out, what President Lee called a “priesthood-centered Church” risks placing women at the margin, especially if “priesthood” is misinterpreted to mean “men.”

I recognize that narratives of loss and subordination respond to such experiences of marginalization and structural inequity. Admittedly, women have less direct access to organizational authority and less ability to facilitate and implement change within the current organizational structure. However, focusing only on this fact distorts the larger picture and mutes the ways in which the Relief Society has maintained influence, adapted to, and even benefitted from correlation’s changes. In practical terms, the scarcity of money, time, and resources and the need to accommodate an international Church made centralization and procedural change inevitable. A new era called for a new vision.

Unquestionably, expanded vision and new organizational changes await in the future. In 1877, Apostle Orson Pratt reinforced this theme: “To say that there will be a stated time, in the history of this Church, during its imperfections and weaknesses, when the organization will be perfect, and that there will be no further extension or addition to the organization, would be a mistake.” Furthermore, “organization is to go on, step after step, from one degree to another, just as the people increase and grow in the knowledge of the principles and laws of the Kingdom of God, and as their borders shall extend.”⁹⁹

The renewed emphasis on universal sisterhood and brotherhood and greater inclusiveness for people of all backgrounds reflected in magazine and curriculum content exemplify correlation’s nobler aims. The increasing willingness and ability of men and women to work in interdependent and mutually beneficial relationships through ward councils is another encouraging evolution. Chris Aston, a Relief Society president in Utah, commented, “I have seen some changes in the way the priesthood works with the sisters. For example, in ward council meetings the sisters’ ideas and thoughts are given much more value. I’m not sure women were included in councils with the priesthood very often if at all in years past. I

99. Orson Pratt, address, May 20, 1877, *Deseret News Weekly*, July 18, 1877, quoted in Derr and Derr, “Outside the Mormon Hierarchy,” 40.

find that as a Relief Society President now, the bishop often asks my opinion on many different situations.”¹⁰⁰

In 1978, a policy designating those who prayed in sacrament meeting as Melchizedek Priesthood holders was changed specifically to make that service available to women.¹⁰¹ In 1989, women spoke for the first time in general conference since 1845.¹⁰² Women’s role as teachers of doctrine has expanded. Do these welcome changes represent a backlash against the principles of correlation? Or do they represent an evolving understanding and more holistic embodiment of Paul’s vision of the body of Christ invoked in priesthood correlation rhetoric? Will the future hold new visions and patterns of working together for priesthood quorums and women’s organizations?

As the Relief Society grapples with change, it also grapples with the uneasy balance and uncomfortable mixture of the divine, the practical, the corporate, the temporal, and the humanness of the Church. Despite such paradoxes of organizational life and instances of loss, Relief Society has ultimately benefitted from changes under correlation and looks hopefully to the future. The programs of the Church and Relief Society are more widely available and more realistically adapted to a culturally diverse membership. The benefit of change does not remove the sting of loss. It does, however, beckon us to look forward. To conclude, I quote Belle Spafford who summarized this vision for the Relief Society during an era of change and growth:

While adjustment to change usually brings a degree of sadness as we part with those things with which we are familiar and which we have learned to love and value, and while certain misgivings assail us with regard to how best we may preserve traditional values as we move forward into new patterns, experience has taught us that it can be done successfully and worthy expanded goals can be achieved. Experience has taught us that always change has been the handmaid of progress. So, as much as we revere the past, we

100. Chris Aston, Letter to Tina Hatch, July 28, 2003.

101. Spencer W. Kimball, quoted in “Report of the Seminar for Regional Representatives,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1978, 100.

102. General conference proceedings appear in *Report of the Semi-Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, semi-annual); and (usually) in the May and November issues of the *Ensign*, 1971–89 <www.ldschurch.org>.

look forward to the future, knowing that the new plan for forwarding the work of the women of the Church will prosper.¹⁰³

103. Belle S. Spafford, "Change: The Handmaid of Progress," address given at final Relief Society conference, Salt Lake City, October 1975, LDS Church Archives.