

greater emphasis on service, both in word and in deed, within the Church and in society at large. For example, there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of elderly people, mostly women, in the Salt Lake valley living below the federal poverty level of \$600 per month. Many of these people are without spouse or children, facing the disabilities of old age and death alone. They need their yards cleaned, their houses repaired and painted. They need, above all, to know that somebody cares. We meet hundreds of elderly people in the Salt Lake valley who face life absolutely alone and who are living on \$300 or \$400 a month from social security.

If able-bodied Latter-day Saints, young and mature, would commit one-half day a month to service, we could transform our town and create a feeling of goodwill and brotherhood beyond imagination. What I wouldn't give for a Mormon volunteer corps of about 500 who would give joyfully and faithfully a half-day a month to me. I could also use 500 families who were anxious to build friendships with elderly, lonely, or disabled persons on an ongoing basis. I would like to see in the spirit of Doctrine and Covenants, Section 88, more time and study in Priesthood, Relief Society, and Sunday School manuals spent on the problems which face mankind: war and peace, crime, poverty, child-abuse, unemployment. What might our Christian faith contribute to the reduction of these complex and difficult social problems?

I am not so naive as to believe that we as a Church can solve all the problems of mankind. What we might do, however, is to develop some pilot projects which might demonstrate some solutions. Some Church farms, for example, could be a wonderful setting for senior citizen living or a place to redeem alienated youth. The Church is committed to taking its message to all the world. I believe it can be done most effectively if it is a message from a people who are living a Christian life of service to one another in the fold and towards people not of our faith. Christian living would attract and draw people to the Church. Maybe someday we will send missionaries out to serve and to teach. The results would bear watching. "Go Ye Unto All the World: To Serve and to Convert."

## Person-to-Person Service

*Marjorie Whitman*

GOING INTO ALL THE WORLD TO SERVE OTHERS on an individual basis is an opportunity for creative, thoughtful expression. An individual may render service on behalf of an organization or may act independently of any group. If our service is given as a member of an organization, our behavior is seen to represent the group's goals, a view which somewhat diminishes the intimacy of

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one-to-one caring. Of course, there is need for both, but my remarks here are focused on person-to-person service without group sponsorship.

Service is labor given for the benefit of others. A cynic always lurks, eager to point out that all human behavior is motivated by self-interest. In truth, most behavior is multi-motivated and thus very complex. It is very difficult to explain our own behaviors with a single motive. I much prefer the philosophy I learned in the Brigham Young University nursing program, which simply states that people's behavior is the best they are capable of at a given time. I sense an interest in service from most people and choose to believe that to serve is a basic human desire.

Whom shall we serve? The parable of the Good Samaritan suggests that we should serve whomever we encounter in need of service. This parable involves a single server and a single recipient; there was no question of priorities (unless the Samaritan was going to inconvenience someone by delaying his arrival at the end of his journey). We, however, are simultaneously members of several groups and constantly make decisions about which group will receive each portion of our efforts to serve. As a child, I personally experienced my father's philosophy, "Neglect the family, but be generous to others who will recognize your generosity with favors." The Latter-day Saint philosophy of stewardship for family before others attracted me to the Church, and I continue to believe this is an important priority.

However, consistent with the recent urging that leaders of the Church have given, I believe that it is also important to value highly and to serve members of our neighborhood and community. I think we are often tempted to over-indulge ourselves and our families and neglect Church members, neighbors, and community members. Achieving a balance which allows us to distribute our energy and resources requires a mature analysis of each situation. Inspiration received in answer to prayer and with regular scripture study has provided the best guidance for me.

I would like to suggest four basic guidelines for serving others. 1. Service should be for the benefit of the served. Perhaps the only people who can successfully serve without the consent of the served are parents; even they often have difficulty! Respect for the dignity of the individual compels us to obtain the consent of those whom we would serve. No matter how well-meaning, an unwanted effort may offend. I recall visiting Mayan ruins in eastern Mexico with a friend. As we strode toward an ancient pyramid, we were greeted by two elderly women, also tourists. Without preamble, one of them offered, "You know, we have a Book of Mormon which explains the origin of these ruins." Her thoughts were certainly consistent with mine, but my friend later commented that she felt the woman had been rude. Without an invitation or overture, she had simply intruded her "helpful" information. Of course, no harm was done, but she had erected a wall, instead of a bridge, in my friend's mind. Whatever the labor, it should be with the consent of the recipient.

2. The act of service should be appropriate for the situation. Help is not help unless it is appropriate, and that necessitates an assessment of needs. On

this highly populated planet, people achieve an amazing amount of privacy. They are usually reluctant to advertise their problems; and it often happens that we are unaware of the need, much less the nature of the service needed. Hence, we are often misled into giving a wholly inappropriate and unhelpful form of "help." Apparently this is an age-old problem, as indicated by the expression "taking coals to Newcastle." A rather hard-nosed assessment of what is needed is vital.

While living in Orem, Utah, I would sometimes hear that when a mother of teenage children was hospitalized or infirm the family needed no help because the children were capable of cooking, cleaning, etc. It seemed obvious to me that one could appropriately call in the National Guard for those situations! Help would mean sending the kids out for pizza while cleaning the house, which was being trashed constantly.

Making an appropriate assessment of needs is often more difficult when the beneficiary of our service is a non-Mormon. The Church is sometimes criticized for focusing its welfare and service efforts on its own people and neglecting its non-Mormon neighbors. This may be a valid observation, but it is frequently quite difficult to learn what our non-Mormon friends need. Church members are accustomed to a pattern of behavior in which one makes candid and even intimate disclosures to the bishop or the home teachers, thus making an assessment of needs relatively simple. Without this system of communication it is more difficult to be truly helpful.

3. The act of service should respect and support the beliefs of the individual. Person-to-person service is usually a type of crisis intervention — a situation of acute need which can be attended to briefly, so that the individual can shortly resume self care or seek a more elaborate helping system. In this setting, I consider it very inappropriate even to suggest that the individual's personal belief system might need adjustment.

Three years ago I was diagnosed with cancer. One of the attempted helps I received was information on Christian healing. While I appreciated the concern that motivated my born-again friends to provide this information, I found the gesture inappropriate. In a time of crisis, we need increased faith in our familiar coping style, not the imposition of a new set of beliefs. A better approach would have been to help me identify methods I had used successfully in the past for surviving other crises.

4. If possible, we should identify and initiate some remedy for the underlying cause of the problem. The best form of service helps people avoid future problems. If the problem is somewhat self-imposed and is deemed unpleasant by the individual, one might cautiously discuss ways to prevent its recurrence. For example, you may be the person to let a friend know that caffeine increases the pain and extent of fibrocystic breast disease. As Latter-day Saints we can share specific and appropriate truths without imposing our whole package on people.

Perhaps the greatest service we can give is personal concern. If the service delivers a product which the person does not want or need, we have missed