

# Woman as Healer in the Modern Church

*Betina Lindsey*

I went to my bishop to discuss some things that had happened in my life, and I asked him for a blessing. There were circumstances in my family—my husband was inactive, and I had an unusual position in our home. The bishop said I should call upon the power of the Melchizedek Priesthood to bless my family and those whom I loved and served. Not too long after, my son, who has serious attacks of croup, woke up one morning coughing. Within about five minutes, he couldn't breathe. I ran into the bathroom [carrying] him, turning on the shower to create steam, but he was turning blue and couldn't get any air. Someone called the ambulance. Meanwhile, my son was sitting on the toilet seat and I sat in front of him on the bathtub edge. Suddenly, in a natural, instantaneous response, I laid my hands on his head and said, "As E\_\_\_\_'s mother, I call on the power of the Melchizedek Priesthood . . ." and I blessed him. I had always prayed desperately for him during these attacks, but this was the first time I had ever laid my hands on his head and invoked the priesthood. While I was speaking, his head slipped forward from under my hands and fell on my lap. He was asleep! His breathing was even and relaxed. By the time we arrived at the hospital, they questioned why we'd brought him at all.

I'd given blessings before—with women, to other women—for infertility, alcoholism, and depression; but I'd never quoted priesthood authority until that morning with my son.<sup>1</sup>

I CONSIDER THIS WOMAN to be a pioneer; but rather than exploring new terrain, she is rediscovering the vast landscape that was once the

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<sup>1</sup> I personally collected all of the accounts used here from the individuals who were directly involved. However, because healing blessings are officially assigned to men who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood and because many Mormon men feel uneasy about autonomous action by women, many Latter-day Saint women feel vulnerable in speaking openly of giving and receiving blessings from women. To preserve their anonymity and to respect their privacy, I use no names in any of the contemporary accounts of healing blessings by women which I quote.

freehold of Mormon women—the domain of woman as healer—and from which, for three generations, women have been exiled.

Evidence from Mormon women's journals, diaries, and meeting minutes tells us that from the 1840s until as recently as the 1930s, LDS women served their families, each other, and the broader community, expanding their own spiritual gifts in the process. Even now, the ward fast and the temple prayer circle symbolize the union of our spiritual community; for by uniting together to seek healing for others, we heal ourselves and our community.

But because the Church now defines blessing the sick as a function of priesthood authority, we all suffer from the loss of women's boundless potential as healers. One woman told me of her concern when her son needed an operation. Because her husband was "very private where the family was concerned" and apparently did not understand that he could pronounce a blessing alone, he refused to ask another elder to help him give the child a blessing, saying, "Let's just wait and see how it goes." The woman commented, "I would have felt better if my son had been given a blessing beforehand, but my husband wouldn't and I couldn't."

In the last decade or so, a growing number of LDS women are refusing to accept this externally imposed limitation. They not only desire to exercise such a gift but discreetly practice it. If women were authorized to exercise this gift openly, we cannot foresee the transformation that would come to them as individuals and to the Church collectively.

But I am not arguing that the General Authorities should grant women this authority. I affirm women's right to do so. I urge those who feel the desire, either to bless or to be blessed, to claim their right as a member of the "household of faith" and to lay hold of that gift.

This essay argues four points: (1) There is clear historical and scriptural precedent for women as healers. (2) The process and gift of healing are ungendered. (3) The Mormon health blessing contains ritual elements that resemble elements in the healing rituals of other cultures. (4) The Church could benefit collectively by officially recognizing the resource that women healers represent. I conclude by urging a broadening of women's service.

#### THE PRECEDENTS FOR MORMON WOMEN HEALERS

Since the founding of Mormonism, women have constituted an important spiritual and community resource through exercising the gifts of healing. I commend Linda King Newell's (1987) well-researched

"Gifts of the Spirit: Women's Share," which traces the LDS tradition of women's spiritual gifts, particularly speaking in tongues and healing the sick. Indeed, our nineteenth-century foremothers give their sisters an unparalleled heritage of spiritual activism. It is a sacred tradition with which we should all become more familiar.

It begins in Nauvoo when the women of the Relief Society frequently pronounced healing blessings upon each other. Elizabeth Ann Whitney remembered receiving her authority to so act by ordination: "I was . . . ordained and set apart under the hand of Joseph Smith the Prophet to administer to the sick and comfort the sorrowful. Several other sisters were also ordained and set apart to administer in these holy ordinances" (in Newell 1987, 115).

The April 1893 *Young Woman's Journal* describes the healing gifts of Lucy Bigelow Young, a plural wife of Brigham Young and a St. George Temple worker:

How many times the sick and suffering have come upon beds to that temple, and at once Sister Young would be called to take the afflicted one under immediate charge, as all knew the mighty power she had gained through long years of fastings and prayers in the exercise of her special gift. When her hands are upon the head of another in blessing, the words of inspiration and personal prophecy that flow from her lips are like a stream of living fire. One sister who had not walked for twelve years was brought, and under the cheering faith of Sister Young she went through the day's ordinance and was perfectly healed of her affliction. (in Newell 1987, 124)

Nor did these women consider themselves to be radical innovators. Instead, they hearkened back to the scriptures to find the exercise of such gifts promised in abundant measure—and, what is more, promised upon condition of faith, irrespective of gender.

#### WOMEN AS MEMBERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH

The promise of healing power comes directly from Jesus Christ to anyone born of the Spirit:

And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues.

They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. (Mark 16:17-18)

Moroni corroborates that "all these gifts come by the spirit of Christ; and they come unto every man [or woman] severally, according as he [or she] will" (Moro. 10:17).

Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote in *Mormon Doctrine*, commenting upon gifts of the spirit: "Faithful persons are expected to seek the gifts of the Spirit with all their hearts. They are to 'covet earnestly the best

gifts' (1 Cor. 12:31; D&C 46:8), to 'desire spiritual gifts' (1 Cor. 14:1), 'to ask of God, who giveth liberally' (D&C 46:7; Matt. 7:7-8). To some will be given one gift; to others another" (McConkie 1966, 314). "And again, to some it is given to have faith to be healed; and to others it is given to have faith to heal" (D&C 46:19-20). Women are clearly included within this injunction to "seek the gifts of the Spirit with all their hearts."

Although the contemporary Church does not theologically exclude women from healing—because all believers in Christ have access to the same gifts—they are excluded from performing the ordinance. This exclusion, as Newell carefully documents, is not a theological sanction but rather a matter of evolving Church policy (1987, 111-50). Because the Church has, since the 1960s, defined and correlated itself as a "church of priesthood" in what I believe is an effort to make men take their responsibilities more seriously, it has systematically excluded women from many gray areas, equating "adult male" and "Melchizedek Priesthood."

Healing by the laying on of hands brings together three sources of power: (1) God's power, transmitted through the conduit of human action; (2) faith, exercised both by the recipient and by those participating in the blessing; and (3) the healing power of the healer, a gift which is apparently an act of free grace from God to certain individuals who, in their turn, are free to exercise or withhold it.

There is no indication in Mormon theology that priesthood is, in itself, the healing power; rather, it is an avenue for exercising that power. Quite obviously, in earlier days of the Church, Melchizedek Priesthood was only one avenue. Women's faith was still another. It is difficult to estimate how many priesthood holders possess the gift of healing; but it seems that any worthy priesthood holder can serve as a conduit for God's power. It also seems likely that even when the priesthood holder is not worthy, a blessing pronounced upon a faithful member of the Church may still be heard and answered, due to the faith of the recipient or a loved one.

Restricting healing blessings to Melchizedek Priesthood holders only is a limitation on women's spirituality. One husband observed, "If one of the kids has a sore throat, I don't think it's time for a blessing. If they were in the hospital with a serious illness, then it would be different." His wife, however, felt differently: "I think a blessing can be a preventative to worse things to come. He says I worry too much. I feel helpless sometimes; and because he's the one with the priesthood, I'm put in the position of nagging him into giving a blessing he doesn't feel is necessary."

Another woman expressed dismay at the "routine" nature of priesthood blessings. When a woman in her ward became seriously ill, the

first sister's husband administered to her but "for the next weeks, I and the other Relief Society sisters went into her home and nursed and took care of her and her children." When she recovered, this sister mentioned the event to her husband who gave her "a blank look because he didn't even remember the sister's name or administering to her." She concluded, "I think it was the prayers and nursing by the sisters in the ward that healed her."

To my knowledge, there has never been a suggestion that women's faith is not efficacious, individually or collectively in healing; or that a woman's supplication for healing herself or another is inappropriate. Thus, contemporary Mormon women are not officially forbidden to heal; rather, they are forbidden to engage in the rituals of healing.<sup>2</sup>

An interesting example of the Church's uneasiness with women's exercise of the gifts of healing was an instance reported by David Miles Oman during the question-answer session at a Mormon Women's Forum lecture 8 June 1989. During his mission in France in 1972, he and his companion taught the gospel to a woman who "had the gift of healing":

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<sup>2</sup> The exclusion does not specifically forbid women's participation. Rather, women are silently excluded by the instructions of who may participate and how. The current policy on blessings of healing and blessings of comfort and counsel appears in the *General Handbook of Instructions* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, March 1989), pp. 5-4 and 5-5:

Normally, two Melchizedek Priesthood holders administer to the sick. A father who holds the Melchizedek Priesthood should administer to sick members of his family. He may ask another Melchizedek Priesthood bearer to assist.

If no one is available to help, a Melchizedek Priesthood holder has full authority to both anoint and seal the anointing. If he has no oil, he may give a blessing by the authority of the priesthood.

The ordinance of administering to the sick should be performed at the request of the sick person or someone who is vitally concerned, so the blessing will be according to their faith (see D&C 24:13-14). Elders who are assigned to visit hospitals should not solicit opportunities to administer to the sick.

A person need not be anointed with oil frequently for the same illness. If a priesthood holder is asked to give a repeat blessing for the same illness, he usually does not need to anoint with oil after the first blessing, but he may give a blessing by the laying on of hands, and by the authority of the priesthood.

The ordinance of administering to the sick is performed in two parts as outlined in the *Melchizedek Priesthood Leadership Handbook*. That handbook also contains specific instruction on other ordinances, including conferring the priesthood and ordaining to a priesthood office, setting a member apart in a calling, dedicating graves, and dedicating homes.

#### Father's Blessings and Other Blessings of Comfort and Counsel

Fathers (for their families) and others who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood may give blessings of comfort and counsel. Fathers may give their children blessings on special occasions, such as when the children go on missions, enter military service, or leave home to go to school. A family may record a father's blessing for family records, but it is not preserved in Church records. A father's blessing is given the same as any blessing of comfort and counsel (see *Melchizedek Priesthood Leadership Handbook*).

The gift first manifested when she was a child, and she had laid her hands on a pet and it was healed. We gave her all the literature about the Church, and she read everything and joined, becoming a faithful member. The mission president visited her in regard to her gift of healing; and though he recognized her ability to heal as a spiritual gift from God rather than [from] Satan, he requested she not use or demonstrate the gift for now.

We can speculate on the mission president's motives: a desire not to confuse members by having two sources of healing authority, a concern about the inevitable questions of appropriateness that would arise, even a desire to help the woman fit more swiftly into the conventional roles assigned an LDS woman. I wish I knew whether this woman accepted the limitation imposed upon her and whether she is still an active member of the Church.

Another woman I interviewed had been promised "the gift of healing in your hands" in her patriarchal blessing. She said, "I use the gift mainly for my own children and family, drawing out the pain with my hands. Afterwards, I sometimes feel drained. I haven't used the gift outside the family, though I find when I visit the sick I can talk with them, and my voice, in some part, soothes and helps them." I think with longing of the blessing this woman could be to her ward.

Church leaders emphasize "spirituality" and "worthiness" in calling upon gifts of the spirit; but for Mormon women, that emphasis becomes a double bind when the symbol and avenue for spiritual manifestations within the Church is priesthood. In essence, Mormon women become spiritually dependent on male priesthood holders for healing ordinances, even though Mormon theology gives them equal access to God's power. It is particularly ironic, in light of recent statements by Church leaders about the spiritual "superiority" of women, that the Church allows no official avenue for women to exercise this superiority.

### THE MORMON HEALING RITUAL

Virtually every society has created a ritual for attuning an individual with a divine source as a channel of healing or other important spiritual gifts for the community. Ritual use of language and symbols is central in such empowerment rituals, because symbols both represent and objectify power.<sup>3</sup> Within Mormonism, consecrated oil and the ritual language of the ordinance occupy this important place. Sacred-

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<sup>3</sup> In a recent study of contemporary healing in America, Meredith McGuire points out that "power is a fundamental (if not *the* fundamental) category for interpreting healing. . . . [E]ach type of healing group has distinct beliefs about the loci of the power to heal (or to cause illness), as well as different ideas about ways to channel or control that power" (McGuire 1988, 227).

ness attaches to both the oil and to the language. They communicate power, awaken faith, and enhance the individual's sense of personal empowerment.

Mormon healing prayers do not have a rigid form, although they must contain important ritual elements. The instructions in the Melchizedek Priesthood Personal Study Guide—which were identical in each manual I checked between 1980 and 1988—did not give exact wordings or sample prayers, probably to avoid an over-reliance on terminology in and of itself. The first step is consecrating the oil:

Olive oil should be consecrated before it is used to anoint the sick. A good grade of olive oil should be used. No other kind of oil should be used. Those holding the Melchizedek Priesthood should consecrate it and set it apart for its holy purposes. One man alone can do this.

- Hold the open container of olive oil.
- Address our Heavenly Father as in prayer.
- State the authority (Melchizedek Priesthood) by which the oil is consecrated.
- Consecrate the oil (not the container), and set it apart for the blessing and anointing of the sick and the afflicted.
- Close in the name of Jesus Christ.

In administrations to the sick:

This ordinance is done in two parts.

#### **Anointing**

One Melchizedek Priesthood holder anoints with oil as follows:

- Anoint the head of the sick person, using a small amount of oil.
- Lay your hands on the person's head.
- Call the person by name.
- State the authority (Melchizedek Priesthood) by which the ordinance is performed.
- State that you are anointing with consecrated oil.
- Close in the name of Jesus Christ.

#### **Sealing the Anointing**

Two or more Melchizedek Priesthood holders lay their hands on the head of the sick person. One of them speaks as follows:

- Call the sick person by name.
- State the authority (Melchizedek Priesthood) by which the ordinance is performed.
- Seal the anointing that has already taken place.
- Add such words of blessing as the Spirit dictates.
- Close in the name of Jesus Christ. (*Lay Hold* 1988, 153–54)

Within Mormonism as with any religious or cultural tradition, the ritual effect of using traditional language is an empowerment; the person speaking words that have been spoken many times in similar settings is also putting himself or herself in touch with the power that has operated in those previous settings. I would argue that priesthood mediates power from a divine source to the human setting by distinguish-

ing key structural symbols and moving them into a proper relationship to allow power to flow through them. In other words, an ordinance creates order. In healing, the priesthood power to establish order through ritual lies at the root of the healing process. (See McGuire's discussion, 1988, 213-39).

This priesthood ordering or alignment was often extended through the use of physical objects when the healer was distant from the source. We see a scriptural example of such "portable charisma" in Moses' brazen serpent, which had the power to heal any Israelite bitten during the plague of serpents (Num. 21:8-9). A modern example occurred in July 1839 in Nauvoo and Montrose during a malaria epidemic. Joseph Smith, who had been healing the sick, was waiting to return to Nauvoo when a father asked him to heal his three-month-old twins:

Joseph told the man he could not go, but he would send some one to heal them. He told Elder Woodruff to go with the man and heal his children. At the same time he took from his pocket a silk bandanna handkerchief, and gave it to Brother Woodruff, telling him to wipe the faces of the children with it, and they should be healed; and remarked at the same time: "As long as you keep that handkerchief it shall remain a league between you and me." There were many sick whom Joseph could not visit, so he counseled the twelve to go and visit and heal them, and many were healed under their hands. (HC 4:4-5)

In his book *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, D. Michael Quinn cites additional examples of healing handkerchiefs, including those of Lorenzo Snow, Newel Knight, and Caroline Butler. Quinn also notes the fascinating incident of Joseph Smith consecrating the cape belonging to Caroline Butler's husband "for healing purposes, and several generations of the Butler family regarded the cape as having power in itself to heal" (Quinn 1987, 222).

### *Consecrated Oil*

Consecrated oil, which is usually blessed for its healing function in quorum meetings as a semi-private act of a united brotherhood, is the only ritual object currently involved in healing. Women, by being excluded from priesthood meetings, are not witnesses to the consecration.

Some faithful Mormon men regularly carry oil with them in tiny pocket-size vials. Women may be responsible for seeing that the family medicine chest contains a current supply of consecrated oil; but because they were barred from using oil at the same time they lost the privilege of giving blessings, they are also distanced from the close proximity that some men retain to this holy object. Consecrated oil is part



of the washing and anointing portion of the temple ritual for women, as for men; but the increasing strictness surrounding anything temple-related has made the use of oil for women even less accessible, rather than more comfortable and familiar.

### *The Laying on of Hands*

The second part of the ritual is the laying on of hands and the pronouncing of the prayer of administration in which, even though the wording is not specified, certain elements must appear, as cited in the handbook. Laying on hands is an important part of the healing ritual. To the best of my knowledge, all Mormon prayers outside of the temple are pronounced with arms folded and hands clasped except for four: confirmations, ordinations to the priesthood, settings apart, and blessings of healing. Women, as non-priesthood-holders, participate in none of these, so even the ritual posture—a circle of men with their hands on the head of the recipient—is associated with male priesthood functioning.

Many of the women I've talked to express hesitancy about laying hands on someone's head because they are afraid that assuming this "priesthood posture" will be seen as inappropriate. Some of them avoid the problem by establishing physical contact in other ways during the pronouncing of a blessing: hands on shoulders, holding hands, etc.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The practice of laying on of hands is not uniquely or distinctively Mormon. The practice is known worldwide and across time. Its sources are unquestionably the intuitive and instinctive gestures of comfort that we offer a hurt child: laying a palm on a feverish forehead, kissing a scrape well, patting a weeping child. The formal laying on of hands is the oldest form of ritual healing, known to virtually every religion. Rock carvings in Egypt and Chaldea (Iraq) and cave paintings in the Pyrenees that are 15,000 years old depict individuals in a formal attitude of laying both hands on another. The Roman emperor Vespasian (A.D. 70–79) had the reputation of healing blindness, lameness, and mental illness with a power in the palms of his hands. The Spanish conquistadores found Native American shamans and brujas of both genders laying on hands (Stein 1988, 116–17). North American Pentacostal congregations practice the ritual widely today.

Nor is the role of physical touching excluded from modern healing. In a recent *Deseret News* article, physician Lynn Fraley stated, in language borrowed from Alvin Tobler's *Future Shock*: "The more the world becomes 'high tech,' the more the world needs 'high touch.' I consider touch the most undervalued, most effective tool we [physicians] can use." Fraley regularly uses touch with her patients, not only during examinations but also to relieve pain, to reduce anxiety, "and sometimes to provide something that is hard to measure in terms that modern medicine understands" (Jarvik 1989).

A precious twentieth-century document for Mormon women is a written form of the blessing to be pronounced in a washing, anointing, and sealing before childbirth. It was recorded in the minutes of the Oakley (Idaho) Second Ward Relief Society between 1901 and 1910. This excerpt combines the use of consecrated oil, ritual language, and the laying on of hands:

We anoint your back, your spinal column that you might be strong and healthy no disease fasten upon it no accident befall [befall] you, Your kidneys that they might be active and healthy and preform their proper function, your bladder that it might be strong and protected from accident, your Hips that your system might relax and give way for the birth of your child, your sides that your liver, your lungs, and spleen that they might be strong and preform their proper functions, . . . your breasts that your milk may come freely and you need not be afflicted with sore nipples as many are, your heart that it might be comforted. (in Newell 1987, 130–31)

The blessing continues, in what could be a revelatory tradition for women in modern times. Nineteenth-century blessings—and obviously this one as well—involved the anointing and blessing of the area of the body mentioned in the blessing, a depth of ritual that now exists only in the temple. The question of propriety is no doubt one reason why male leaders of the Church accepted the administration of women to each other and why laying hands on only the head of the recipient accompanied the narrowing of pronouncing blessings to males. (I have no information which change came first.)

### *Authority*

The portion of this prayer quoted by Linda Newell does not specify the authority of the women. Some contemporary women who give blessings circumvent the problem by developing another category of blessings: the “mother’s” blessing. One woman, a single parent to whom the idea of women holding priesthood seemed “spooky,” admitted giving her son a mother’s blessing. A guest speaker at a Young Woman’s values night in my ward, said, “My husband travels a lot on business; and sometimes when he’s gone, if a child is sick, I give a mother’s blessing.” She quickly added, “It isn’t like a priesthood blessing.”

Alternatively, some endowed women have blessed others by invoking “the authority with which we were endowed in the temple” or “by the power of our united faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Still others invoke the priesthood of their husbands. A friend of mine who is a gifted healer reports, “I’ve given my husband a blessing, and I lay my hands upon him and cite his priesthood authority, which I share.” The

mother who blessed her croupy son invoked the Melchizedek Priesthood without specifying who held it.

### MODERN CONSEQUENCES OF WOMEN'S HEALING

Imagine with me a scenario in which LDS women could serve each other with the spiritual rituals of healing blessings—important in physical health—and blessings of comfort and counsel—important in mental health.

An immediate result would be to strengthen the Church at large by increasing the spiritual autonomy of more than half its members. One single woman expressed her frustration at the “inaccessibility” of blessings, due to the inaccessibility of priesthood holders. She describes her ward’s demographics as “180 families which are mostly single women” and “about twenty priesthood holders.” She has had no home teachers during the five years she has lived in the ward. The “home teaching” is done by visiting teachers, by special permission. “And if you’re sick, it better be on Wednesday night because you can only catch the bishop on Wednesday.”

A second immediate result would be an increase of faith because women would be released from the very real and very crippling fear that they are “doing something wrong” and may be punished by the community. It breaks my heart to hear of beautiful experiences like the two that follow where, even as the women experience the unquestioned outpouring of the Holy Ghost, they still draw back fearfully.

One woman told me about a time when she was twelve and her father was dying from Lou Gehrig’s disease. Early one morning, her mother called her awake—her father had quit breathing. She ran downstairs to be with him while her mother called the bishop and the family.

Somehow I felt I could do something about it. I held his hand in mine and sincerely prayed as best a twelve-year-old could do. After a moment, his eyes opened. He looked at me and asked, “What did you do? My lungs lifted and I could breath again.” He said he’d been fighting to live all night and felt like he should give up. It was a very humbling thing, and we both knew that the Spirit had worked through me. A few months later, he did die; but we were all better prepared for it by then.

I hadn’t labelled it as a healing blessing until years later when I was listening to a lecture about experiences like this in the Church. I’ve always felt a need to “heal hurts” of others. I would like to have the option to use that power, but I’m not sure what makes it okay to call on it. It seems the natural thing to do. I would like to have that permission.

In the second example, a Relief Society president, concerned about some sisters with serious physical and emotional problems, asked if they would like some of the sisters to come and pray with them.

They all thankfully agreed. I called sisters in the ward who were close to them—friends and visiting teachers—and arranged for baby-sitting for a half hour or so. The sisters made every effort to be there. Some left work. We knelt in a circle, and I said the prayer. It was a deeply spiritual experience for everyone involved, and I would have liked to have put my hands on their heads as I prayed; but I felt we were on the edge as it was, with no priesthood [holder] present.

### BROADENING WOMEN'S SERVICE

It is ironic, given the tradition of Mormon women's healing, that the new tradition makes women apprehensive and fearful about using their spiritual gifts. How can we encourage Mormon women to cross the borders of timidity and comfortably use these gifts in the service of others?

While the ordination of women would remove objections to women performing the ordinance of administration and overcome the hesitancy many Mormon women feel about practicing healing, ordination is not an event they can control or bring about. Rather than wait for women's ordination, I think it is wiser to concentrate on what women themselves *can* do.<sup>5</sup> I would hope that women who feel drawn to healing would "earnestly seek" this gift and prayerfully exercise it, appropriately uniting with those who have the complementary gift of faith to be healed and strengthened by those who have the gift of faith in the Savior.

I would also hope that women would break the silence of the last three generations regarding the exercise of this gift and share their experiences with each other and with selected men in appropriate ways. We need to tell each other stories, not only the stories of our foremothers and their healing experiences, but also our own.

Some may feel that if such sharing becomes "public," it will be seen as a "publicity stunt." I have talked with literally dozens of women about this topic. Although many—not all—feel disappointed at their exclusion from the Church's official healing rituals and some who are aware of the history resent the injustice, none are angry at the Church or inclined to use a healing occasion to try to embarrass the Church or

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<sup>5</sup> An alternative solution—having ecclesiastical leaders set certain women apart as healers—has serious problems. In this case, the choice of seeking and exercising a spiritual gift would still be removed from the woman's own area of autonomy. A male leader would be making the choice. Thus, healing would still be limited and excluding. A second solution, having both men and women participate in prayer circles for healing outside the temple, has the same problems with selection and exclusivity; also, it is a highly unlikely solution, since prayer circles outside the temple have been discouraged for some time.

put public pressure on it. In fact, I would suspect that anyone prompted by such a motivation probably would not be a successful healer.

Moroni promises: "All these gifts of which I have spoken, which are spiritual, never will be done away, even as long as the world shall stand, only according to the unbelief of the children of men. . . . Wherefore, there must be faith; and if there must be faith there must also be hope; and if there must be hope, there must be charity" (10:19).

Unbelief is not the reason Mormon women no longer practice the gift of healing. Rather, there exists much faith but no legitimate avenue to exercise it. Even though the Relief Society motto is "Charity Never Faileth," the Church's distancing of its women from blessing circles has diminished Moroni's vision of faith, hope, and charity to plates of chocolate chip cookies and tuna casseroles. Mormon women are trained for private charity, Mormon men for public priesthood power. Those in one realm are required to close their eyes to the other realm. The disconnection of charity from power, unfortunately, ensures that charity is powerless and licenses power to be without charity.

The instructions in Doctrine and Covenants 46:7-9, which preface the list of gifts given to the members of the Church, contain important cautions. One of these cautions is against sign-seeking, self-aggrandizement, or other unworthy personal motivations. But the other important caution is against being deceived "by evil spirits, or doctrines or devils, or the commandments of men." I agree that these cautions against self-deception and temptation are important; I wonder if the warning against "the commandments of men" may also be a caution against our own traditions that may unnecessarily limit and restrict us. For certainly, the rest of that introduction is a celebration, a promise, and an encouragement to exercise spiritual gifts:

But ye are commanded in all things to ask of God, who giveth liberally; and that which the Spirit testifies unto you even so I would that ye should do in all holiness of heart, walking uprightly before me, considering the end of your salvation, doing all things with prayer and thanksgiving. . . .

. . . And that ye may not be deceived, seek ye earnestly the best gifts, always remembering for what they are given;

For verily I say unto you, they are given for the benefit of those who love me and keep all my commandments; and [her] that seeketh so to do; that all may be benefit that seek or that ask of me. . . .

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