Know the History
Conversation Two

ORDAIN WOMEN
“I felt as though I must lay hands on her.
I never felt so before without being called on to do it. She said, ‘Well, do it.’ I knew I had been ordained to lay hands on the sick and set apart to do that. She had been washed clean and I anointed her, gave her some oil to take, and then laid hands on her. I told her she would get well if she would believe and not doubt it.”

-Patty Sessions, 1884

“I could not bless you. I could not even touch you at the moment your name would have been pronounced to our community. All because I am woman and I am your mother. And so, a year later, I held you tight as I used that body, my female body, the one that had been banned from holding and blessing, to offer up the prayer of my heart. I carried you with me as I proclaimed my desire and readiness to hold you a year before. I carried you for the right to hold my own child. I carried you for the power to bless. I carried you because I wanted you to know that you are the authority in your life and not auxiliary to it. I carried you because I want you to know that you can be a leader, not simply one who is led. I carried you because I hope for a better, stronger, more loving faith for you. I carried you because I do this for you. I do this for me. I do this for the grandmothers, mothers, daughters, and granddaughters. I do this for yesterday, today, and tomorrow.”

-Amy Cartwright, 2014, following the Ordain Women Priesthood Session Action on April 5
OW CONVERSATION TWO READINGS

Participants should prepare beforehand by reading the attached excerpts of the following:

“‘There is Always a Struggle’ An Interview with Chieko Okazaki,” Gregory A. Prince

“A Gift Given: A Gift Taken: Washing, Anointing, and Blessing the Sick among Mormon Women,” Linda King Newell

Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, Eliza R. Snow

In this conversation, we will talk about women’s history in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). Watch the video and discuss the questions provided or those that come up with your group members. Please feel free to modify the structure of the discussion in any way you see fit to meet the needs of your particular group members.

REVIEW

During Conversation One, See the Symptoms, we talked about the symptoms of patriarchy within our church and faith community. “A patriarchal system is one in which adult men hold most, much, or all of the power.”

As you have gone about your daily lives since we last met, has anyone noticed any additional symptoms of patriarchy? Would anyone like to share thoughts that have come up since we last met? Are there any other comments or questions about Conversation One you would like to address before we move on to today’s topic?

VIDEO

Watch a 15-minute video presentation from the 2013 Mormon Women’s Forum Counterpoint Conference:

Confirming Our Hope: Women and Priesthood
April Young Bennett
Available on YouTube at http://youtu.be/Mj9okL4fTk

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

What did you find most surprising or interesting in the video presentation?

How has studying LDS women’s history expanded your vision of women’s spiritual and administrative potential?
Before Christ’s ministry, Miriam, Deborah, Huldah and Anna are Biblical prophets.  
Phoebe is a deacon and Junia is an apostle in the early Christian church.

1830: Emma Smith is ordained by Joseph Smith.

1842: The Relief Society is established as a “Kingdom of Priests.”
1845: Brigham Young disbands the Relief Society.

1872: The Relief Society begins a newspaper, the Women’s Exponent.
1876: Relief Society grain and silk programs begin.
1882: The Relief Society opens Deseret Hospital.

1906: The first priesthood correlation program begins.
1918: The Presiding Bishopric and First Presidency sell the Relief Society grain storage supply.
1920: The Relief Society Social Services Department is established.

1946: Joseph Fielding Smith ends the practice of women giving blessings by laying on of hands.

1962: The second priesthood correlation program begins.
1969: The Relief Society Social Service Department is incorporated into Church Welfare Services under Presiding Bishopric direction.
1971: The Relief Society Magazine is cancelled. The Ensign magazine begins.
1978: The Relief Society transfers its financial assets to the First Presidency.
1979: The council system of church governance is announced with plans to include “relatively few” women.

1995: The Proclamation on the Family is introduced at the General Relief Society Meeting.
1997: The Teachings of the Presidents of the Church manuals replace manuals designed by Relief Society officers.

2012: Minimum missionary age drops.
2013: Ordain Women launches.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
How have the roles of women in the LDS Church changed over time?
What factors have influenced these changes? What changes do you see as positive? Negative?
Over the course of Church history, how have culture and social context affected our thoughts and attitudes about women and the priesthood?
REVIEW THE READINGS

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
What can we learn from Sister Okazaki’s interview about the roles of the highest-ranking women in our church?
What do the Nauvoo Relief Society Minutes tell us about Joseph Smith’s vision for women in the Church? Do you believe we have achieved this vision? Why or why not?

CONCLUSION

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
How do you feel about women’s participation in church ministry and administration today?
How involved are you in the administration of your ward? Are there any barriers preventing women from fully participating in our church?
Could women’s ordination address these barriers? Why or why not? Are there other intermediary steps we could take to improve the status of women in our church?
What gives you hope for our daughters and the future female members of the Church?

“THERE IS ALWAYS A STRUGGLE”
AN INTERVIEW WITH CHIEKO OKAZAKI
Gregory A. Prince  •  15 November 2005 (Published Spring 2012)

Chieko Okazaki: I was the education counselor [in the General Relief Society Presidency], so I worked with one of the men on the curriculum committee. We wanted to change the manual so that it brought up modern-day problems that women have to face and focus on how to implement some of the gospel doctrines and principles in dealing with the problem.

I had written a general outline, and the Relief Society presidency approved it. So I talked about it to a man on the Curriculum Committee. He went to his boss, and the boss said, “We don’t need a new manual for the Relief Society.”

“Why don’t we need a new manual!”

“We already are writing a manual for them.”

So he came back and told me that a new manual was already being prepared. I asked what it was, and he said, “Well, it’s the manual on Harold B. Lee.” It was the first one in that series of teachings of the Church presidents.

I asked, “Why are they writing a manual for Harold B. Lee?”

He didn’t know.

I told the presidency, so we went and asked the Curriculum Committee, “What is this all about?”

They said, “Well, we’re already almost finished with the first book.”

We said, “You’re almost finished with the first book, and you didn’t tell us that you were doing this! Why is this the first time we have heard about it? Chieko has been writing an outline in relation to what women need.”

So I asked, “Who is writing this manual?”
It turned out to be five men, and the Melchizedek Priesthood quorums and Relief Society would have the same lessons.

I asked, “Why aren’t the women included in this?”

Then they sort of got the point and called three women to the committee. I had one of our board members assigned to be the liaison with these three women. They got to the point where they could go through the manual and write questions in relation to the manual. And for the second one, they were part of it. But that’s how it was. I just thought, “Where are we, anyway, in this entire thing?”

It was such a shock! I said, “How did this come about?”

“Well, President Hinckley thought that many of the people who live outside the United States don’t have the privilege of having any doctrinal books in their homes. He thinks we should have a manual where we have the prophets speak about their doctrines, so they would at least have a doctrinal book in their home.”

That’s a good idea.

“He decided maybe this would be a good thing to have for the priesthood and the Relief Society.”

“Well, why wasn’t it discussed with us, too?”

“Sometimes I think they get so busy that they forget that we are there.”

-Chieko Okazaki-

We asked one time if we could be on the building committee and the temple committee, because sometimes we think, “Why did they build it this way?”—because it doesn’t work very well for the women’s needs. And we wanted to be on the temple committee, because there are many things that affect women in the temple. But we were never allowed to be a part of those committees. I think we could help a great deal, but you have to have leaders in the Church who are willing to make that possible.

Greg Prince: Do you see that as perhaps coming from beneath? That as you have new generations of women who are the wives of bishops and stake presidents, and who are ward and stake Relief Society and Young Women leaders, that they are going to grasp the reins a little bit stronger than their predecessors?

Chieko Okazaki: I have to say that, in my sixty-four years in the Church, I sometimes see a little bit of a change that the women themselves prompt, but most of the time, I haven’t seen women who would make that change possible. Wherever I go, I think that they already know their place. Maybe they’d be able to be more open if there were open-minded bishops or stake presidents who would listen to some of the feelings and the ideas of the women. But when women get the message that their job is to be supportive and just agree with the decisions of the bishop, they become clams.

Chieko Okazaki: It would be a great idea. They are in the council meetings, but in many council meetings the person who is in charge is the only one who is talking. I’m on several community boards, and sometimes I’m the only woman there or one of two or three women. I’m on the YWCA advisory board; I’m on the advisory board for the University of Utah Graduate School of Social Work; and I’m on the Belle Spafford Chair board. If I got the message that I was supposed to just sit there and listen to the men, I’d quit that board. I’d say, “What am I here for?” I speak up a lot in all of these board meetings.

In contrast, in 1995 when “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” was written, the Relief Society presidency was asked to come to a meeting. We did, and they read this proclamation. It was all finished. The only question was whether they should present it at the priesthood meeting or at the Relief Society meeting.

It didn’t matter to me where it was presented. What I wanted to know was, “How come we weren’t consulted?”

Greg Prince: You didn’t even know it was in the works?

Chieko Okazaki: No. They just asked us which meeting to present it in, and we said, “Whatever President Hinckley decides is fine with us.”

He decided to do it at the Relief Society meeting. The apostle who was our liaison said, “Isn’t it wonderful that he made the choice to present it at the Relief Society meeting?” Well, that was fine, but as I read it I thought that we could have made a few changes in it.

Sometimes I think they get so busy that they forget that we are there. It’s different from the time when Belle Spafford was president of the Relief Society. She was her own boss, as I read her life. And so was Florence Jacobsen. There’s a great deal of difference now.

Greg Prince: Don’t forget LaVern Parmley.

Chieko Okazaki: Yes. “The Big Three,” I call them. Boy, they were staunch and strong women!

Greg Prince: And it didn’t bother David O. McKay one bit.

Chieko Okazaki: No! It did not. Sister Spafford was on international and national women’s committees. Mormon women were out there! But gradually, things were taken away from Belle Spafford. I remember when the U.N. sponsored a women’s international meeting in Beijing. Elaine asked if we could attend, and we were denied. We couldn’t go.

Greg Prince: Do you see change coming?

Chieko Okazaki: There’s change in society. Women are now presidents of companies and presidents of countries—

Greg Prince: But it’s still in transition.

Chieko Okazaki: Oh, yes, it’s in transition. I guess it’s a cultural thing...
A GIFT GIVEN, A GIFT TAKEN: WASHING, ANOINTING, AND BLESSING THE SICK AMONG MORMON WOMEN

Linda King Newell • September 1981

...That women could and did participate in blessing and healing the sick was already a clearly established and officially sanctioned fact by the time the Saints had established a refuge in the Great Basin...

Brigham Young, speaking in the Tabernacle on 14 November 1869...ended by addressing himself specifically to mothers: “It is the privilege of a mother to have faith and to administer to her child; this she can do herself, as well as sending for the Elders to have the benefit of their faith”...

The year before in Cache Valley, Elder Ezra T. Benson had called on all the women who had been ordained to wash and anoint to exercise their powers to rebuke an unspecified disease...

In 1893, the Young Women Journal published a spritely article... “The next time you have a headache take some oil and ask God to heal you...And if you still feel sick ask your mother or your father to administer to you. Try that; then if that fails, and they wish to call in Elders, let them do so, and thus exhaust the ordinances of the priesthood before you take the other step [of calling a doctor].”

“Sister Eliza R. Snow... taught the sisters in her day that a very important part of the sacred ordinance of administration to the sick was the sealing of the anointing and blessings...”

The brisk matter-of-factness echoes Brigham Young’s practical heartiness—there is nothing mysterious or mystical here about faith and spiritual gifts. But perhaps most revealing is the attitude of spiritual self-sufficiency and the interchangeability of the mother and father as administrators. If this article reflects practice among the membership at large, administrations were far from being confined to the men ordained with the priesthood.

...On 9 April 1901, [Louisa Lulu Greene Richards] wrote a somewhat terse letter to Church President Lorenzo Snow concerning an article she read in the Deseret News the previous day, which stated: “priest, Teacher or Deacon may administer to the sick, and so may a member, male or female, but neither of them can seal the anointing and blessing, because the authority to do that is vested in the Priesthood after the order of Melchizedek.” The question of sealing was thus added to the long list of ambiguities. Lulu says, “If the information given in the answer is absolutely correct, then myself and thousands of other members of the Church have been misinstructed and are laboring under a very serious mistake, which certainly should be authoritatively corrected.” She gives a hint of the kind of authority that would be necessary by stating firmly, “Sister Eliza R. Snow Smith [Lorenzo’s sister], who received the instructions from the Prophet Joseph Smith, her husband, taught the sisters in her day, that a very important part of the sacred ordinance of administration to the sick was the sealing of the anointing and blessings, and should never be omitted. And we follow the pattern she gave us continually. We do not seal in the authority of the Priesthood, but in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.”...

In October 1914, President Joseph F. Smith and his counselors sent a letter to bishops and stake presidents establishing official policy on “Relief Society Sisters Regarding Anointing the Sick.” For the first time, such a document did not come from the Relief Society itself. Little of the information was new. It formalized policy that had taken shape over the years: Lorenzo Snow’s stipulation that the blessing must be confirmed rather than sealed, Wilford Woodruff’s that it was neither a Relief Society function nor an ordinance. The only new policy seems to be that such work comes under “the direction of” the bishop...

Throughout the 1920s, Church leaders increasingly drew bolder lines between spiritual gifts and priesthood powers. With the clarification of the priesthood role came restriction in the women’s sphere. Church leaders made it clear that women did not have right to priesthood power. Further definition of priesthood included healing, anointing with oil, etc., as exclusive functions of elders...

The strength of that pattern can be seen through a letter from Martha A. Hickman of Logan, who wrote to Relief Society General President Louise Yates Robison, asking: “Is it orthodox and sanctioned by the Church today to perform ‘washing’ and ‘anogings’ for the sick (sisters) especially in preparation for confinement in childbirth? Some have advocated that the proper procedure would be to have a special administration by some member bearing the Priesthood for those desiring a special blessing at this time. Some years ago when our temples did away with this ordinance for the sick and expectant mothers, in many of our wards in this stake, as well as adjoining stakes, committees of sisters, generally two or three in each committee, were called and set apart for this work of ‘washing’ and ‘anoighting,’ in their respective wards, wherever this ordinance was desired. I happen to be the head of this committee in the First Ward of Logan..."
Stake. We have officiated in this capacity some ten years, have enjoyed our calling, and have been appreciated. However, since above questions have arisen we do not feel quite at ease. We would like to be in harmony, as well as being able to inform correctly those seeking information. Our Stake Relief Society President, nor our Stake President seem to have nothing definite on this matter."

Sister Robison sent the letter back to the stake Relief Society president with an attached letter explaining: “In reference to the question raised, may we say that this beautiful ordinance has always been with the Relief Society, and it is our earnest hope that we may continue to have that privilege, and up to the present time the Presidents of the Church have always allowed it to us. There are some places, however, where a definite stand against it has been taken by the Priesthood Authorities, and where such is the case we cannot do anything but accept their will in the matter. However, where the sisters are permitted to do this for expectant mothers we wish it done very quietly, and without any infringement upon the Temple service. It is in reality a mother’s blessing, and we do not advocate the appointment of any committees to have this in charge, but any worthy good sister is eligible to perform this service if she has faith, and is in good standing in the Church. It is something that should be treated very carefully, and as we have suggested, with no show or discussion made of it. We have written to Sister Hickman and told her to consult you in this matter, as it is always our custom to discuss matters of this kind with our Stake Presidents, and have them advise the sisters in their Wards.”...

The next year brought the official death knell of this particular spiritual gift. On 29 July 1946, Elder Joseph Fielding Smith of the Quorum of the Twelve wrote to Belle S. Spafford, the Relief Society general president, and her counselors, Marianne C. Sharp and Gertrude R. Garff. “While the authorities of the Church have ruled that it is permissible, under certain conditions and with the approval of the priesthood, for sisters to wash and anoint other sisters, yet they feel that it is far better for us to follow the plan the Lord has given us and send for the Elders of the Church to come and administer to the sick and afflicted.”

It would certainly be difficult for a sister to say that she did not wish to follow “the plan the Lord has given us” by asking for administration from her sisters rather than from the elders. One Relief Society worker in Canada recalled: “This ordinance was a comfort and strength to many. But it was discontinued and the sisters were asked to call for administration by the Priesthood instead when necessary and desirable.” Elder Smith’s pronouncement ended the practice where it had not already stopped. There is no further evidence of such blessings being given by women.

**NAUVOO RELIEF SOCIETY MINUTE BOOK**

*Eliza R. Snow • March-April 1842*

**A RECORD OF THE ORGANIZATION, AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE FEMALE RELIEF SOCIETY OF NAUVOO**

*Nauvoo Lodge Room • March 17th 1842*

...Prest. Smith further remark’d that an organization to show them how to go to work would be sufficient. He propos’d that the Sisters elect a presiding officer to preside over them, and let that presiding officer choose two Counsellors to assist in the duties of her Office— that he would ordain them to preside over the Society— and let them preside just as the Presidency, preside over the church; and if they need his instruction— ask him, he will give it from time to time.

Let this Presidency serve as a constitution— all their decisions be considered law; and acted upon as such.

If any Officers are wanted to carry out the designs of the Institution, let them be appointed and set apart, as Deacons, Teachers &c. are among us.

The minutes of your meetings will be precedents for you to act upon— your Constitution and law.

He then suggested the propriety of electing a Presidency to continue in office during good behavior, or so long as they shall continue to fill the office with dignity &c. like the first Presidency of the church.

Motioned by Sister Whitney and seconded by Sister Packard that Mrs. Emma Smith be chosen President— passed unanimously—

Mov’d by Prest. Smith, that Mrs. Smith proceed to choose her Counsellors, that they may be ordain’d to preside over this Society, in taking care of the poor— administering to their wants, and attending to the various affairs of this Institution.

The Presidentess Elect, then made choice of Mrs. Sarah M. Cleveland and Mrs. Elizabeth Ann Whitney for Counsellors—

President Smith read the Revelation to Emma Smith, from the book of Doctrine and Covenants; and stated that she was ordain’d at the time, the Revelation was given, to expound the scriptures to all; and to teach the female part of community; and that not she alone, but others, may attain to the same blessings.— The 2d Epistle of John, 1st verse, was then read to show that respect was then had to the same thing; and that why she was called an Elect lady is because, elected to preside.

Elder Taylor was then appointed to ordain the Counsellors— he laid his hands on the head of Mrs. Cleveland and ordain’d her to be a Counsellor to the Elect Lady, even Mrs. Emma Smith, to counsel, and assist her in all things pertaining to her office &c.
Elder T. then laid his hands on the head of Mrs. Whitney and ordain’d her to be a Counsellor to Mrs. Smith, the Pres. of the Institution—with all the privileges pertaining to the office &c.

He then laid his hands on the head of Mrs. Smith and blessed her, and confirm’d upon her all the blessings which have been confer’d on her, that she might be a mother in Israel and look to the wants of the needy, and be a pattern of virtue; and possess all the qualifications necessary for her to stand and preside and dignify her Office, to teach the females those principles requisite for their future usefulness...

MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE THIRD MEETING OF THE SOCIETY Lodge Room • March 30th 1842

Prest. J. Smith arose—spoke of the organization of the Society—said he was deeply interested that it might be built up to the Most High in an acceptable manner... that the Society should move according to the ancient Priesthood, hence there should be a select Society separate from all the evils of the world, choice, virtuous and holy—said he was going to make of this Society a kingdom of priests as in Enoch’s day— as in Pauls day...

MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SIXTH MEETING OF THE SOCIETY Lodge Room • April 28th, 1842

The Meeting met according to adjournment, present Pres. Joseph Smith and Elder W[illard] Richards—

President Smith arose and said that the purport of his being present on the occasion was, to make observations respecting the Priesthood, and give instructions for the benefit of the Society...and Prest. J. Smith arose and call’d the attention of the meeting to the 12th Chap. of 1st Cor. “Now concerning spiritual gifts” &c...He said the reason of these remarks being made, was, that some little thing was circulating in the Society, that some persons [p. 35] were not going right in laying hands on the sick &c. Said if he had common sympathies, would rejoice that the sick could be heal’d, that the time had not been before, that these things could be in their proper order—that the church is not now organiz’d in its proper order, and cannot be until the Temple is completed—Prest. Smith continued the subject by advertting to the commission given to the ancient apostles “Go ye into all the world” &c.—no matter who believeth; these signs, such as healing the sick, casting out devils &c. should follow all that believe whether male or female. He ask’d the Society if they could not see by this sweeping stroke, that wherein they are ordained, it is the privilege of those set apart to administer in that authority which is confer’d on them—and if the sisters should have faith to heal the sick, let all hold their tongues, and let every thing roll on...

Respecting the female laying on hands, he further remark’d, there could be no devils in it if God gave his sanction by healing—that there could be no more sin in any female laying hands on the sick than in wetting the face with water—that it is no sin for any body to do it that has faith, or if the sick has faith to be heal’d by the administration...
SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES:
The following are recommended for participants who would like to follow up the discussion with continued personal study.

ARTICLES
Grain Storage: The Balance of Power between Priesthood Authority and Relief Society Autonomy
Jessie L. Embry

A Kingdom of Priests: My Support for Female Ordination
Mahonri Stewart

Landmarks for LDS Women: A Contemporary Chronology
Lavina Fielding Anderson

The Missing Rib: The Forgotten Place of Queens and Priestesses in the Establishment of Zion
Margaret Toscano

Relief Society History: A Building for the Women of the Church
Ardis E. Parshall

AUDIO AND AUDIOVISUAL
The History of LDS Correlation
Lindsay Hansen Park and April Young Bennett
http://feministmormonhousewivespodcast.org/episode-73-the-history-of-lds-correlation/

Makers: Voices of Utah Women
Nancy Green, producer
http://video.kued.org/video/2339261708/

BOOKS
Daughters in My Kingdom
Susan W. Tanner. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: 2011

Pedestals and Podiums: Utah Women, Religious Authority, and Equal Rights
Martha S. Bradley. Signature Books: 2005

FOOTNOTES
2 Amy Carrwright, Carrying Emilia, available at http://youngmormonfeminists.org/2014/04/14/carryingemilia/
4 Text and references for the video Confirming Our Hope, available at http://www.theexponent.com/confirmingourhopewomenandpriesthood/
5 Exodus 15, Judges 4, 2 Kings 22, Luke 2
6 Romans 16
7 D&C 25
21 Kate Kelly, Organizing the women after the manner of the priesthood, available at http://ordainwomen.org/organizing-the-women-after-the-manner-of-the-priesthood/2/