



CHILDREN

In Church History

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LISTEN TO THE CHILDREN OF THE PAST HEAR THE LESSONS FOR TODAY

Community of Christ youth have made an impact throughout the history of our faith community. We know the story of a teenage boy kneeling in a grove searching for answers to life's most difficult questions, but what about an elementary school student fighting to support his Polish friends in Germany during World War II? We have much to learn from the youth of the past.

We invite you to explore this new resource, *Children in Church History*, and discover the powerful lessons from Community of Christ's past. By looking through the lens of history, we hope you will discover connections between our shared past and today's Mission Initiatives and Enduring Principles.

It is our hope that as you read these stories of the past, you will hear the voices of our youth teaching us about improving the world, healing broken relationships, and pursuing peace. May the youth of the past open our hearts and minds to listen more intently to what the youth of today's Community of Christ have to teach our faith community.

*Let the children come to me, and do not stop them;
for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.*

~ Mathew 19:13-14 NRSV

GRACE AND GENEROSITY



Mansion House in Nauvoo, Illinois.

Peter Schenk arrived in Nauvoo as a curious boy in 1848. The young German immigrant resided in the small river town for more than fifty years and was considered one of the more influential and highly respected citizens of Nauvoo. When the local newspaper, *The Independent*, prepared to celebrate its 50th anniversary, Peter wrote a letter to the editor. Of all the memories and experiences shared during his time in Illinois, he chose to share a story from his childhood that involved interactions with Joseph Smith III that left a lasting impression.

One day, while walking home from school with his friends, Peter noticed some delicious-looking apples on the ground in the Smith family yard. The boys sneaked to the trees and began filling their arms and pockets with apples. Just as they collected their fill and prepared to leave, they were surprised to see Joseph Smith III walking toward them. Knowing he was caught red-handed, Peter quickly emptied his pockets and dropped all of the apples in his arms, except for the one he was eating. Even more surprising than Joseph Smith III's sudden



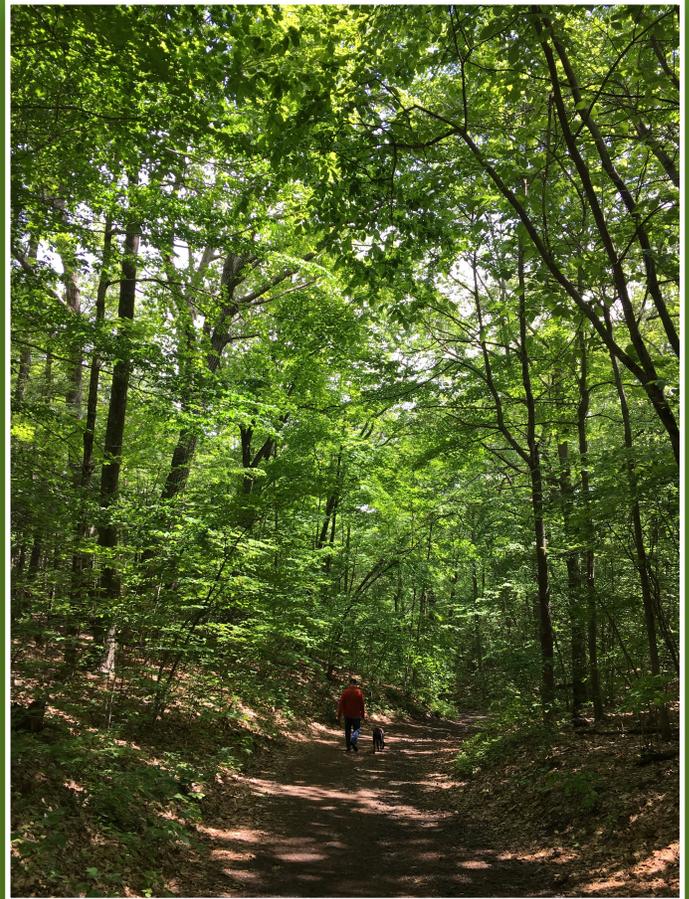
Portrait of Joseph Smith III.

appearance was his response. He said to the young apple thieves, “Those apples are no good, throw them away and come back to the house with me, and I’ll give you some good ones.” Peter and his friends followed Joseph into the house where they found Joseph’s mother, Emma, and received several very good apples. The boys then continued on their journey home “feeling mighty happy at being left off so easy.” Peter Schenk and his friends experienced “grace and generosity” at the Smith house that day.

Thoughts to Consider:

- Where do you see the Enduring Principle of Grace and Generosity represented in this story?
- Do you think Joseph Smith III did the right thing by forgiving the boys and offering them better apples from inside Emma’s house?
- Do you remember a time when you forgave someone like Joseph Smith III forgave the boys stealing his apples?

SACREDNESS IN CREATION



Generations of church members have been drawn to the natural environment when searching for answers to life's most difficult questions. As a teenager, Joseph Smith Jr. retired to a grove behind his boyhood home at a time when he was wrestling with questions about his personal salvation.

At a young age, Emma Smith went to a forested area near her home to pray for her father, Isaac Hale. Emma was worried about his relationship with God. While she prayed, Isaac happened to be walking through the woods nearby and overheard Emma's heartfelt prayer on his behalf. He was so touched by his daughter's compassion and concern that he later joined his family's Methodist faith.

Joseph and Emma each had an experience with God while on their knees in prayer and surrounded by the beauty of creation. In the same way, church members today seek guidance and understanding by finding a quiet place surrounded by nature at church campgrounds and reunions around the world. In nature we find the peace of Christ.

Thoughts to Consider:

- Is there a special place in nature that you really enjoy? Is it at your reunion grounds, in the forest, near a lake, or a dusty sand dune?
- Joseph and Emma went to nature to feel close to God. Is there a special place where you feel God's presence?

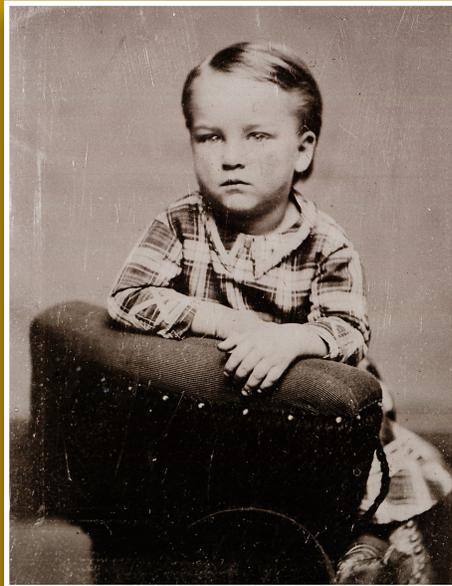
CONTINUING REVELATION

The first few years of Elbert Smith's life were spent in Nauvoo and Plano, communities that were at the heart of church life. However, Elbert didn't live in Illinois long as most of his youth was spent in a rural area of northwestern Iowa with his mother and grandparents. There was no congregation and only one other church family in the area. Elbert described their situation as being "isolated saints," feeling forgotten by the larger church at times. In

addition to feeling distant from his faith community, Elbert and his mother, Clara, were also separated from his father, David Hyrum Smith. His father's mental health had declined rapidly, and his medical needs required full-time care away from home.

However, the absence from his father and a structured church community did not prevent Elbert from having an active spiritual life. Some of his earliest spiritual experiences occurred on the plains of Iowa. It was wandering among a field of colorful wildflowers at six years of age that Elbert encountered God in an experience that he would long remember. He shares the story:

"Perhaps it was the things my mother had told me, or there may have been some subconscious memory of days in Nauvoo — memories of my father. At least I was thinking of him. And then there came upon



Elbert A. Smith in his younger years

me unmistakably the testimony of the Spirit: when I grew up to manhood, I was to go out and preach the same message that father had preached — I was to take up the same work and carry it on. I was too young to understand all the implications of that testimony to me, but I never forgot it. It remained to stabilize my life. From then on, increasingly I endeavored under difficulties to make preparation. I did not know it, but spiritually my face had been turned back toward Zion."

Years later, Elbert lived out the revelation he received among the wildflowers. He served as a missionary throughout the United States and in the very areas where his father had served decades earlier. Like his father, Elbert served as an editor for the *Saints' Herald* and in the First Presidency, just

like his father, before serving as the presiding patriarch/evangelist.

Thoughts to Consider:

- Elbert described his family as the "isolated saints" because of their geographic distance from an active church community. Besides geography, are there additional ways we isolate ourselves from God?
- Elbert's experience with God happened when surrounded by nature. Is there a connection between the Enduring Principles: Continuing Revelation and Sacredness of Creation?

WORTH OF ALL PERSONS

After the State of Illinois revoked the Nauvoo charter, the community attempted to keep peace and order through various policing measures. During this period the “Whistling and Whittling Brigade,” made of teenage boys, was used to intimidate strangers who appeared to be threats to the community. The brigade’s goal literally was to chase offenders out of town.

In 1845, young Joseph Smith III saw the brigade intimidating Austin Cowles, an old family friend and former member of the church. Cowles was a former member of the high council, a counselor in William Marks’ Nauvoo Stake Presidency, and a later dissenter. Because Cowles had left the church, many church members viewed him as a threat to the church and no longer a friend.



Photo of young Joseph Smith III

Cowles had returned to Nauvoo, likely in the fall of 1845, and soon found himself surrounded by thirty young men and boys “whistling, and whittling toward him with wicked looking knives,” following him wherever he went throughout the day. Joseph saw Cowles about 4:00 p.m. as he headed toward the ferry to make his departure and spoke to him briefly. On cue,

“his escort struck up their din of whistling and whittling, hustling the poor old man with the ends of broken boards and the sticks they were whittling.”

Though thirteen-year-old Joseph attempted to stop the harassment, his intervention seemed only to intensify the whistling and whittling brigade’s efforts. He found it especially troubling that church members who had long complained of the “intolerance of bigotry” had themselves become bigots. The persecuted had become persecutors. Joseph Smith III wrapped up his story with a plea that God would “soon send the day when the curse of intolerance may be known no more in the land.” Joseph stood up to the bullies in Nauvoo and it taught him that intolerance was unacceptable no matter who the persecutor may be.

Thoughts to Consider:

- Has there been a time in your life when you felt bullied, similar to how Joseph’s friend, Austin, was feeling?
- Has there been someone in your life who stood up for you, like Joseph did for Austin?
- Have you ever stood up to a bully to protect yourself or a good friend?

ALL ARE CALLED

In 1958, at age eleven, Bruce Crockett returned to Shriners Hospital in San Francisco for more surgery to help offset the residual effects of having had polio in 1948. He had already had three muscle transplant surgeries in 1954, '55 and '57. Bruce was not looking forward to being in the hospital again, especially during an era when parents were not allowed to visit their children in person, to hug, to touch, to kiss. The patients visited their parents on Sunday afternoon through a second-story window, yelling back and forth.



Image of Bruce Crockett at age 11.

Bruce soon became aware of the need for community amongst the patients. The children went to school together, lived together on the ward, but did not have moments to slow down, worship, pray, or respond to uplifting music. Bruce felt an urge to hold church on the ward. He shared, *“I felt it was important for us to be connected in this setting. I wrote my parents and asked them to contact Reverend Kessel, my Pastor at the Methodist church where I attended with my family. Reverend Kessel came to the hospital and brought my Bible. The Hospital allowed my Pastor to visit me in person only once.”*

With the help of the head nurse, a small room and a phonograph were reserved for a weekly service, and Tennessee Ernie Ford Gospel Music was offered for the music. On Saturday, Bruce went around the ward and invited the other kids to come to worship the following day. The custodian took the bed and furniture

out of the room while Bruce set up the record player.

The guests arrived on crutches, in wheelchairs, and some on gurneys. Bruce began the service by reciting the 23rd Psalm and then invited the kids, for those who knew it, to pray the Lord’s prayer. A story of Jesus from one of the gospels came next. After Bruce read the story about Jesus, he asked his fellow patients if they wanted to hear some gospel music. They all enthusiastically agreed. Bruce described what happened next, *“I put on the most upbeat gospel song on the recording and to my surprise the kids started bouncing up and down in their*

wheelchairs and on their gurneys and those on crutches started hopping on one foot.

The Head Nurse was smiling in the doorway but when we put on another upbeat song she intervened to slow things down because we were all sweating from dancing.”

Bruce continued as worship leader until he was released from the hospital. The church services were very popular, especially the dancing. The calling Bruce experienced as a child in 1958 continued long into his adulthood when he served as an appointee minister and spiritual formation coordinator in Community of Christ.

Thoughts to Consider:

- What lessons do we learn from Bruce’s story?
- How does this story reflect the Enduring Principle, All Are Called?

RESPONSIBLE CHOICES

Throughout World War II, church members were forced to make responsible choices. Wilhem Kreisle of Nuremberg, Germany, gave a pair of shoes to a slave laborer struggling to survive. For his act of compassion, Kreisle was arrested, tried, and sentenced to the Dachau extermination camp. During the next four years, he endured the threat of being ushered into a camp death chamber.

Youth in the church also were making difficult choices during World War II to help those who were suffering. Georg Sofke, an 11-year-old child in Germany, was forced to make responsible choices when it came to his friendship with a young Polish couple. In 1942, the couple moved into the same house where the Sofke family lived. While Georg's mother was at work during the day, Georg would spend time with the couple. Shortly after their arrival, the young wife had her first baby. When the child was about a year old it became gravely ill and died. Georg's mother was unable to take time off work to attend the funeral. However, Georg chose to support his friends by attending. Fortunately, the funeral was held in the morning hours, which allowed Georg to go to the service before school.

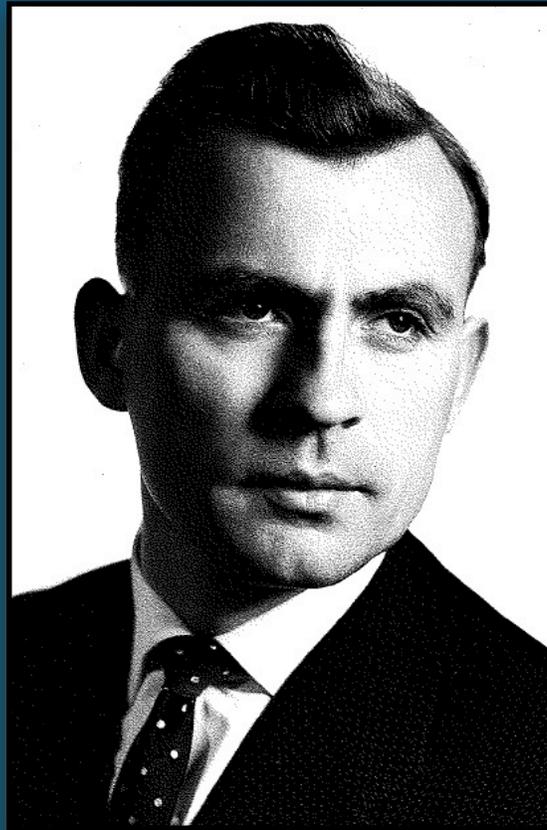


Image of Georg Sofke

When Georg walked to the funeral service that morning, he bumped into his school teacher who also was a former major in the army and a member of the Nazi party. The teacher was made aware of Georg's plans to attend the funeral and did not approve.

When Georg arrived in class, the teacher singled him out and said, "Look at Sofke there. He calls himself a German. I don't suppose he's noticed we are in the fifth year of the war, for it seems he attends the funeral services of his enemies."

Georg knew personally about the tragedy of war as his older brother had been killed during the conflict. Choosing to support the young couple, despite being persecuted by the teacher in front of his classmates, might have been a difficult choice for most 11-year-olds. However, it wasn't difficult for Georg. As an adult, he reflected on his decision and said, "I had

learned the commandment of the Lord, 'Love your enemies,' and in my home the word of God was held in greatest esteem."

Thoughts to Consider:

- How do you think you would have responded in Georg's position?
- Consider a time when you had the courage to defend someone who needed help and support?

PURSUIT OF PEACE

As a young boy, Perce Judd looked forward to the weekly church gatherings at Sister Cole's home. His pastor, Edwin Davies, would roll out a large map of Palestine and share stories from the scriptures. Perce was fascinated by the wars, captures, and prophecies, but what he remembered most was the passion of his pastor as he shouted, *"And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."* Decades later, Perce would discover these words written on the United Nations building in New York City.

Raised in southern Australia, Perce traveled the world promoting peace among nations most of his life. He was in London in 1946 when the UN General Assembly met for the first time. He was invited to serve on the newly formed UN Secretariat. Over the next three decades, he traveled the world on behalf of the United Nations, working for better trade practices, equitable sharing of resources, and the pursuit of justice for the poor and developing countries. World leaders hailed him for his perseverance, honesty, integrity, and skillful "diplomacy of quiet negotiation."

He later reflected on his unique heritage and calling:

"A sister who made a brief statement at the time when I was called to the office of teacher in the church stressed the importance of 'peacemakers.' This thought became a basis

for my life, and particularly later when I joined the UN. I deem it a great privilege to have worked so long for the UN as well as for a church whose very symbol and motto is 'peace' which stresses the need to spread the message of Christ, namely Peace on Earth."

The lessons learned as a child sitting on the floor in the Cole family living room made a significant impact on Perce. He worked for the United Nations for over 30 years as a literal peacemaker among nations.

Thoughts to Consider:

- Perce's story reveals the timeless impact a class or home visit can have on a child. What examples can you think of that are similar to what Perce experienced with his congregation?
- Perce's story shows how important personal relationships can be when children explore their calling and purpose. How do you see the Enduring Principles of Pursuit of Peace, Blessings of Community, and All Are Called working together? Are there times when these Enduring Principles conflict with one another?



Youth gathered for Sunday School in Southern Australia, circa 1924.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

This story takes us back to the winter of 1843 when a group of teenagers gathered at Heber C. Kimball's home in Nauvoo, Illinois. The topic of conversation among the young men and women that evening revolved around their concerns that they were spending too much time at parties and not enough time helping to improve and strengthen their community. Kimball suggested they meet again in a more formal atmosphere to create an organization specifically for the needs of the youth and their community. Attendance continued to grow as the organization met several times in a variety of places including the Mansion House and Red Brick Store. The youth chose the name "The Young Gentlemen and Ladies' Relief Society of Nauvoo," elected officers, and adopted a charter. The mission of the society was the "correction of the follies of youth, to guard against temptations to which they are exposed, and to aid in charitable enterprises."

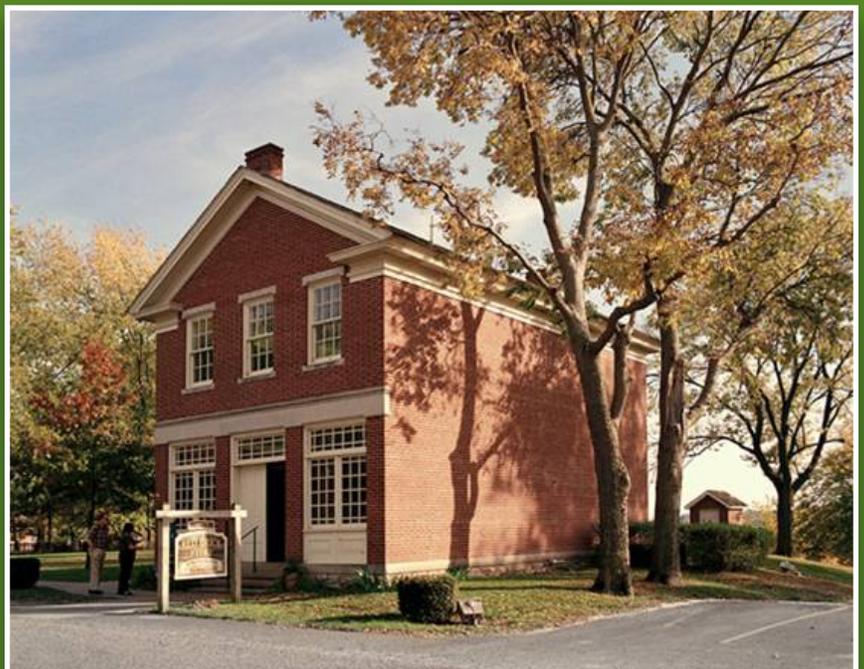
Joseph Smith Jr. attended a society meeting in the spring and praised the youth for their remarkable conduct. The group was encouraged to dedicate their service to the relief of the poor in Nauvoo. To promote their good works, Joseph gave the youth a petition from Brother Maudsley, an English convert who recently had moved to Nauvoo and needed help building a home. The group agreed to raise funds and support for Maudsley. A newspaper praised the group as a model society:

"If the youth throughout our land would follow this good example and form themselves into such societies, ...there would not be as many suffering poor, neither would there be as much immorality among the people. But on the

contrary, peace, good order, happiness, cheerfulness and plenty, would reign in the land, the Lord would look down from his holy habitation and smile upon us, and bless us all."

Thoughts to Consider:

- The teenagers and adults of Nauvoo were united under the cause of improving their community and helping those in need. What efforts have you witnessed that unite people?
- The Nauvoo community was a diverse gathering of people along the Mississippi River. Thousands of immigrants from the British Isles called Nauvoo home, in addition to people from New England, the Midwest, and the South. When have you experienced diversity? What did you learn from the experience?
- Within our congregations, we often find diverse views among our members. What do you think unites everyone in Community of Christ?



Red Brick Store (above) in Nauvoo, Illinois

BLESSINGS OF COMMUNITY

Minnie Blair Nicholson, daughter of Elizabeth and W. W. Blair, shares this story about how the women in the Sandwich community supported her mother during a difficult time while Minnie's father was away on a mission. Minnie's mother, Elizabeth, was pregnant and chose not to tell Minnie's father that she was expecting a child as she feared it would prevent him from serving his mission. Minnie tells the story:

“Had it not been for the kind and efficient help of a member of the Sandwich Branch in planning and looking after the finishing up on the home so the family could be moved in before winter, it would indeed have been a serious time for us. About the time we moved to Sandwich, Charlie, the oldest of the family, had a low fever; and all the younger children had the whooping cough. The youngest boy, David, about three years old, had it so seriously that it seemed that we would have to give him up.

Then the new baby, Frederick, was born. Had it not been for the loving care of Sisters Eliza Cox and Emmeline Banta, we would have been in a deplorable condition. But day by day one or the other would come to care for Mother and wash the baby. It was Sister

Marietta Faulconer (now Walker) who wrote to tell Father of the arrival of the new boy.

Just about that time, Brother Fred Hartshorn happened to pass our house and saw me, then a girl of 13, struggling with a big washing out in the unfinished part of the house. He did not stop, but hurried home; and soon his sister, Clara, was there helping me.



Marietta Walker and her daughter, Lucy, attended the Sandwich, Illinois, Branch along with Marietta's mother and sister.

It was thus that the Saints assisted in the life of the family of the early missionary. Such was the life of those who were struggling to raise a family on very limited income.”

Minnie's story about the women of the Sandwich Branch supporting her family in their time of need is an example of compassionate ministry and building community.

Thoughts to Consider:

- Where do you witness the Enduring Principle of “Blessings of Community” in Minnie's story?
- When Minnie's family was in desperate need, the members of the Sandwich Branch were quick to respond. Has there been a time in your life when others offered you help without you having to ask for the assistance?

INVITE PEOPLE TO CHRIST

On a cold Thanksgiving morning in 1887, Alexander Hale Smith took Anna Hartshorn's hand as she prepared to enter the waters of baptism. When they arrived at Pickerel Lake, they discovered a frozen body of water. They chopped through six inches of ice and lowered a ladder into the water. Five people, including Anna, braved the frigid water to be baptized on that cold November day.



Youth group gathered for a lesson alongside the Mississippi River in Nauvoo

Although Alexander Smith was a fine missionary, it was not his evangelism efforts that inspired Anna to be baptized that day. It was her young son who encouraged her to join the church in 1887. When Anna married his father, Fred Hartshorn, she knew Fred's family was associated with the RLDS church, and she wanted nothing to do with his church. In fact, she made Fred promise that he wouldn't be baptized into the church without her permission, knowing she would never give it.

Fred and Anna welcomed a baby boy into their family, and as the boy grew he became more acquainted with his father's faith community. One day, Anna overheard her son playing with the family dog when he asked the pet, "Are you a Latter Day Saint?" Anna was stunned by her son's question and feared that he would one day ask her the same question.

Anna immediately began to read all she could about the RLDS Church and the Book of Mormon, searching for reasons why she would never join such a church. The more she read and attended meetings with the

missionaries in preparation for her young son's question, the more she connected the scriptures with her husband's faith community. The more inviting the RLDS Church appeared.

Elbert A. Smith was baptized the same day as Anna Hartshorn, or as he called her "Aunt Anna." He said she literally dragged her husband, Fred, into the waters with her. Years later, Elbert reflected on his Aunt's journey to baptism:

"Sometimes the Lord goes before and opens the way for the truth to enter honest hearts. In this case the very childish question of a little boy opened the door. This woman became a true Latter Day Saint, and so taught her children that they and their children after them have been church members."

Thoughts to Consider:

- Her son's innocent question prompted a much deeper faith journey for Anna. How has your spiritual life deepened over the years?
- How have you witnessed children modeling the call of a disciple?

PURSUPE PEACE ON EARTH

Tucked in a corner office of the Red Brick Store is a wooden writing desk. It carries a story that impacted Joseph Smith III's life. The desk was a gift from Newel K. Whitney, a family friend and former bishop in Kirtland and Nauvoo. While many of Joseph's neighbors were planning to leave Nauvoo in 1846, a few friends and relatives gave Joseph gifts. Much to his mother's dismay, among those gifts were a bowie knife and a small pistol.

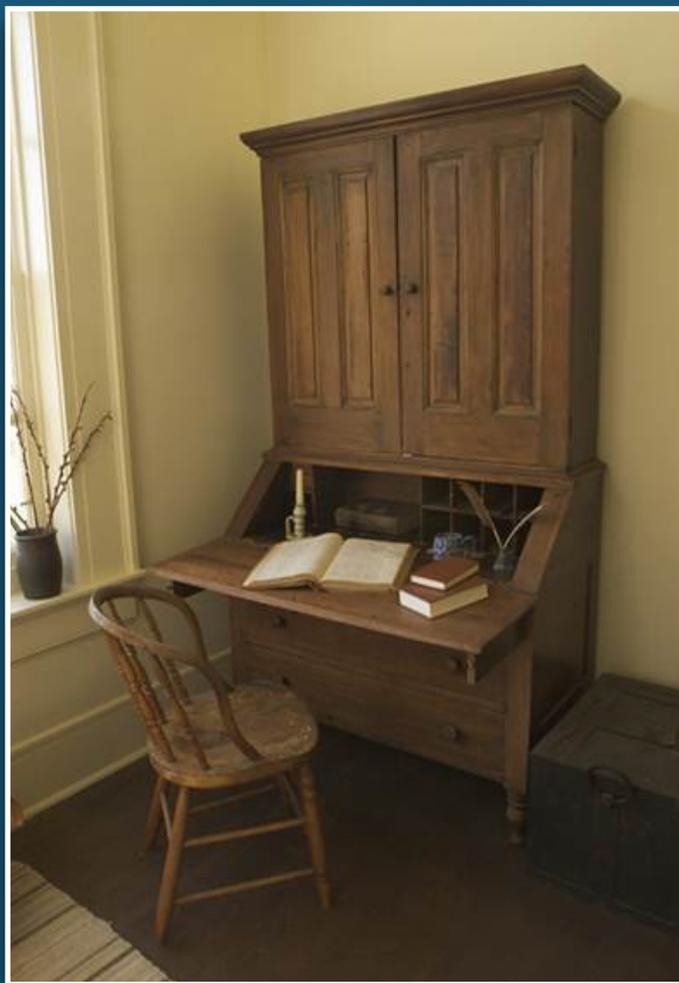
As Newel and his family prepared to depart Nauvoo, he shared with Joseph a gift to remember him by: a writing desk. Newel compared his desk to the other gifts Joseph received and shared that the pistol and knife were weapons of war. Joseph later reflected that Newel:

"...wished to impress upon me the sentiment that 'the pen is mightier than the sword.' I seemed to feel at the time that his intention was to foster within me a spirit of peace rather than one of conflict... The gift of Bishop Whitney led to the reflection that the spirit and weapons of war were among the evanescent things of life and would necessarily perish with the using but that

the pen, mightier than they, would produce permanent things upon which the judgment of men would be based in the great hereafter. At all events these were the effects they produced upon me, for I did not imbibe the spirit of war, and had little use for its dangerous weapons."

Newel K. Whitney's desk was not only a wonderful gift, but a powerful lesson of peace that Joseph carried with him the rest of his life.

The historic desk was eventually donated to the Community of Christ historic sites by members of the Smith family. The desk is on display in Newel K. Whitney's office at the Red Brick Store, where visitors hear the story of Newel's generous gift and life-long lesson to Joseph.



Whitney desk on display at the Red Brick Store

Thoughts to Consider:

- For Newel K. Whitney and Joseph Smith III, the desk was something much more than a piece of furniture. Do you have an object that carries a deeper meaning or lesson for you?
- Joseph Smith III felt that Newel's intent was to "foster within me a spirit of peace rather than one of conflict." How can we foster a spirit of peace in our community today?

DEVELOP DISCIPLES TO SERVE

Francis Cole knew an education was crucial for the future of her son, Clifford, but there simply were no valid options in her rural community. A Presbyterian minister named Elbert Nash heard of Francis' concerns and invited Clifford to move in with his family in Moorcroft, Wyoming, 35 miles away. The Coles accepted the hospitable offer, and Clifford felt like a member of the Nash family throughout his high school years. Each night following dinner, the Reverend Nash would pull out the scriptures, and the family would read and discuss. While sitting at the dinner table, Elbert and Clifford would carry on long conversations about Clifford's RLDS roots, spanning theology to Restoration history. It was during this time that Clifford discovered there were faithfully devoted Christians outside his own denomination and that "genuine religious experiences" could happen outside an RLDS church.

His experience of being welcomed into the Nash family inspired him to devote his life to the ministry of Christ. Clifford entered church appointment in 1946, when the traditional faith of the church was undergoing one of the

most rigorous self-examinations in its history. Faith often was measured by one's ability to defend the "one true church." Clifford set out to change this mentality by working with others to reform church education. In 1954 he was named the new director of Religious Education. In this role Clifford published new materials for youth from primary to senior high. In addition, he widely published materials for adults. It included the historic context surrounding the scriptures. For the first time the works of several major biblical scholars were cited, and teachers were urged to use these in the congregation. Clifford worked on church-wide curriculum for 25 years. His impact still is felt in the church today.

Thoughts to Consider:

- One family bravely opening its home to a young teenager in need led to extraordinary things within our faith community. What are some of the lessons you have experienced when moving out of your comfort zone?
- Like Clifford Cole, what lessons have you learned from faith communities outside Community of Christ?



Youth and adults gathered at the Children's Home in Lamoni.



Clifford Cole

EXPERIENCE

CONGREGATIONS IN MISSION



Image features early church members living in Germany.

Following WWII, Rosie Sellars and her family struggled to survive in Germany. Her father was killed during the war, and the responsibilities of providing for the family were in her young mother's hands. Everywhere Rosie looked she saw homelessness and food scarcity. She remembered food being rationed. Some nights, there wasn't enough bread on the table to feed her family. She described their desperation, "Many times some of my family went on an all-day bike trip out to beg for a piece of bread from a farmer or, if really lucky, an egg."

During this time Rosie relied on the support of the local congregation and those abroad to help her family survive. She explained:

"...In 1947 my mother was thrown off her bicycle when hit by a truck. The doctors

thought she would die that night, but I trusted in Jesus and prayed all night. The next day I went to an elder and asked him to go and see Mother in the hospital to administer to her. She remained in the hospital for four months before she came home. It was during these four months that we received several CARE packages from church members in Independence, Missouri. They meant a lot to us, especially the food. They were an answer to prayer."

Thoughts to Consider:

- Where do you see the Mission Initiative, Experience Congregations in Mission, being practiced in Rosie's story?
- This story is one of many stories where we see people helping others in need. How is your congregation living Christ's mission?

For more information about preserving and sharing Community of Christ heritage, go to:
www.HistoricSitesFoundation.org

