



Lesson Seven: Forging an Organization

Inquiry Questions:

- How does a person begin what they believe is the most important task of the rest of their life?
- Is it ever possible to truly know what to expect in any situation?

Historical Context: Temple endowments, baptism for the dead, and Nauvoo theology

The endowment was a teaching in the church that continually evolved during Joseph Smith Jr.'s life. In Kirtland, it took the expression of washings and anointing in the Temple, as well as prayer vigils, communion, and the "Hosanna Shout." The goal was to seek towards Pentecostal experiences like those recounted in Acts.

In Nauvoo, the focus of the endowment shifted from this world to the next. Also, it heavily emphasized Old Testament teachings and bore striking similarities to Freemasonry in several respects. The Nauvoo endowment prepared people for the afterlife, and ultimately to ascend to the highest level of the highest glory of heaven as kings and queens, priests and priestesses, and gods and goddesses. Its details were deemed so sacred that they were not to be written or shared. These ordinances were to occur in the Nauvoo Temple, but began in the Red Brick Store before the Temple was deemed ready.

Early church members believed that God loved and wanted salvation for all people. Salvation, they believed, required baptism. To provide for those who died without baptism, Joseph Smith Jr. taught Baptism for the Dead, which allowed proxy baptisms done on earth for those who have already passed. This allows them the opportunity of salvation in the hereafter.

Pre-Class Reading:

Joseph Smith III: A Pragmatic Prophet by Roger Launius, Chapter Seven: Forging an Organization

Discussion Questions:

One of Joseph's first focuses as President was to secure the authority of the priesthood quorums.

- What concerns of his does the biography reveal to the reader?
- What are the potential long term implications of priesthood authority?
- What could have occurred if he had not focused on this initiative?
- Do you agree that this was a priority in the early Reorganization?

Joseph struggles early on in how to assert his influence without becoming a dictator. He was President and Prophet for the church, approved by the membership. In preceding conferences, the memberships will and vote determined decisions rather than following a central figure.

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of a church run by a central leader?
- What are the pros and cons of a church run by common consent?



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- How might the two traditions (discussed in the questions above) be blended without too much conflict?

Joseph discovers that Nauvoo is isolated from the bulk of church happenings, as well as being off the beaten path for communication purposes. He relocates to Plano, in part, for better access to church resources and connections.

- In today's world with ever increasing technology, is this still an issue within churches, businesses and organizations?
- Is there as much of a need for a centralized location or headquarters? Or can technology solve the isolation issues in places such as Nauvoo.

Class Activity:

Have the class pretend that they are creating an organization that will operate a business, such as "Community of Christ Lemonade Stand." You choose the business. As a group, decide how our organization will run using the worksheet provide.

Reading Assignment:

Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet, Chapter Eight: And the Lord Called His People, Zion

Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet by Roger Launius and a variety of historical reprints are available at www.redbrickstore.com. All Red Brick Store purchases help preserve Community of Christ historic sites.

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Building an Organization (Worksheet)

1. How will you decide the name of your organization?

- What name did you pick?

2. Who will run your organization?

- Will you have a governing/management board?
- Will someone head the organization?

3. Will you have other positions in the organization?

- What other positions will you have?

4. What are the responsibilities of each member and/or position and/or leader in your organization?

- How will you ensure no one person has too much power?

5. How will you choose who fills each position or who serves on the board?

- What will you do if someone vacates their position?
- How long will each term be?

6. How will the organization handle disagreements?

- What if your first conflict resolution method doesn't work?