

Relief Society Birthday Celebration Emma's Garden

(This program is 35-40 minutes long. It is suggested that the participants be dressed in period costumes, seated randomly in the audience, walking forward for their part. Two microphones are needed at the front; one for the Narrator, and one for Emma and the Presidents. The script was revised from a program available on the internet. All music is either from the hymn book or can be downloaded free at the noted websites.)

Narrator: In the early days of the Church, Emma Smith, the wife of the Prophet Joseph Smith, was charged by her husband with the creation of an organization for the benefit of the women of the Church. As a result, the Relief Society was organized on March 17, 1842.

Emma: Hello! I am Emma Smith, the 1st President of the Relief Society. I remember that day well, and oh, what a lovely day it was! As I sat in the Red Brick Store with those sweet sisters, I felt to exclaim, "We are going to do something extraordinary!" And indeed we did. Joseph advised us that we were to be a select society, separate from all the evils of the world; choice, virtuous, and holy. He promised us that if we lived up to our privileges, the angels could not be restrained from being our associates. Imagine! Who would have known what lay ahead?

Narrator: Originally called The Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, it later came to be known as the Relief Society, an organization which today continues a worldwide legacy of faith and service. In 1842, under the leadership of Emma Smith, sisters raised funds for the Nauvoo Temple, sewed clothes for the temple workmen, nursed the sick, cared for the poor, and gave relief where it was needed.

Emma enjoyed a brief period of prosperity in Nauvoo. She had a lovely home and her husband was mayor. Let's imagine she is having a garden party and is welcoming her guests, each of you, as well as the sisters who served as Presidents of the Relief Society from 1842 to the present time. They are arriving now. Look, here is Eliza R. Snow.

Emma: Dear Sister Eliza! Welcome to my garden. Come and meet our friends. Why don't you tell them a little about yourself.

Eliza: I was called to be the 2nd General Relief Society President in 1866. Brigham Young knew of the good the Relief Society had accomplished in Nauvoo and how it had blessed the lives of all the women who were members. He asked me to assist the bishops of our new Utah territory in organizing a Relief Society in every ward.

Narrator: Sister Snow was a talented poetess who wrote over 500 poems, using her poetry to strengthen the Saints. *(music begins, "Though Deepening Trials," #122, 1st four measures; then "O My Father," #292, 1st phrase and last phrase.)* For example, she wrote "Though Deepening Trials" for those who needed to press on with hope after being driven from their homes in Missouri. She wrote "O My Father" for a close friend who was mourning the loss of a parent. She served for 22 years during which time the Relief Society sent women to medical school, trained nurses, opened the Deseret Hospital, operated cooperative stores and promoted silk manufacturing among the sisters.

Emma: Here comes Zina Diantha Huntington Young, the 3rd General President of the Relief Society. She was sustained in 1888. Sister Zina, tell us how you gained your testimony when you were just 13.

Zina: (*music begins, "The Iron Rod," #274, play the verse and then the first and last phrase of the chorus.*) One day on my return from school, I saw the Book of Mormon, that strange, new book lying on the window sill of our sitting room. I went up to the window, picked it up and the sweet influence of the Holy Spirit accompanied it to such an extent that I pressed it to my bosom in a rapture of delight, murmuring as I did so, "This is the truth, truth, truth." I was baptized with my family about a year later. Unfortunately, my parents both died as a result of the persecutions against the Mormons. I was a plural wife of Brigham Young and 10 years after his death was called to be the General President of the Relief Society, serving there for 13 years.

Narrator: During her presidency the Relief Society affiliated with the United States National Council of Women and campaigned for women's suffrage, recognizing the unique strengths of women during a difficult time in our nation's history.

Emma: Oh, here is Bathsheba Smith, the 4th General Relief Society President. She is such a charming woman. We all love her graciousness and hospitality. Sister Bathsheba, you were in the meeting when the Relief Society was formed, were you not?

Bathsheba: As a 19-year-old I was the youngest of the 20 women present at the first meeting of the Relief Society in Nauvoo. That same year I gave birth to my first child. A few months later, my husband, George Albert Smith, left on his 5th mission for the Church. Though I bore three children, only one daughter lived to adulthood. My oldest son died as a child at Winter Quarters, and another son was killed by Indians.

During my 10-year presidency, our membership grew to more than 40,000, and I felt the need to educate women. I was prompted to start mothers' classes and formal Relief Society instruction. I told the sisters that they should never cease studying diligently for the knowledge which would be of greatest use to them in their holy calling as daughters of God.

Narrator: Emmeline B. Wells, the 5th General Relief Society President, served from 1910 to 1921, a tumultuous time when World War I began, the Titanic sank, Prohibition was instituted and the Suffragettes lobbied to give women the vote. Voting was already familiar to Utah women, as they had been doing it for over 40 years!

Emma: Dear Emmeline, though early on, your life also seemed tumultuous, I know that the foundation of the gospel created peace amidst turmoil and direction during the storm.

Emmeline: I spent a happy childhood in a God-fearing English community. Although my father died when I was young, my mother saw that I received a good education at an early age. (*music begins, "Come, Come Ye Saints," #30. The first 8 measures and the last 4 measures.*) At age 14, I was baptized into the Mormon Church. When I was 15, I married James Harris. The next year I lost a 3-month-old baby and my sadness continued as my husband left both me and the Church, giving no explanation. I became a wife to Bishop Newel K. Whitney and had two daughters. After his death, I married Daniel H. Wells and we had 3 more daughters. I believe I learned to love the sweet more because I had experienced the bitter.

Narrator: In 1921, Clarissa S. Williams became the 6th General Relief Society President. She was a schoolteacher, and a woman of humility with exceptional executive ability.

Emma: Yes, but foremost, Clarissa, you were a mother, raising 11 children, and that is where your priorities lay. Do you remember what you told President Heber J. Grant when you were called by him to this position?

Clarissa: Ah, yes. I said, “President Grant, I know you are a very busy man and you might want to call me to have a conference with you in the late afternoon. But you must know that during school days, I intend to leave my office just before 3:30 p.m. I have three children yet in school and I want to be home when they arrive.”

Narrator: During WWI, the Relief Society sold wheat to the U.S. Government to help war victims. Sister Williams recommended that the interest accrued be used for health, maternity, and child welfare projects. She directed the Relief Society Social Services Department to train social workers and nurses, aid refugees, find employment for women, and offer adoption services.

Emma: Oh, look. Louise Y. Robison has joined us, the 7th General President of the Relief Society. Welcome to my garden.

Narrator: Sister Robison led the Relief Society during the challenging years of the Great Depression, from 1928 to 1939, helping to lay the groundwork for the Church welfare system, which functioned as part of the Relief Society until 1969. She had warmth and wit and practicality, but she was also shy and had feelings of inadequacy about her lack of formal education. She adopted as her personal motto, “Welcome the task that takes you beyond yourself.” Knowing her weakness and hoping to increase her knowledge, she arose early every morning to study between 4 and 6 AM. She also loved music, so during her presidency, she organized the Relief Society singing mothers’ choruses, (*music begins, last 4 measures of “Love At Home,” #318*) because she felt that “a singing mother makes a happy home.”

“Love at Home”

*Double trio, dressed in white blouses and black skirts;
arrangement available to download free at www.chapelmusiconline.com*

Louise: Occasionally our sweet Relief Society sisters need a little nudging, but that can be done with good humor and gentleness. I remember one incident at a Relief Society Conference. Although General Authorities had suggested that women remove their fashionably large hats during meetings, many women kept them on rather than disturb their hair or appearance. At the beginning of the meeting, I announced to the congregation, “Sisters, we are going to remain seated while we sing our first song. I’m sure you have books and papers and your hats on your laps, and I’m afraid it would be hard for you to hold all of them if you stand.” There were smiles and surprises in the congregation as the embarrassed ladies quickly removed their hats.

Emma: Amy B. Lyman is our next dear friend to arrive. Come, sister Amy, tell us what it was like to be the 8th President of a Relief Society with nearly 115,000 sisters.

Amy: My presidency was from 1940 to 1945, during the difficult years of World War II. Because of my experience presiding over the Church's women's organizations in Europe while my husband was president of the European mission, I felt the need to emphasize wartime thrift and emergency preparedness. At a time when war industries were pulling many women into the workforce, I wanted to focus on strengthening families. I felt called to emphasize the importance of the role of mothers in the home.

Narrator: Sister Lyman was a gifted administrator, who served in the Utah legislature. In addition, she bore the sorrow of her apostle husband's excommunication. (*begin "Encircle Me With Love."*) Two years before her release, Belle Spafford, a friend and co-worker, said this of Amy: "She met disappointments and challenges in her personal life during these years with composure. She never panicked in time of trouble. She always placed her faith and trust in the Lord and was poised in time of trouble. I don't know of anyone who better taught me how to meet adversity than Amy Lyman."

*"Encircle Me With Love (SA full score, Emma's Garden)"
download free at www.chapelmusiconline.com*

Narrator: Sister Spafford learned that lesson well and followed Sister Lyman as the 9th General Relief Society President in 1945.

Emma: Dear Sister Spafford. We are so glad you have come. You had other great lessons which prepared you for this calling, did you not?

Belle: Yes, I certainly did. I recall one time when I first served in a Relief Society presidency. The ward had built a new meeting house. In order to have it done and dedicated on time, they needed to raise a few thousand dollars, so the Relief Society was called upon to prepare a turkey dinner for a large group. It was the first dinner in the new building. We found the kitchen to be insufferably small. The women were in each other's way, slowing up the service. One woman even fainted from the heat. Distressed about this circumstance, I went to see the bishop. I explained the situation and requested we knock out one wall and extend the kitchen to include the adjoining space which had been allocated for a classroom. He responded with sharpness. "Certainly not! We aren't going to start remodeling this building before it is dedicated."

On my way home, discouraged and feeling somewhat reprimanded, I called at the home of one of the older sisters and I poured forth my troubles. I concluded by saying, "In this church men have all the power. The women are helpless." To this she replied, "Oh no, my dear, the women are not helpless....If someone came to you, Sister Spafford, and had the gift of power in one hand and the gift of influence in the other, which gift would you choose?" I thought seriously for a moment and then I said, "I think I would choose influence." "You probably did, my dear," she said. "Influence is a great gift of God to women. Appreciate it and use it right."

Narrator: Sister Spafford was a woman who certainly used her gift of influence. She was richly endowed with driving executive leadership abilities, a charming forthright personality, and a deep abiding faith. She served in her calling until 1974, nearly 30 years. During her tenure, the Relief Society shipped clothes, bedding, and soap to war-torn areas; the Relief

Society Building was built and dedicated; and the rules were changed to automatically enroll all Latter-day Saint women ages 18 and older, instead of requiring a small membership fee.

The next Relief Society General President was Barbara B. Smith. While she served, the Relief Society grew to 2 million women worldwide, amid sweeping changes in the world and in the status of women.

Emma: Look! Here comes Sister Smith now. She is such a wonderful woman; one with humility, intelligence and energy. Sister Smith, I'm sure you needed that energy during your 10-year presidency.

Barbara B. Smith: Indeed I did! I served at a time of intense conflict over women's issues in our country, so I also sought for good judgment and tolerance. The leadership of the Church felt inspired to take a stand against the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution. I was often interviewed by both private and public officials, and asked to explain and defend our beliefs. I encouraged Latter-day Saint women to be involved in their communities and to stand up for their beliefs. I told them they could represent Church attitudes about women without being combative or divisive. (*Intro begins to "I Am a Daughter of God."*) While the amendment appeared to be good on the surface, calling for "equality of rights under the law," there were implications which could ultimately cause the destruction of the unique protections currently given to women. The church knew that the place of a woman is not to walk in front of the man, nor behind him, but beside him.

"I Am a Daughter of God (solo, Emma's Garden)"
download free at www.chapelmusiconline.com

Narrator: Barbara B. Winder followed Sister Smith as the 11th General President in 1984, at a time when the Relief Society had expanded into 135 countries and territories. Under her direction the Relief Society emphasized personal spirituality and gave special attention to the needs of single adult sisters and to the family.

Emma: Hello, Sister Winder. Won't you please share with us all a little about your calling?

Barbara B. Winder: I was called while my husband was serving as president of the San Diego, California Mission. I truly had mixed emotions as we left our field of labor. Bless my dear husband! He sacrificed that I might serve my Heavenly Father in this capacity. How I love this organization! The prophet Joseph was certainly inspired when he created it. All that we do in Relief Society is guided by four basic principles: building faith and testimony, strengthening families, giving compassionate service, and sustaining the priesthood.

Emma: You are so right, Sister Winder. What a blessing to have you direct the women of the Church. Oh, look. Here comes Elaine L. Jack, the 12th General President of the Relief Society. We love you, Sister Jack.

Elaine: Thank you, Emma, and I just love our sisters. I am so grateful for their Christ-like influence in my life and in the lives of others. I have great confidence in the goodness of women, and in the unique contributions they make, both individually and collectively. That goodness was beautifully illustrated during the Relief Society Sesquicentennial celebration in 1992, when sisters throughout the world participated in service projects to help their local

communities. They certainly exemplified our Relief Society motto: “Charity Never Faileth.” Charity is also the reason I initiated the Gospel Literacy Effort to help those who could not read or write gain those basic skills. I hoped that they might experience the joy of reading the scriptures for themselves, and begin the process of lifelong-learning, gospel study, and self-improvement.

Narrator: Sister Jack, the only president born on foreign soil in Cardston, Alberta, Canada, served from 1990 to 1997. (*music begins, “As I Have Loved You”*) One example of her love for people was when she found out that a nonmember acquaintance was struggling through a divorce and an addiction to alcohol. She couldn’t sit back and do nothing. Sister Jack spent countless hours with her, calling often to reassure her that someone cared. Later, Sister Jack was her moral support as she went through an alcohol rehabilitation program and returned to work. Sister Jack’s husband said that he wondered why she would spend so much time on a person who seemed to be beyond help. But her persistence paid off, and Sister Jack helped turn that woman’s life around.

Emma: Dear Sister Jack. You truly are an example of charity to all of us. Look, here comes Mary Ellen Smoot, the Church’s 13th General Relief Society President. I believe you grew up during the Great Depression, did you not?

Mary Ellen: Yes, but my family survived due to my parents’ abilities and hard work. Father planted vegetables and fruit trees, and raised cows, pigs, and chickens. Mother was very careful to use and store what they produced. Provident living and self-reliance were virtues instilled in us from an early age as we all took part in placing seeds in the ground, watering, weeding, harvesting, and canning in preparation for the winter months. Our storage room was like a small grocery store. Likewise, I want the women of the Church to be spiritually prepared to meet their challenges; to be examples of gospel living; and to move forward with faith, courage, and spiritual, mental, and emotional strength.

Narrator: Leading a worldwide Relief Society with membership of nearly five million, Sister Smoot traveled more than 200,000 miles during her administration from 1997-2002. Everywhere she went, whether it was Finland, Idaho, Brazil, Washington D.C., or Russia, she witnessed the Gospel of Jesus Christ in action and its radiant light in the countenances of courageous and faithful sisters. The spirit bore witness that “we are here for such a time as this.” (Esther 4:14)

Mary Ellen: To each of you, no matter your nationality, race, social status, or individual talents, whether you are married, single or widowed, whether you were born into the Church or are a new convert and the only member of your family, I say, “Welcome home! (*Introduction begins to “My Sister’s Hands”*) The Relief Society is your home, and you are an integral part of a worldwide sisterhood with a divine mission.”

“My Sister’s Hands” (1st verse only)
download free at www.defordmusic.com

Emma: Here comes my dear friend, Bonnie D. Parkin, the Church’s 14th General Relief Society President. She served from 2002-2007.

Narrator: Service in the Church has been a way of life for all of these wonderful sisters. For example, prior to Sister Parkin’s call, she had served as the ward Primary president, Relief Society President, stake Young Women’s President, member of the Relief Society general board, 2nd counselor in the Young Women general presidency, and with her husband during his assignment as president of the England London South Mission. At the time of her calling, she was serving as a ward missionary and as the Laurel Advisor.

Bonnie: My desire is that all sisters would feel the love of the Lord in their lives daily. (*music begins “My Sister’s Hands,” at pickup to measure 9*) I would also pray that sisters of all ages would find a place in Relief Society where they can feel at home and develop bonds of trust, friendship, and support. When Joseph Smith organized the Relief Society, he called us to relieve the poor and to save souls. When we fulfill this mandate, we are living welfare. . . . It is one woman making a difference for another. It is one sister offering to listen or talk with a sister who may be lonely. It is a sister developing a close friendship with the sister she visit teaches. (*at measure 21*) It is you and me with our strengths, our skills, and our talents blessing the life of another.

“My Sister’s Hands” (continues, singing 3rd verse to the end)

Emma: And finally we have sweet Sister Beck, sustained in 2007 as our General Relief Society President. There have been 168 years of service between you and me, Sister Beck. What an honor, what a privilege, and what a great blessing it has been to belong to this wonderful organization! You were prepared in a special way to serve in what has now become a world-wide Relief Society of nearly 6 million women.

Julie: Yes, I believe you’re right. Although I was born in Granger, Utah, I grew up in Sao Paulo, Brazil, where my father was serving as mission president. I learned to speak Portuguese as a child, and gained an appreciation for life outside the United States. Because we are living in the latter days, we as individuals and families are facing many difficult challenges. Now more than ever, we need women to step up and be strong. We need women who declare the truth with strength, faith, and boldness. We need women to set an example of righteousness. We need women who are strong, immovable, and anxiously engaged in a good cause.

Narrator: (*background music begins, leading to “As Sister in Zion”*) The Relief Society mobilizes the collective power of faithful women throughout the world to build the Lord’s kingdom. This marvelous army of righteous sisters then spreads throughout the world; changing it, one life at a time. For the real power in this great worldwide sisterhood lies within each woman. The Lord cannot accomplish His work without the help of you, His precious daughters. The Relief Society needs you, and you need the Relief Society.

*“As Sisters in Zion”
Closing Hymn
an arrangement can be downloaded free at:
www.chapelmusiconline.com*