

*Teachings Concerning*  
*Birth Control and Family Size*

**First Presidency Statements and Church Handbook of Instructions**

**Church Handbook of Instructions (1998)**

It is the privilege of married couples who are able to bear children to provide mortal bodies for the spirit children of God, whom they are then responsible to nurture and rear. The decision as to how many children to have and when to have them is extremely intimate and private and should be left between the couple and the Lord. Church members should not judge one another in this matter.

Married couples also should understand that sexual relations within marriage are divinely approved not only for the purpose of procreation, but also as a means of expressing love and strengthening emotional and spiritual bonds between husband and wife.

**Heber J. Grant** (First Presidency Statement)

*In the October, 1942 General Conference, J. Reuben Clark, Jr. read a message from the First Presidency to the general Church membership.*

Amongst His earliest commands to Adam and Eve, the Lord said: "Multiply and replenish the earth." He has repeated that command in our day. He has again revealed in this, the last dispensation, the principle of the eternity of the marriage covenant. He has restored to earth the authority for entering into that covenant, and has declared that it is the only due and proper way of joining husband and wife, and the only means by which the sacred family relationship may be carried beyond the grave and through eternity. He has declared that this eternal relationship may be created only by the ordinances which are administered in the holy temples of the Lord, and therefore that His people should marry only in His temple in accordance with such ordinances.

The Lord has told us that it is the duty of every husband and wife to obey the command given to Adam to multiply and replenish the earth, so that the legions of

choice spirits waiting for their tabernacles of flesh may come here and move forward under God's great design to become perfect souls, for without these fleshly tabernacles they cannot progress to their God-planned destiny. Thus, every husband and wife should become a father and mother in Israel to children born under the holy, eternal covenant. (Conference Report, October 1942)

**David O. McKay - First Presidency Letter** to Bishops and Stake Presidents Date April 14, 1969

We seriously regret that there should exist a sentiment or feeling among any members of the Church to curtail the birth of their children. We have been commanded to multiply and replenish the earth that we may have joy and rejoicing in our posterity.

Where husband and wife enjoy health and vigor and are free from impurities that would be entailed upon their posterity, it is contrary to the teachings of the Church artificially to curtail or prevent the birth of children. We believe that those who practice birth control will reap disappointment by and by.

However, we feel that men must be considerate of their wives who bear the greater responsibility not only of bearing children, but of caring for them through childhood. To this end the mother's health and strength should be conserved and the husband's consideration for his wife is his first duty, and self-control a dominant factor in all their relationships.

It is our further feeling that married couples should seek inspiration and wisdom from the Lord that they may exercise discretion in solving their marital problems, and that they may be permitted to rear their children in accordance with the teachings of the gospel." (*Ensign*, May 1971, 19; "Editorial: Population, Pollution, and You," *Ensign*, June 1971, 129)

**Teachings From the General Authorities**

**Brigham Young**

- There are multitudes of pure and holy spirits waiting to take tabernacles, now what is our duty? -- To

prepare tabernacles for them; to take a course that will not tend to drive those spirits into the families of the wicked, where they will be trained in

wickedness, debauchery, and every species of crime. It is the duty of every righteous man and woman to prepare tabernacles for all the spirits they can. (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, p.197)

- This is the reason why the doctrine of plurality of wives was revealed, that the noble spirits which are waiting for tabernacles might be brought forth. (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, p.197)
- To check the increase of our race has its advocates among the influential and powerful circles of society in our nation and in other nations. The same practice existed forty-five years ago, and various devices were used by married persons to prevent the expenses and responsibilities of a family of children, which they must have incurred had they suffered nature's laws to rule preeminent. That which was practiced then in fear and against reproving conscience, is now boldly trumpeted abroad as one of the best means of ameliorating the miseries and sorrows of humanity. Infanticide is very prevalent in our nation. It is a crime that comes within the purview of the law, and is therefore not so boldly practiced as is the other equally great crime, which, no doubt, to a great extent, prevents the necessity of infanticide. The unnatural style of living, the extensive use of narcotics, the attempts to destroy and dry up the fountains of life, are fast destroying the American element of the nation; it is passing away before the increase of the more healthy, robust, honest, and less sinful class of the people which are pouring into the country daily from the Old World. The wife of the servant man is the mother of eight or ten healthy children, while the wife of his master is the mother of one or two poor, sickly children, devoid of vitality and constitution, and, if daughters, unfit, in their turn, to be mothers, and the health and vitality which nature has denied them through the irregularities of their parents are not repaired in the least by their education. (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, p.197)

### **Joseph F. Smith**

I regret, I think it is a crying evil, that there should exist a sentiment or a feeling among any members of the Church to curtail the birth of their children. I think that is a crime wherever it occurs, where husband and wife are in possession of health and vigor and are free from impurities that would be entailed upon their posterity. I believe that where people undertake to curtail or prevent

the birth of their children that they are going to reap disappointment by and by. I have no hesitancy in saying that I believe this is one of the greatest crimes of the world today, this evil practice. (*Gospel Doctrine*, pp. 278–79)

### **David O. McKay**

Any effort or desire on the part of a married couple to shirk the responsibility of parenthood reflects a condition of mind antagonistic to the best interests of the home, the state, and the nation. No doubt there are some worldly people who honestly limit the number of children and the family to two or three because of insufficient means to clothe and educate a large family as the parents would desire to do, but in nearly all such cases, the two or three children are no better provided for than two or three times that number would be. Such parents may be sincere, even if misguided; but in most cases the desire not to have children has its birth in vanity, passion, and selfishness. Such feelings are the seeds sown in early married life that produce a harvest of discord, suspicion, estrangement, and divorce. All such efforts, too, often tend to put the marriage relationship on a level with the panderer and the courtesan. They befoul the pure fountains of life with the slime of indulgence and sensuality. Such misguided couples are ever seeking but never finding the reality for which the heart is yearning.

Depriving themselves of the comfort and happiness of the companionship of children, the barrenness of their lives drives the young couple to seek the hollow fads and fascinating excitements of "society," many of which pursuits are as antagonistic to the real purpose of life as the influence of evil can make them.

As I write these lines, I have in mind a young girl who has substituted for the reality of home and family, the froth of week-end parties and midnight carousals, including the most degrading but fashionable habit of cigarette smoking. She began her married life in honor and is the mother of two beautiful children; but she was caught in the whirlpool of pleasure and passion, and though flaunting daily the latest fashions, is sinking from respectability to degradation. "O what a falling off were here!" I cannot look upon such actions of young husbands and wives without a feeling of pity mingled with contempt. There is comfort only in the thought that in our communities such cases are exceptional.

Love realizes his sweetest happiness and his most divine consummation in the home where the coming of children is not restricted, where they are made most welcome, and where the duties of parenthood are

accepted as a co-partnership with the eternal Creator.

In all this, however, the mother's health should be guarded. In the realm of wifehood, the woman should reign supreme.

Man, not woman, is the chief cause of this evil of race suicide now sweeping like a blight through the civilized nations.

Marriage is ordained of God that children might be so trained that they may eventually be worthy of Christ's presence; and that home is happiest in which they are welcomed, as God and nature intended they should be. (*Gospel Ideals*, p.469)

### Joseph Fielding Smith

- **MAN COMMANDED TO BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY.** The obligations which married couples take upon themselves should conform in every particular to the commandments given by the Lord.

In the beginning, the Lord said when he gave Eve to Adam, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it." This earth was created for the very purpose that the spirit children of our Father might have the privilege of the temporal existence, receiving bodies of flesh and bones as tabernacles for the spirits which occupy them, and then, through the atonement of Jesus Christ, receive the resurrection in which the spirit and the body become inseparably connected so that man may live again. . . .

Marriage is an eternal covenant, not to come to an end as taught so generally throughout the world when the covenanting parties are dead, but to endure forever. The real purpose of life is that the spirits of men thus clothed in bodies of flesh and bones may, through obedience to the gospel, come back into the presence of the Father and the Son, to receive the fulness of exaltation,

The Lord has revealed that when a man and a woman are married according to his law, children born to them will be theirs throughout all eternity.

The covenant given to Adam to multiply was renewed after the flood with Noah and his children after him. The Lord said to Noah: "And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein. And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying. And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you."

This covenant is still binding, although mankind has departed from the way of eternal life and has rejected the covenant of marriage which the Lord

revealed.

**BIRTH CONTROL IS WICKEDNESS.** The abuse of this holy covenant has been the primary cause for the downfall of nations. When the sacred vows of marriage are broken and the real purpose of marriage abused, as we find it so prevalent in the world today, then destruction is inevitable.

No nation can endure for any length of time, if the marriage covenants are abused and treated with contempt. The anger of the Almighty was kindled against ancient nations for their immorality. There is nothing that should be held in greater sacredness than this covenant by which the spirits of men are clothed with mortal tabernacles.

When a man and a woman are married and they agree, or covenant, to limit their offspring to two or three, and practice devices to accomplish this purpose, they are guilty of iniquity which eventually must be punished. Unfortunately this evil doctrine is being taught as a virtue by many people who consider themselves cultured and highly educated. It has even crept in among members of the Church and has been advocated in some of the classes within the Church.

It should be understood definitely that this kind of doctrine is not only not advocated by the authorities of the Church, but also is condemned by them as wickedness in the sight of the Lord.

President Joseph F. Smith has said in relation to this question: "Those who have taken upon themselves the responsibility of wedded life should see to it that they do not abuse the course of nature; that they do not destroy the principle of life within them, nor violate any of the commandments of God. The command which he gave in the beginning to multiply and replenish the earth is still in force upon the children of men. Possibly no greater sin could be committed by the people who have embraced this gospel than to prevent or to destroy life in the manner indicated. We are born into the world that we may have life, and we live that we may have a fulness of joy, and if we will obtain a fulness of joy, we must obey the law of our creation and the law by which we may obtain the consummation of our righteous hopes and desires – eternal life." (*Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol.2, p.86)

- **BIRTH CONTROL LEADS TO DAMNATION.** Instructing the mothers of the Church, President Joseph F. Smith said in June, 1917: "I regret, I think it is a crying evil, that there should exist a sentiment or a feeling among any members of the Church to

curtail the birth of their children. I think that is a crime wherever it occurs, where husband and wife are in possession of health and vigor and are free from impurities that would be entailed upon their posterity. I believe that where people undertake to curtail or prevent the birth of their children that they are going to reap disappointment by and by. I have no hesitancy in saying that I believe that is one of the greatest crimes of the world today, this evil practice.”

When young people marry and refuse to fulfill this commandment given in the beginning of the world -- and just as much in force today -- they rob themselves of the greatest eternal blessing. If the love of the world and the wicked practices of the world mean more to a man and a woman than to keep the commandment of the Lord in this respect, then they shut themselves off from the eternal blessing of increase. Those who wilfully and maliciously design to break this important commandment shall be damned. They cannot have the Spirit of the Lord.

Small families is the rule today. Husbands and wives refuse to take upon themselves the responsibilities of family life. Many of them do not care to be bothered with children. Yet this commandment given to Adam has never been abrogated or set aside. If we refuse to live by the covenants we make, especially in the house of the Lord, then we cannot receive the blessings of those covenants in eternity. If the responsibilities of parenthood are wilfully avoided here, then how can the Lord bestow upon the guilty the blessings of eternal increase? It cannot be, and they shall be denied such blessings. (*Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol.2, pp.88-89)

### **Harold B. Lee**

If I were to name the first thing that impresses me always in these fine Latter-day Saint homes, I would say it was a love for and a desire for children. These are homes where the having of children was not delayed because of some social or educational or financial objective, and where the size of the families has not been limited by the practice of birth control. (Conference Report, October 1948, p.53)

### **Spencer W. Kimball**

- Childbearing should not be delayed for convenience. After marriage young wives should be occupied in

bearing and rearing children. I know of no scriptures or authorities which authorize young wives to delay their families or to go to work to put their husbands through college. Young married couples can make their way and reach their educational heights, if they are determined. (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, p.329)

- In family life, men must and should be considerate of their wives, not only in the bearing of children, but in caring for them through childhood. The mother's health must be conserved, and the husband's consideration for his wife is his first duty, and self-control a dominant factor in all their relationships. (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, p.330)
- Supreme happiness in marriage is governed considerably by a primary factor -- that of the bearing and rearing of children. Too many young people set their minds, determining they will not marry or have children until they are more secure, until the military service period is over; until the college degree is secured; until the occupation is more well-defined; until the debts are paid; or until it is more convenient. They have forgotten that the first commandment is to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.” (Genesis 1:28.) And so brides continue their employment and husbands encourage it, and contraceptives are used to prevent conception. Relatives and friends and even mothers sometimes encourage birth control for their young newlyweds. But the excuses are many, mostly weak. The wife is not robust; the family budget will not feed extra mouths; or the expense of the doctor, hospital, and other incidentals is too great; it will disturb social life; it would prevent two salaries; and so abnormal living prevents the birth of children. The Church cannot approve nor condone the measures which so greatly limit the family.  
How do you suppose that the Lord would look upon a man and a woman whose marriage seems to be largely for the purpose of living together and sex gratification without the responsibilities of marriage? How do you think that the Lord looks upon those who use the contraceptives because in their selfish life it is not the convenient moment to bear children? How do you feel the Lord looks upon those who would trade flesh-and-blood children for pianos or television or furniture or an automobile, and is this not actually the case when people will buy these luxuries and yet cannot afford to have

their children? Are there not numerous people who first buy the luxury article and then find they cannot pay the doctor or a hospital bill incident to childbirth? How do you think the Lord feels about women who forego the pleasures and glories of motherhood that they might retain their figures, that their social life might not be affected, that they might avoid the deprivations, pains, and agonies of childbearing and birthing? How do you think the Lord feels as he views healthy parents who could have children but who deliberately close the doors by operation or by contraceptives, close the doors upon spirits eager to enter into mortal bodies? (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, p.329)

- As we look about us, we see many forces at work bent on the destruction of the family, both in America and abroad. Family ties are being destroyed by an ever-increasing divorce rate, by increased infidelity of spouses, by the abominable sin of abortion, which bids well to become a national scandal and is a very grave sin. Another erosion of the family is unwarranted and selfish birth control. ("We Need a Listening Ear," *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, p. 5)
- And that's the way the Lord organized it. This wasn't an experiment. He knew what he was doing. Those things that endanger a happy marriage are infidelity, slothfulness, selfishness, abortion, unwarranted birth control, leaving the home to others, and sin in all of its many manifestations. ("The Blessings and Responsibilities of Womanhood," *Ensign*, Mar. 1976, p. 71)

#### **Ezra Taft Benson**

- Guard against the temptations of seeking after material things; the constant craze to appear more youthful and worldly; the limiting of the size of your family when health of the mother or infant is not the concern; and personal selfishness which will deprive you of the joy of helping others. All these problems contribute to ingratitude, uncharitableness, and emotional instability. ("The Honored Place of Woman," *Ensign*, Nov. 1981, 107)
- I have always loved the words of Solomon: "Children are an heritage of the Lord: and. . . happy is the man [and woman] that hath [their] quiver full of them" (Psalm 127:3-5). I know the special blessings of a large and happy family, for my dear

parents had a quiver full of children. Being the oldest of eleven children, I saw the principles of unselfishness, mutual consideration, loyalty to each other, and a host of other virtues developed in a large and wonderful family with my noble mother as the queen of that home.

Young mothers and fathers, with all my heart I counsel you not to postpone having your children, being co-creators with our Father in Heaven. Do not use the reasoning of the world, such as, "We will wait until we can better afford having children, until we are more secure, until John has completed his education, until he has a better paying job, until we have a larger home, until we have obtained a few of the material conveniences," and on and on. This is the reasoning of the world and is not pleasing in the sight of God. Mothers who enjoy good health, have your children and have them early. And, husbands, always be considerate of your wives in the bearing of children.

Do not curtail the number of children for personal or selfish reasons. Material possessions, social convenience, and so-called professional advantages are nothing compared to a righteous posterity. In the eternal perspective, children--not possessions, not position, not prestige--are our greatest jewels. Brigham Young emphasized: "There are multitudes of pure and holy spirits waiting to take tabernacles, now what is our duty?--To prepare tabernacles for them; to take a course that will not tend to drive those spirits into the families of the wicked, where they will be trained in wickedness debauchery, and every species of crime. It is the duty of every righteous man and woman to prepare tabernacles for all the spirits they can" (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, p. 197). Yes, blessed is the husband and wife who have a family of children. The deepest joys and blessings in life are associated with family, parenthood, and sacrifice. To have those sweet spirits come into the home is worth practically any sacrifice. (Address given at a Fireside for Parents, 22 February 1987 - Produced as a Pamphlet)

#### **Gordon B. Hinckley**

- Mr. Wallace: "Why is it that Mormons apparently have so many children?"  
Reply: "We don't dictate family size. That is left to the father and the mother, the husband and wife. And we expect them to make of this the most serious business of their lives, the rearing of the

family. ..." ("This Thing Was Not Done in a Corner," *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 49)

- Much has been said . . . about birth control. I like to think of the positive side of the equation, of the meaning and sanctity of life, of the purpose of this estate in our eternal journey, of the need for the experience of mortal life under the great plan of God our Father, of the joy that is to be found only where there are children in the home, of the blessings that come of good posterity. When I think of these values and see them taught and observed, then I am willing to leave the question of numbers to the man and the woman and the Lord. (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*, p. 35.)
- I am offended by the sophistry that the only lot of the Latter-day Saint woman is to be barefoot and pregnant. It's a clever phrase, but it's false. Of course we believe in children. The Lord has told us to multiply and replenish the earth that we might have joy in our posterity, and there is no greater joy than the joy that comes of happy children in good families. But he did not designate the number, nor has the Church. That is a sacred matter left to the couple and the Lord. The official statement of the Church includes this language: "Husbands must be considerate of their wives, who have the greater responsibility not only of bearing children but of caring for them through childhood, and should help them conserve their health and strength. Married couples should exercise self-control in all of their relationships. They should seek inspiration from the Lord in meeting their marital challenges and rearing their children according to the teachings of the gospel" (General Handbook of Instructions [1983], p.77). [From *Cornerstones of a Happy Home*, (pamphlet) p. 6]

#### **N. Eldon Tanner**

The whole purpose of the creation of the earth was to provide a dwelling place where the spirit children of God might come and be clothed in mortal bodies and, by keeping their second estate, prepare themselves for salvation and exaltation. The whole purpose of the mission of Jesus Christ was to make possible the immortality and eternal life of man. The whole purpose of mothers and fathers should be to live worthy of this blessing and to assist God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ in their work. No greater honor could be given to [men and] women than to assist in this divine plan, and I wish to say without equivocation that a woman will find greater satisfaction and joy and make a greater contribution to mankind by being a wise and worthy mother raising good children than she could make in any other vocation." [Conference Report, Oct. 1973, 126, or "No Greater Honor: The Woman's Role," in *Ensign* (Jan. 1974), pp. 8, 10; emphasis added]

#### **Dallin H. Oaks**

How many children should a couple have? All they can care for! Of course, to care for children means more than simply giving them life. Children must be loved, nurtured, taught, fed, clothed, housed, and well started in their capacities to be good parents themselves. Exercising faith in God's promises to bless them when they are keeping his commandments, many LDS parents have large families. Others seek but are not blessed with children or with the number of children they desire. In a matter as intimate as this, we should not judge one another. ("The Great Plan of Happiness," *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, p. 75)

## Non-General Authority Statements from Ensign

### **I Have a Question**

*Questions of general gospel interest answered for guidance, not as official statements of Church policy.*

Is it our understanding that we are to propagate children as long and as frequently as the human body will permit? Is there not any kind of "gospel family-planning," for lack of a better way to say it?

### **Dr. Homer Ellsworth, gynecologist and former member of the Melchizedek Priesthood General Committee**

I hear this type of question frequently from active and committed Latter-day Saint women who often ask questions that are outside my professional responsibilities. Here are some of the principles and attitudes I believe apply to this fundamental question, a

question most couples ask themselves many times during their child-bearing years.

I rejoice in our basic understanding of the plan of salvation, which teaches us that we come to earth for growth and maturity, and for testing. In that process we may marry and provide temporal bodies for our Heavenly Father's spirit children. That's basic, it seems to me. In contemplating this truth, I also take great delight in the Church's affirmative position that it is our blessing and joy, and our spiritual obligation, to bear children and to have a family. It impresses me that the positive is stressed as our goal.

I rejoice in our understanding that one of the most fundamental principles in the plan of salvation is free agency. The opportunity to make free agency choices is so important that our Heavenly Father was willing to withhold additional opportunities from a third of his children rather than deprive them of their right of choice. This principle of free agency is vital to the success of our probation. Many of the decisions we make involve the application of principles where precise yes-and-no answers are just not available in Church handbooks, meetings, or even the scriptures.

Our growth process, then, results from weighing the alternatives, studying the matter carefully, and seeking inspiration from the Lord. This, it seems to me, is at the heart of the gospel plan. It has always given me great joy and confidence to observe that in their administration of God's teachings, our inspired prophets do not seek to violate this general plan of individual agency, but operate within broad guidelines that provide considerable individual flexibility.

I recall a President of the Church, now deceased, who visited his daughter in the hospital following a miscarriage.

She was the mother of eight children and was in her early forties. She asked, "Father, may I quit now?" His response was, "Don't ask me. That decision is between you, your husband, and your Father in Heaven. If you two can face him with a good conscience and can say you have done the best you could, that you have really tried, then you may quit. But, that is between you and him. I have enough problems of my own to talk over with him when we meet!" So it is clear to me that the decisions regarding our children, when to have them, their number, and all related matters and questions can only be made after real discussion between the marriage partners and after prayer.

In this process of learning what is right for you at any particular time, I have always found it helpful to use a basic measuring stick: Is it selfish? I have concluded that most of our sins are really sins of selfishness. If you

don't pay your tithing, selfishness is at the heart of it. If you commit adultery, selfishness is at the heart of it. If you are dishonest, selfishness is at the heart of it. I have noted that many times in the scriptures we observe the Lord chastising people because of their selfishness. Thus, on the family [page 24] questions, if we limit our families because we are self-centered or materialistic, we will surely develop a character based on selfishness. As the scriptures make clear, that is not a description of a celestial character. I have found that we really have to analyze ourselves to discover our motives. Sometimes superficial motivations and excuses show up when we do that.

But, on the other hand, we need not be afraid of studying the question from important angles—the physical or mental health of the mother and father, the parents' capacity to provide basic necessities, and so on. If for certain personal reasons a couple prayerfully decides that having another child immediately is unwise, the method of spacing children—discounting possible medical or physical effects—makes little difference. Abstinence, of course, is also a form of contraception, and like any other method it has side effects, some of which are harmful to the marriage relationship.

As a physician I am often required to treat social-emotional symptoms related to various aspects of living. In doing so I have always been impressed that our prophets past and present have never stipulated that bearing children was the sole function of the marriage relationship. Prophets have taught that physical intimacy is a strong force in strengthening the love bond in marriage, enhancing and reinforcing marital unity. Indeed, it is the rightful gift of God to the married. As the Apostle Paul says,

"The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife." Paul continues, "Depart ye not one from the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency." (JST, 1 Cor. 7:4–5). Abstinence in marriage, Paul says, can cause unnecessary temptations and tensions, which are certainly harmful side effects.

So, as to the number and spacing of children, and other related questions on this subject, such decisions are to be made by husband and wife righteously and empathetically communicating together and seeking the inspiration of the Lord. I believe that the prophets have given wise counsel when they advise couples to be considerate and plan carefully so that the mother's health will not be impaired. When this recommendation of the First Presidency is ignored or unknown or

misinterpreted, heartache can result.

I know a couple who had seven children. The wife, who was afflicted with high blood pressure, had been advised by her physician that additional pregnancy was fraught with grave danger and should not be attempted. But the couple interpreted the teachings of their local priesthood leaders to mean that they should consider no contraceptive measures under any circumstances. She died from a stroke during the delivery of her eighth child.

As I meet other people and learn of their circumstances, I am continually inspired by the counsel of the First Presidency in the General Handbook of Instructions that the health of the mother and the well-being of the family should be considered. Thirty-four years as a practicing gynecologist and as an observer of Latter-day Saint families have taught me that not only the physical well-being but the emotional well-being must also be considered. Some parents are less subject to mood swings and depression and can more easily cope with the pressures of many children. Some parents have more help from their families and friends. Some are more effective parents than others, even when their desire and motivation are the same. In addition, parents do owe their children the necessities of life. The desire for luxuries, of course, would not be an appropriate determinant of family size; luxuries are just not a legitimate consideration. I think every inspired human heart can quickly determine what is a luxury and what is not.

In summary, it is clear to me that couples should not let the things that matter most be at the mercy of those that matter least. In searching for what is most important, I believe that we are accountable not only for what we do but for why we do it. Thus, regarding family size, spacing of children, and attendant questions, we should desire to multiply and replenish the earth as the Lord commands us. In that process, Heavenly Father intends that we use the free agency he has given in charting a wise course for ourselves and our families. We gain the wisdom to chart that wise course through study, prayer, and listening to the still small voice within us. (Homer Ellsworth, "I Have a Question," *Ensign*, Aug. 1979, pp. 23-24)

### **Philip F. Low, "I Have a Question,"**

How does one use these principles in reaching decisions on issues or practices for which there is no established Church policy? As a case study, let us consider one problem that sometimes troubles Church members: family size. Many years ago, my wife and I

were confronted with this problem. My wife had experienced trouble with her back that was aggravated by the carrying and bearing of children and, following the cesarean birth of a fourth child, she was obliged to undergo surgery on her spinal column. The surgery was largely successful in removing the cause of the trouble, but some irreparable damage had already been done and so she was strongly advised by the physicians involved not to have any more children. This advice troubled us greatly because we wanted to have more children. Therefore, we decided to follow the procedure described heretofore.

We first examined the scriptures and the words of modern prophets for relevant principles of truth. Among the scriptures we read were the following: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Gen. 1:28) and "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them." (Ps. 127:3-5.)

We found that these scriptures were reinforced by President Joseph F. Smith, who stated: "I regret ... that there should exist a sentiment or a feeling among any members of the Church to curtail the birth of their children. ... I believe that where people undertake to curtail or prevent the birth of their children that they are going to reap disappointment by and by." (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1939, pp. 278-79.)

We also read President David O. McKay's statement: "Love realizes his sweetest happiness and his most divine consummation in the home where the coming of children [is] made most welcome, and where the duties of parenthood are accepted as a co-partnership with the eternal Creator.

"In all this, however, the mother's health should be guarded. In the realm of wifehood, the woman should reign supreme." (*Gospel Ideals*, 2nd printing, Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1954.)

Having read what the Lord and his prophets have said on the subject, we next studied all the literature we could find on the kind of back trouble that my wife suffered. For seven years we studied and prayed and fasted for inspiration in deciding what to do. Finally, we decided to have a fifth child. This decision was confirmed by a peaceful assurance from our Father in Heaven.

When our fifth child was born, we wondered about having a sixth. My wife felt that there was still another child, a boy, waiting to come into our home. So we followed the same procedure again and, as a result, that



boy is now part of our family and has returned from a mission to Germany. Once he was born, we felt content. We felt no motivation to further expand our family. Our quiver was full.

In the economy of heaven, all the answers are not given. We have the opportunity to exercise our agency and God-given faculties to seek and find our own answers to many questions. In the process, if we follow correct principles and are sensitive to the whisperings of the Spirit, we will grow and develop toward godhood. (Homer Ellsworth, "I Have a Question," *Ensign*, Aug. 1979, 24)

**From "A Blooming in France," *Ensign*, Mar. 1995, pp. 48-49 - An Article Dealing With the Church in France**

The gospel strengthens both individuals and families. Single members of all ages are part of most branches and wards. Sylvie Tramhel is a magazine journalist who also handles public affairs for the Church in Paris. "Sometimes it is hard to be a single member," she says, "but commitment to the gospel brings joy."

Families here face considerable challenges. In Paris and other cities, expensive housing often results in mothers who work outside the home and couples who limit family size to two children. Latter-day Saint families face the same challenges and make great sacrifices when mothers remain home to bring up four or five children.

Jean-Aime Durand, who serves as the stake president of the Nice France Stake, and his wife, Chantel, feel it is a great blessing to have children. "After we were baptized," says President Durand, "we decided to have more children. We have always been grateful for this decision.

"Scripture reading, personal and family prayer, family home evening, and attending church give children a shield of faith. Because they are at peace with the truth, they are not troubled when they are faced with false doctrine." Sister Durand agrees. "Priesthood blessings can give protection to us and our children," she says. "The gospel has totally changed the way I look at my children. I realized that these are Heavenly Father's children, and I have greater respect for them and their ideas."

Beatrice Magré feels that parents can make the difference with children. "Older children have three hours of homework," she says. "If the mother is home, she can help them study so they can attend Mutual."

Paulette VanTonder concurs. "I would never have

been able to bring up a large family without the gospel," she says, "but because the Lord has set his standards, it is not difficult."

Bernadette Seube of Bayonne realizes that her "faith and example will be [her] inheritance to [her] children."

Temptations abound for children; however, ten-year-old Guillaume Lafargue of Angoulême says, "I don't do bad things because I made the promise when I was baptized. I know better." He, like many other Latter-day Saint children, draws spiritual strength from the gospel and its programs. Patriarchal blessings, seminary, and activities are special sources of courage.

"Patriarchal blessings put young people on life's path of righteousness and help them remain active in the Church," [page 49] says Raymond Baudin, patriarch of the Bordeaux France Stake and coordinator of the Church Educational System in southeast France. "Most receive a patriarchal blessing when they are between sixteen and twenty years old, and they take them seriously. One young man was promised that he would have the maturity to choose his wife after serving a mission. At the time, he had already decided to get married and not go on a mission. After much prayer, he decided to go on a mission first."

President Soulé says, "We pray for our children. We have hope for them. For one of our youth activities we made sandwiches and then we gave them to the hungry in the Metro. Our youth still talk about the light in the eyes of the people they fed."

