

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTERDAY SAINTS
OFFICE OF THE FIRST PRESIDENCY
74³/₄ EAST SOUTH TEMPLE STREET, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH 84150-1200

May 17, 2018

To: General Authorities and the following leaders in the United States and Canada: Area Seventies; Stake, Mission, and District Presidents; Bishops and Branch Presidents.

Dear Brethren:

President Nelson Meets With NAACP, Offers Apology for History of Racism

“As I look around, I am reminded that this is not the first time leaders of our church have sat in counsel with the leadership of the NAACP. The first meeting, in 1963, prior to the October general conference resulted in a remarkable statement on civil rights read by President Hugh B. Brown over the tabernacle pulpit. It was a beginning. As I ponder on it now, I recognize how much we as a church must learn from our past.

It is with a solemn heart that I address you all today. I have upon my shoulders a mantle that I don’t suppose you can see with your eyes. It has a weight of its own, and represents the responsibility and duty that accompany this office which I hold - the holy stewardship for the children of God both within and outside of our faith. The trust inherent to that stewardship is no small part of its weight.

This prophetic mantle of this dispensation of the fullness of times began on the shoulder of the founder of our faith, the Prophet Joseph Smith. I imagine Joseph’s shoulders strained at times to bear the weight of the mantle until they were relieved of that calling on the ground outside of Carthage Jail. Still, the mantle passed on.

To each of the brethren who have born it since then, those men who have passed through the office I now hold, its weight and shape have persisted - adapted to the needs of the people and the inspired direction of our creator. Each of us bear the same duty and responsibility in accepting this office, and in so doing we also may be called upon to act on the principle of that mantle in completing or responding to matters started by our institutional and ecclesiastical forbears who also bore it before us. It is in that capacity that I address you now, this day.

Today, as Prophet, Seer and Revelator, and President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, I offer a full unqualified apology for the error of racism which was taught from this office and in the tabernacle and over the pulpits of our churches the world over. I am joined by my counselors in the First Presidency and the full Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in making this apology and we collectively bear witness and testimony of the devastating effects of racism which were perpetuated by leaders of the church in the past.

Institutionally in the past, we taught false and hurtful ideas about curses, skin color, and spiritual worthiness, and we were wrong. We taught false notions of white supremacy in civil and religious life, heinous ideas of pure white blood, and erroneously condemned interracial marriage, and we were wrong. We took it upon ourselves to interpret scripture to justify these false ideas and closed our hearts and minds to the truth of God's love even when it could be found in God's written word, ancient and revealed, and we were wrong. We hardened our hearts to the plain and simple truth of Universal Brotherhood and equality of all before God, and we were wrong.

We withheld from our brothers and sisters the joys of Temple service, the security of an eternal family, the peace of hope for full exaltation, complete fellowship among the saints and the duty and blessing of the Priesthood, and we were wrong. We operated in the political sphere and used our influence to fight against civil rights when we should have been on the front lines in defense of those rights, and we were wrong. We reprovved good men and women whose hearts were enlightened and whose voices were raised to God for equality, and we were wrong.

We have previously acknowledged that the false and racist explanations for the Priesthood and Temple restriction were wrong and disavowed them. Today, I am declaring that the ban itself was wrong. It was not of God but of fallible men, born of ignorance, pride and sin.

We stand humbly before our God and the world this day to prostrate our souls and beg forgiveness. With the mantle of authority also comes accountability. Though we did not originate these teachings and policies, we cannot deny accountability for their harm. Many of us were living and secure in our places of Priesthood privilege during those days and did not speak out against their falsehood when it was our duty, and each of us now feels the weight of institutional responsibility for those affronts to God's precious children.

Our souls are harrowed up by the memory of this sin. To every man, woman, and

child and to every family scarred by this hurtful sin, we humbly ask for forgiveness. We plead forgiveness of God and forgiveness from all of you in this room and throughout the world.

Throughout the scriptures, the Lord has called for his people to humble themselves and correct the error of their ways - the leaders most of all. Members may be faithful in following the teachings and instructions of their leaders, but if their leaders are in error, how much greater is their need for repentance because of their influence?

Just as individual repentance is commanded by the Lord, so too is institutional repentance, and we, the prophets and apostles must take the lead. We began our own institutional repentance in 1978 when the restriction on Priesthood and temple blessings was removed. I learned as a surgeon how a wound which is not fully healed may fester, and I have come to see the principle true for our church. For us, this wound of racism has taken the form of lingering false ideas which have remained in the hearts of both leaders and members resulting in cultural divisions which fester below the surface.

Today, I am cleansing the wound and completing that doctrinal restitution by acknowledging that there are false racist ideas which have been enshrined in our canonized scripture. This is not as surprising as you might imagine - in the very title page the Prophet Moroni himself states that the Book of Mormon may contain errors which are “the mistakes of men” and this is true of any scripture.

With that in mind, I am announcing the formation of a Scriptural Review Committee on Race. This committee is composed of representatives from The Quorum of the Twelve, The Relief Society, The Seventy and key members of BYU and CES faculty in sociology and race relations and will be presided over by the President of the Genesis Group. The committee will take the next 6 months to review our current body of modern revealed canonized scripture and identify those faults of men around racism which have been left uncorrected. They will consult with experts in sociology, race relations, and theology from both inside and outside of the church and present their recommendations at the October General Conference this fall. Those recommendations may take the form of additional footnotes, updated headers, additional explanatory text or even full removal of offending passages.

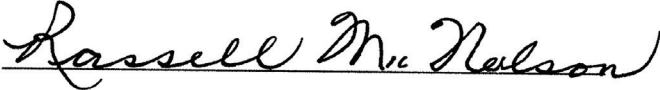
We will all have time to prayerfully consider their findings and recommendations before the April 2019 General conference where they will be presented to the body of the church for a sustaining vote according to the law of Common Consent as contained in the Doctrine and Covenants. Following the April 2019 conference the Correlation department

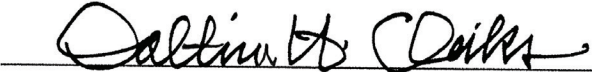
of the church will complete the requisite systematic revision of all manuals, videos and publications.

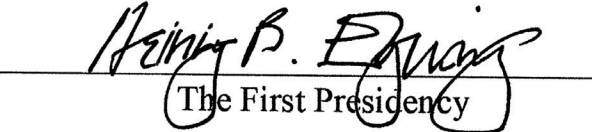
True repentance requires a deep introspection and thorough understanding of the degree of the offense. Though it may sometimes be painful, it carries a hope for a brighter future free from the mistakes of the past. Though we have been chastened of the Lord, we are hopeful for “whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth.”

It is my prayer that we all examine our hearts and root out those aspects of ourselves which may have been shaped by the racism of our past. As leaders and as members we must constantly guard against these biases. The strongest ally we have in this endeavor is Christ. He set the example of unconditional love and charity. If we measure our hearts against that standard and always strive to meet it, changing where we must even though it may be difficult - then we can stay on the path of discipleship and grow in faith and love for all of God’s children.

On behalf of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, its current and past leaders and members, I offer this humble apology and plead for forgiveness in the *merciful name of Jesus Christ, Amen.*”







The First Presidency