

# “Daughters of Christ”: Finding Language to Talk about Women and Priesthood

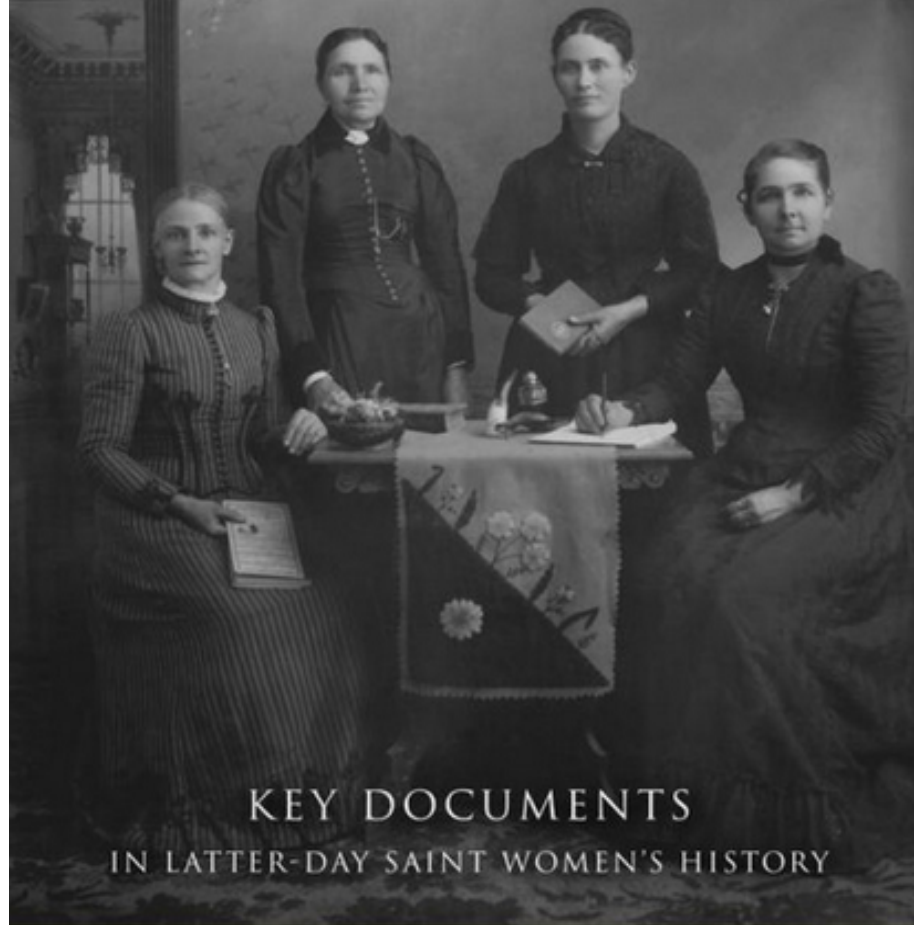
Kathryn H. Shirts  
FairMormon Conference  
August 5, 2016

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“We are not accustomed to speaking of women having the authority of the priesthood in their Church callings, but what other authority can it be? When a woman— young or old — is set apart to preach the gospel as a full-time missionary, she is given priesthood authority to perform a priesthood function. The same is true when a woman is set apart to function as an officer or teacher in a Church organization under the direction of one who holds the keys of the priesthood. Whoever functions in an office or calling received from one who holds priesthood keys exercises priesthood authority in performing her or his assigned duties.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “The Keys and Authority of the Priesthood,” *Ensign* 44 (May 2014): 51.

THE  
FIRST FIFTY YEARS  
OF  
RELIEF SOCIETY



KEY DOCUMENTS  
IN LATTER-DAY SAINT WOMEN'S HISTORY

“...without the female all things cannot be restor’d to the earth it takes all to restore the Priesthood.”

Bishop Newel K. Whitney, Minutes of the Nauvoo Relief Society, May 27, 1842, in Derr, Madsen, Holbrook and Grow, eds., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, 75-76.

“You, my sisters, if you are faithful will  
become Queens of Queens, and  
Priestesses unto the Most High God.  
These are your callings.”

“An Address by Miss Eliza R. Snow, Delivered  
in the Tabernacle, Ogden, August 14, 1873” in  
Derr, Madsen, Holbrook, and Grow, eds., *The  
First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, 388.



Susa Young Gates

“Office and priesthood carry heavy responsibilities requiring constant labor and time. No woman could safely carry the triple burden of wifhood, motherhood and at the same time function in priestly orders. Yet her creative home labor ranks side by side, in earthly and heavenly importance, with her husband’s priestly responsibilities. His in the market place — hers at the hearthstone.... That he would bungle and spoil home life if he sought to enter woman’s sphere is as sure as it is that she would emasculate his affairs if, or when, she attempts to prove her equality by crowding man out of his place.”

Susa Young Gates and Leah D. Widtsoe, *Women of the “Mormon” Church* (Independence, Missouri, 1928), 3-5.



Leah Dunford Widtsoe



“Motherhood can be exercised as universally and vicariously as can Priesthood... All intelligent worthwhile work for social betterment in private life or in organized activity is but an enlarged Motherhood acting for the uplift of mankind.”

Leah D. Widtsoe, “Priesthood and Womanhood,”  
*Relief Society Magazine* 20 (October 1933): 597.



Leah Dunford in the chemistry lab  
at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, 1896



John and  
Leah Widtsoe  
with their  
children,  
Anna and  
Marsel



John and Leah Widtsoe in  
Sheffield, England, 1929

“When we speak of marriage as a partnership, let us speak of marriage as a full partnership. We do not want our LDS women to be *silent* partners or *limited* partners in that eternal assignment! Please be a contributing and *full* partner.”

President Spencer W. Kimball, “Privileges and Responsibilities of Sisters,” Women’s Fireside, 16 September 1978.

“Just as worthy men were foreordained to hold the priesthood in mortality, righteous women were endowed pre-mortally with the privilege of motherhood. Motherhood is more than bearing children, though it is certainly that. It is the essence of who we are as women. It defines our very identity, our divine stature and nature, and the unique traits our Father gave us.”

Sister Sheri L. Dew, “Are We Not All Mothers?”  
General Relief Society Meeting, 2001.

“No woman in the Church may say that since she cannot hold the Priesthood it is no concern of hers.... It is just as though she were to sit in a dark house refusing to turn on the electricity because she is not an official... of the electric company. She would better rejoice that she can use all the benefits of electric power without carrying any of the burden of administering the electric plants.”

Leah D. Widtsoe, “How We May Honor the Priesthood in the Home,” *Relief Society Magazine* 27 (November 1940): 739-40.

- Because motherhood is common to women throughout the world, motherhood itself does not give Latter-day Saint women a spiritual identity that signifies their commitment to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.



- The model of priesthood and motherhood as spiritual alternatives for men and women can leave unmarried women and those who are not biological mothers feeling uncertain of their own spiritual identity and value.

“Latter-day Saints and others often mistakenly equate priesthood with religious office and the men who hold it, which obscures the broader Latter-day Saint concept of priesthood.”

LDS Gospel Topics Essay: “Joseph Smith’s Teachings about Priesthood, Temple, and Women,”  
[lds.org](https://www.lds.org).

“Like faithful sisters in the past, you need to learn how to use the priesthood authority with which you have been endowed to obtain every eternal blessing that will be yours.”

Elder M. Russell Ballard, “Women of Dedication, Faith, Determination and Action,” 2015 BYU Women’s Conference.

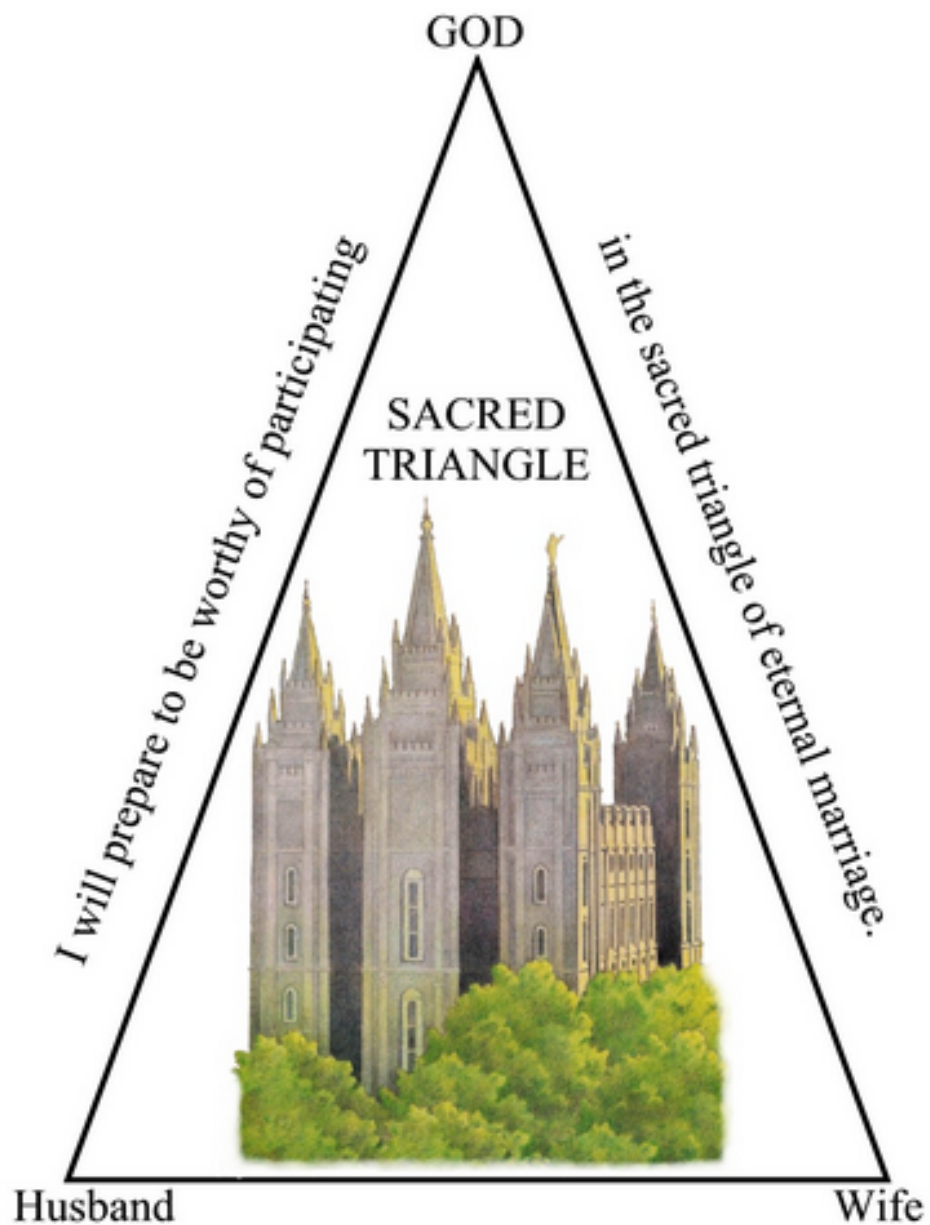
1. How do women act with priesthood authority and power as missionaries, in the temple, and in their Church callings?
2. How do women function as priestesses in the temple?
3. How do women become queens and priestesses; that is, how are women spiritually transformed?
4. How do men and women share divine authority to establish and guide their families when they enter the eternal covenant of marriage?

1.

How do women act with priesthood authority and power as missionaries, in the temple, and in their Church callings?

2.

How do women function as priestesses  
in the temple?



“Most simply, a priest is one who has the right to access the powers of heaven and to mediate or exercise those heavenly powers for the benefit of others on earth.”

Kathleen Flake, “The Emotional and Priestly Logic of Plural Marriage,” Leonard J. Arrington Memorial History Lecture, Utah State University, 2009



3.

How do women become queens and priestesses; that is, how are women spiritually transformed?

## Being in the Image of Christ

“And I, God, created man in mine own image, in the image of mine Only Begotten created I him; male and female created I them.”

Moses 2:27

## Becoming Daughters of Christ

“And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters: for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters.”

Mosiah 5:7

## Becoming Joint-Heirs with Christ

“... Jesus Christ... that hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.

Revelation 1:5-6

4.

How do men and women share divine authority to establish and guide their families when they enter into the eternal covenant of marriage?

“When a man and a woman are sealed in the temple, they enter together, by covenant, into an order of the priesthood.”

LDS Gospel Topics Essay: “Joseph Smith’s Teachings about Priesthood, Temple, and Women,”  
[lds.org](https://www.lds.org)



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“They who dwell in his presence are the church of the Firstborn; and see as they are seen, and know as they are known, having received of his fulness and of his grace. And he makes them equal in power, and in might, and in dominion.”

D&C 76:94-95