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# How to Start a Family Organization and Keep It Going

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Happy families will use any excuse to get together: holidays, weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, bridal showers, vacations, missionary departures, homecomings, funerals. And as if these aren't enough, there is always the delightful custom of regular family reunions.

Most people need the affectionate, loyal support and the sense of oneness that come with family ties. For this reason, family organizations are always springing up. But a worthwhile family organization won't last without planning and work. Here are some helpful suggestions for creating, improving, and perpetuating your family organization.

To begin with, most family organizations consist of the descendants of a common ancestor—one who lived, let's say, three or four generations back. Obviously, the farther back the common ancestor, the larger will be the family group. It is best for each family to adapt the size of its organization to the number of relatives whom they know and with whom they can easily communicate. But whatever the size, the organization should be more than just an instrument for social contact; it should also be a living service agency for its members.

What can a family organization do for its members? First of all, it can help keep members in contact with one another. Small organizations do this simply by mail or telephone. Larger organizations may publish a newsletter.

The registry of organized families at the Church Genealogical Society can be most helpful to those trying to contact members of an organized family. Contact among family members is vital, not only to the organization itself, but especially to those family members who are not Latter-day Saints. The family organization can be a missionary tool.

Second, a family organization can hold meetings. Well-planned family reunions are both fun and rewarding. Where geographically feasible, some may wish to make monthly contacts with relatives of the immediate three generations. Larger reunions might be more convenient if they are held annually, or even semiannually.

Third, the family organization can care for the welfare of its members. It can be the instrument through which individuals may receive comfort and help in times of distress, illness, or need.

Fourth, the family organization can aid members in doing their genealogy work. Saving the dead is a family responsibility. Archives and libraries perform an important role, but they are auxiliary to the family. A family organization, by pooling its resources, can do work quickly and cheaply that might otherwise be tedious, difficult, and expensive.

Families that do genealogical work together may also plan excursions to the temple to perform ordinance work for their ancestors. Moreover, family reunions can be places to exchange family news, gather material for biographies and histories, and do genealogical research. At such gatherings each member may enrich his book of remembrance and gain a greater appreciation for its importance.

How does one start a family organization? Begin by personally inviting interested relatives to a family

meeting. This would allow family heads to discuss family organization programs and literature offered by the Church. A calendar of reunions could be drawn up. Officers could be selected: a treasurer to collect dues, record expenditures, and make a periodic financial report to the family; a secretary to gather family news and publish a monthly or semiannual newsletter. Often round-robin letters can be substituted for a newsletter if the family organization is small enough. A genealogy chairman could be selected to assess the family genealogical resources and act as a coordinator to help family members build their individual genealogical records.

Though the organization may start small, if its founders are efficient and energetic, the natural tendency for families to unite will soon take its course. More and more relatives will become active in the organization as word gets around. And soon the organization will be running full steam.

How do you perpetuate a family organization? Primarily by establishing it on a proper foundation. It may help to draw up a constitution with by-laws. These should allow for changing conditions and for growth and eventual subdivision into more workable groups based on size and location of members. Responsible officers should be elected regularly so leadership is fresh and enthusiastic. Staleness in leadership positions can often destroy a good family organization.

In addition, goals, objectives, membership requirements, and financial responsibilities should be clearly spelled out to every member. Members should then have an opportunity to approve these guidelines before they are adopted or altered. Since regular meetings of officers are necessary for a smooth-running operation, annual or semiannual meetings of the entire family organization should be planned; they help maintain family solidarity.

The years move swiftly. The time we have with our loved ones is all too short. A good family organization can help make the years brighter by bringing family members closer together and by answering the individual need for love and support. It can well be argued that the greatest security and satisfaction come to those who enjoy the benefits of a well-organized, patriarchally oriented family.

The following sample constitution indicates some of the areas to be considered in forming a family organization.

## **Constitution and By-Laws of the \_\_\_\_\_ Family Organization organized (date) .**

### ***Article I Name***

This family organization shall be known as the \_\_\_\_\_ Family Organization.

### ***Article II Objective***

The objective of the family organization shall be to strengthen the ties of fellowship and kinship between living members of the family; to maintain family unity through frequent association of family members in a social way; and to perpetuate the memory and genealogy of the ancestors and descendants of \_\_\_\_\_ by combining the resources and efforts of the members of the family in performing genealogical research, and by unifying all genealogical, historical, and biographical research necessary for the compilation of complete and accurate family records.

### ***Article III Membership***

All descendants of \_\_\_\_\_ and their husbands or wives are eligible for membership in the

\_\_\_\_\_ Family Organization. Persons who are not descendants of \_\_\_\_\_ but who are interested in the genealogy of his ancestors or descendants are welcome as members of the family organization. Any person who is eligible may become a member of the family organization by contacting the secretary and by paying the annual dues required to sustain membership.

#### **Article IV** **Meetings**

The meetings of the family organization shall consist of an annual meeting and such other meetings or reunions as may be approved by the executive committee. The annual meeting shall be held at a time and place determined by the voice of a majority of the members present at the preceding annual meeting. The agenda of the annual meeting shall include any necessary elections of officers and presentation of business matters, supplemented by such other general activities as may be desired by the executive committee.

#### **Article V** **Officers**

The elected officers of the family organization shall consist of a president, two or more vice-presidents, a secretary, and a treasurer, which officers shall constitute the executive committee. The elections of officers shall be held in connection with every second annual meeting of the family organization. The terms of office shall begin at the close of the business session at which the officers are elected and shall cover a period of two years. All officers shall be eligible for reelection. Failure to hold the annual meeting or any election of officers shall not disorganize the family organization.

The appointed officers of the family organization shall consist of a genealogist and a historian. These appointments shall be made by the executive committee.

#### **Article VI** **Committees**

The executive committee shall set up committees and make special assignments as necessary in administering the programs of the family organization. Committee appointments and special assignments may vary in length of tenure, but such appointments or assignments shall be considered fulfilled at the time new elections of officers are held.

#### **Article VII** **Amendments**

The articles and subsequent amendments of this constitution may be amended by a vote of three-fourths of the members present at the annual meeting.

#### **By-Laws**

Section I. It shall be the duty of the executive committee to represent the family organization during the interval between annual meetings, to recommend the time and place of the annual meeting, to determine the order of business and approve the program for the annual meeting, to fill official vacancies until the next annual meeting, to appoint a nominating committee for officers at least three months in advance of a given election, to provide channels for members of the organization to obtain copies of data compiled through research, and to perform such other work as may be delegated to the committee by the family organization.

Section II. It shall be the duty of the president to preside at all meetings of the family organization, to preside at all meetings of the executive committees and to exercise general supervision over the family organization. It shall be the duty of the president to call special meetings of the executive committee as necessary for the purpose of carrying on the work of the family organization during the period between annual meetings. The president shall submit to the family organization at the annual meeting a report of all official acts of the executive committee, together with any other information and recommendations he

may deem important.

Section III. It shall be the duty of the vice-presidents to carry out the policies of the family organization by developing and administering specific programs within their assigned spheres of activity. These programs must be approved by the executive committee. It shall be the duty of the vice-presidents to assist and counsel the president in all matters pertaining to the activities of the family organization. It shall be the duty of the vice-presidents to act in behalf of the president in his absence in the order of precedence. Upon the resignation or demise of the president, the first or senior vice-president shall call a meeting of the executive committee for the purpose of filling the vacancy until the next annual meeting.

Section IV. It shall be the duty of the secretary to keep accurate minutes of the proceedings of all meetings of the family organization and of the executive committee and to perform such other secretarial duties as the president or executive committee may direct.

Section V. It shall be the duty of the treasurer to receive and keep an accurate record of all dues, contributions, and other monies received by and in behalf of the family organization, and to handle all expenditures and disbursements for and in behalf of the family organization. All checks shall be countersigned by the president and the treasurer.

Section VI. It shall be the duty of the genealogist to supervise and direct the compilation of complete and accurate genealogical records of the ancestors and descendants of \_\_\_\_\_. The genealogist shall select assistants, subject to the approval of the president, to help supervise the gathering of genealogical data, which assistants shall function as a committee, the genealogist being the chairman thereof. The genealogist and his assistants shall have the authority to call upon all members of the family for genealogical data and for assistance in performing genealogical research, and they shall engage as many family members as will respond in this effort, supervising their research activities in an efficient manner and counseling and teaching when necessary. If it becomes necessary, the genealogist may engage the services of professional researchers working on a fee basis, subject to the approval of the executive committee.

Section VII. It shall be the duty of the historian to supervise and direct the compilation and writing of biographical records, family histories, and personal histories pertaining to both the ancestors and descendants of \_\_\_\_\_. Assistants may be selected as necessary, subject to the approval of the president.

Section VIII. The annual dues per member of the family organization shall be \$3.00. Additional contributions may be requested according to the financial needs of the family organization in administering its programs. Dues shall be payable on or before the date of the annual meeting. If no annual meeting is held, dues shall become payable on the date specified by the executive committee.

Section IX. The by-laws of the \_\_\_\_\_ Family Organization may be amended, altered, or added to by a majority vote of the members at the annual meeting.

Note: Small family organizations do not necessarily need by-laws.

## **The Family in Time and Eternity**

The Prophet Joseph Smith described the family as the “fundamental unit of society in both time and eternity.”

To help unite ourselves with our ancestors for time and eternity and to aid us to enjoy the increased power of the priesthood in our lives, we are encouraged to organize ourselves into family groups. An organized family is one that follows the principles and programs of the priesthood and can, therefore, more effectively advance in the kingdom of God toward eternal life.

Brigham Young gave us the pattern for family organization: “All the families of the earth will be governed as one family and every man will preside over his own family.” At the head of every family group stands the family patriarch. He governs his posterity in righteousness and truth.

The Prophet Joseph Smith, enlarging on this theme at one of his own family reunions, said, "And again blessed of the Lord is my father. ... Like Adam of old, he shall stand in the midst of his posterity and shall be called a prince over them, and he shall be numbered among those of old holding the right of Patriarchal Priesthood."

President John Taylor testified that "a father holding the priesthood and having participated in the New and Everlasting Covenant of Celestial or Eternal Marriage, has a right to officiate in the Patriarchal Order as the patriarch to his own family."

Patriarch John Smith declared, "I thank God that so many are gathered of one blood. All that is lacking is for us to organize as families. We cannot redeem our forefathers and our posterity by ourselves."

So what do we do? We must live in such a way that we can qualify to enter the temple of God and there be sealed as family units for time and eternity. Then we must do the same for our parents and their children, and for our grandparents and their children, and so on, as far as we can go.

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