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# President Oaks acknowledges pain of past LDS restriction on priesthood, temple blessings for blacks

By Tad Walch | Jun 2, 2018, 9:22am MDT



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SALT LAKE CITY — A senior LDS leader acknowledged Friday night that the church's past restriction on blacks holding the priesthood and receiving temple blessings caused pain and suffering.

President Dallin H. Oaks, first counselor in the faith's First Presidency, said he was among the white American church members "who felt the pain of black brothers and sisters and longed for their relief" before the restriction was lifted in June 1978 by a revelation received by leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

He made the remarks in a message delivered in the Conference Center at the start of a program billed as "a First Presidency celebration of the 40th anniversary of the revelation on the priesthood," received on June 1, 1978. It was a message that was reiterated in the prophetic blessing of the Church's president, Russell M. Nelson, who would close the meeting by requesting all "to build bridges of cooperation instead of walls of segregation."

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The pain of the 126-year restriction and joy over its end was reflected throughout the evening, as black Mormons cried while narrating stories of faithful black church pioneers. Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Gladys Knight sang and led a combined choir, dressed in colorful robes, in soaring harmonies throughout the program, earning repeated standing ovations from thousands, including well-known Mormons like NBA star Jabari Parker.

Church leaders announced the revelation June 9, 1978. President Oaks said church members who are old enough remember that day the way Americans remember where they were on Sept. 11, 2001, or when John F. Kennedy was assassinated. He recalled receiving the news of the revelation while working in his yard during a break from his job as president of Brigham Young University.

"The scene etched in my memory of this unforgettable announcement 40 years ago (is) sitting on a pile of dirt and weeping as I told my sons of this divine revelation," he said.

LDS Church President Nelson and the second counselor in the First Presidency, President Henry B. Eyring, also wept that day, he said.

President Nelson succeeded the final living leader involved in the 1978 revelation, President Thomas S. Monson, who died Jan. 2 after serving nearly a decade as church president.

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"Some, in their personal lives, continued the attitudes of racism that have been painful to so many throughout the world, including the past 40 years," he said.

The revelation was a divine call to abandon attitudes of prejudice against any group, he added.

An African-American couple from Raleigh, North Carolina, flew to Utah just for the event and said they were grateful for President Oaks' acknowledgements.

"I think everyone needs validation," said Carleen Foster, a youth Sunday School teacher. "I think it's very important to realize there's a struggle in the United States, outside the United States and within the church. I think when you recognize someone else's pain, both can heal from it."

"Some of the people here and many watching online were waiting to hear something like that," said Robert Foster, an eye doctor and member of an LDS stake (regional) presidency. "I was hoping it would not just be singing and dancing, and it wasn't. There was some purpose in this party."

President Oaks emphasized that the First Presidency's goal was to help all church members look forward to a better future, but he recognized the different experiences of African Mormons and black American Mormons, including ongoing racism in the United States.

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"Our determination in this program is to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the revelation on the priesthood by looking forward," he said. "As we do, we express special appreciation for our marvelous members of African descent, especially our African-American members, who have persisted in faith and faithfulness through a difficult transition period of fading prejudice."

President Eyring called the revelation a significant moment in church history with tremendous impact worldwide as he welcomed thousands at the Conference Center at the start of the event, which was broadcast live on [lds.org](https://www.lds.org).

Other headliners for the event included singer Alex Boyé and the Be One Choir, led by Knight and consisting of voices from the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, Saints Unified Voices and Debra Bonner Unity Gospel Choir International.

A few black men received the priesthood after the LDS Church was founded in 1830. But in 1852, church President Brigham Young announced the race-based restriction before the Utah Territorial Legislature as it legalized slavery.

Within a year of the revelation lifting the restriction, the church was organized in several West African countries with 1,700 converts, many of whom had waited 15 years or more for the opportunity to join the church. It is projected that by year's end, the church will have more than 600,000 members in Africa. One in 10 American converts are African-American.

"When we consider what has happened in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and in the lives of its members since 1978," President Oaks said, "we all have cause for celebration."

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President Nelson spoke briefly at the end of the meeting.

"I wish we could have an encore," he said, referring to Knight's rendition of "Love One Another," backed by the combined choir. "These talented performers have inspired each one of us."

"Ultimately," he added, "we realize that only the comprehension of the true Fatherhood of God can bring full appreciation of the true brotherhood of men and the true sisterhood of women," he said. "That understanding inspires us with passionate desire to build bridges of cooperation instead of walls of segregation. It is my prayer and blessing that I leave upon all who are listening, that we may overcome any burdens of prejudice and walk uprightly with God — and with one another — in perfect 'peace and equity.'"

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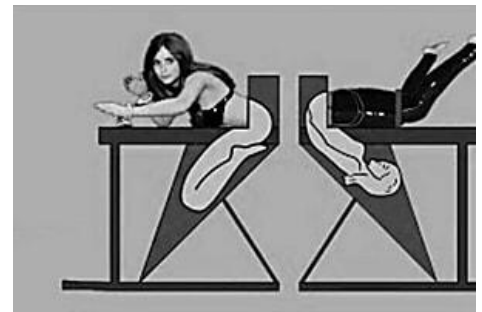
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