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1978 revelation commemorated

Event recounts blessings granted 30 years ago to all worthy males

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At the Church's commemoration of 30 years since the revelation was announced granting the priesthood to all worthy males regardless of race, a General Authority looked forward to "the day when all men and women of the earth will be seen only as God's children."

"Let us look to a future of greater and greater unity," said Elder Earl C. Tingey of the Presidency of the Seventy at the June 8 gathering in the Salt Lake Tabernacle. "We are one! We are united! May God bless you, my brothers and sisters for your faithfulness."

Elder Tingey presided over and conducted the event that included as speakers Elder Sheldon F. Child of the Seventy and three Church members of African-American heritage: Fred A. Parker III, president of the Atlanta Georgia Stake; Catherine M. Stokes, a former deputy director of the Illinois Department of Public

Health; and Ahmad S. Corbitt, president of the Cherry Hill New Jersey Stake. Tabernacle Choir musical director Mack Wilberg led a multi-cultural choir formed for the occasion. Popular recording artist Alex Boye, a Tabernacle Choir member, sang two hymns: "How Great Thou Art," and "I Know That My Redeemer Lives."

Noting that he was there by assignment from the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, Elder Child said to members of the congregation that his heart was touched as he looked at them and knew of their devotion to the Lord. "Many of you were members of the Church before the revelation was given and walked by faith, never doubting the truths of the gospel you have embraced."

The 1978 revelation, he said, "is a dramatic witness of the Lord revealing His will and His love for all of His children."

He said that June 8, 1978, is a day never to be forgotten and that those who were members of the Church then remember precisely where they were and what they were doing when they heard news of the revelation. "I still remember the feelings I had and the tears that filled my eyes as I contemplated the wonderful blessings that would now be available to all of our Heavenly Father's children. I remember that day so well, but what I did not realize was the blessing and the impact it would be in my own life."

He said that in 1991 he was called as president of the New York New York City Mission, where he saw the blessing that came to men because of the revelation. He told of a young African-American man called to preside over a fledgling branch on Staten Island and said the man with members of the branch would stand outside the meetinghouse on Sunday and invite passersby to come in and worship with them. Many did, and the branch grew. The man, Lorenzo Davis, became a bishop of one of the wards when Brooklyn became a stake that included Staten Island.

"What a faithful, dedicated Latter-day Saint he was!" he said of Bishop Davis, who died earlier this year of cancer.

"As I rejoiced upon hearing of the revelation 30 years ago, little did I realize that there were groups of people half a world away who were also celebrating and giving thanks to God for this momentous event," he said.

He and his wife lived in West Africa for four years. "We witnessed time after time how the Lord prepares the hearts of many to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ," he affirmed.

He told of Anthony Obinna, who in 1965 had recurring dreams in which he saw a beautiful building. Later, in a Reader's Digest article about the Church, Brother Obinna recognized a picture of the Salt Lake Temple as the building in his dreams. He wrote to Church headquarters requesting missionaries be sent to his nation of Nigeria and was answered with literature but was told the time was not yet right for the Church to come to West Africa. He and other groups began teaching the principles of his newly found religion. In November 1978, their prayers for the coming of missionaries were answered, and the first 19 official baptisms in West Africa were performed in Nigeria. Today in West Africa there are 146,000 Church members, Elder Child said.

In his talk, President Parker of the Atlanta Georgia Stake spoke of the oath, covenant, power and responsibilities of the priesthood.

Since June 8, 1978, he said, some have inquired of the Lord, the Church and the Brethren why previously only worthy male members who were not of black African descent were ordained to the priesthood.

"Heavenly Father knows the answer," he said. "The Lord may not be inclined to

provide a simple and universally satisfying explanation," he added, saying he finds the words of King Benjamin helpful: "Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend" (Mosiah 4:9).

President Parker said he does not feel it is necessary to understand all the Lord's dealings to believe that He is God and to trust that He loves His children.

"How foolish it would be," he said, "to imagine that because I do not understand some things, the things I do know and understand by the powerful workings of the Spirit in my heart are any less real or true."

He affirmed, "The powers and ordinances of the priesthood are true, majestic and compelling."

Sister Stokes read from an Aug. 18, 1978, talk at BYU by Elder Bruce R. McConkie, who said that on June 1 of that year, as the Brethren met in the temple, it was given President Spencer W. Kimball by the power of the Spirit what he should ask, that the revelation on the priesthood resulted, and that there was perfect unity among the Brethren on the issue involved.

Sister Stokes testified of the healing power of the priesthood and affirmed that she has seen it function in accordance with the principles in Doctrine and Covenants 121.

"As I observe what the Church does as I join with my brothers and sisters of all races to do the Lord's work, I know I am in the right place," she said. "Indeed, this is the place."

Posing the question "Where do we go from here?" she observed that just as there

were those who rejected the revelation when it was announced in 1978, there are those today who prefer to hold on to false notions from the past. In that regard, she quoted the talk from Elder McConkie referred to earlier: "It is time disbelieving people repented and got in line and believe in a living, modern prophet."

She said, "I believe we must reach out to those who lack understanding on this matter ... with an ever-increasing measure of love that we might help them to come unto Christ, and, by so doing, help ourselves to come unto Christ."

President Corbitt of the Cherry Hill New Jersey Stake, who joined the Church in 1980, two years after the priesthood revelation, said the present generation in the Church must "teach our children what unites us as disciples of the Savior. As we take this approach, our children will understand in their hearts that the restored gospel is the Lord's work on earth."

To illustrate, he said that he was informed through his patriarchal blessing that he would be "a teacher in the Church among your people." President Corbitt understood this to mean he would be called on a mission to teach the gospel in the type of inner-city environment where he was raised. Instead he was called to Latin America.

Though it was not what he expected, when the time came to come home, he left the mission in tears. "Hispanics were and are my people," he said.

For the past 15 years, he has served as a stake officer, the majority of those whom he has served being white, he said. "Those whom I have blessed, counseled with and consoled, disciplined and restored, recommended for the temple, advanced in the priesthood, sent on missions, and helped through their struggle of finding and feeling a testimony of Jesus and this restored gospel, whites, I came to know, are my people."

Similarly, he has worked with a Tongan, Hawaiian and Samoan. "Polynesians I know are my people," he said, noting that his first counselor, Vai Sikahema, and he are much alike: Both enjoy Motown and R&B music. "He does the haka, and I do the hambone."

"My point is that as we seek unity, we truly become one with the saints," he explained.

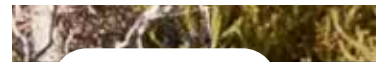
Music during the program underscored a feeling of unity, love and divine purpose in the meeting. For example, during the choir's performance of the hymn "Hark, All Ye Nations," Tabernacle Organist Richard Elliott played as an interlude a strain from "Called to Serve," a favorite of Primary children and missionaries. This evoked a theme of the universal application of the gospel and the mandate to carry it to all nations and people.

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