
First Presidency

D&C 81: Introduction

The First Presidency is the highest governing body of the Church. It is composed of the president of the Church and his counselors. In the early days of the Church, the First Presidency consisted of Joseph Smith as president and Jesse Gause and Sidney Rigdon as counselors. On March 8, 1832, Joseph Smith wrote, “Chose this day and ordained brother Jesse Gause and Broth[er] Sidney [Rigdon] to be my counselors of the ministry of the presidency of the high Priesthood.”¹

One week later, the Prophet received a revelation confirming Jesse Gause to the Presidency and giving instructions to him for his calling (D&C 81: Introduction). In the revelation, President Gause was told to “be faithful; stand in the office which I have appointed unto you; succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees” (D&C 81:5). President Gause did not heed the Lord’s admonition to faithfulness and lost the promised blessing of “a crown of immortality, and eternal life in the mansions which I have prepared in the house of my Father” (D&C 81:6).

That is clearly seen in the two extant holographic copies of this revelation—one in the Kirtland Revelation Book and the other in the archives of the Community of Christ in Independence, Missouri. In both copies, the name of Jesse Gause is crossed out and the name of Frederick G. Williams is written above.

Frederick G. Williams was called to take the place of Jesse Gause as a counselor in the First Presidency and given instructions for his calling and blessings in D&C 81. The Prophet Joseph wrote, “Brother Frederick G. Williams is one of those men in whom I place the greatest confidence and trust, for I have found him ever full of love and

¹ Kirtland Revelation Book, 10.

brotherly kindness. He is not a man of many words, but is ever winning, because of his constant mind. He shall ever have place in my heart.”²

Since the days of Joseph Smith and his counselors, the First Presidency has been recognized as the highest-ranking priesthood quorum in the Church. Members of the First Presidency are sustained by Church members as prophets, seers, and revelators. They are called as special witnesses to teach and testify of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

Is it any wonder that Elder William R. Walker of the Seventy would recall seeing a picture of the First Presidency in the home of his grandparents or speak of it at the April 2008 general conference?

I first learned the importance of the First Presidency as a boy growing up in Western Canada. When I would go to Grandma and Grandpa Walker’s home, I was greeted in the entry by a framed photo of the First Presidency of the Church. I remember it well. It seemed that they stood as sentinels, greeting all who entered.

The beautiful color photo was of President George Albert Smith with his counselors J. Reuben Clark Jr. and David O. McKay. The photo showed them standing together by a large world globe. I loved the picture. They were such handsome and dignified men; I knew them as the prophet of God and his counselors.

That picture hanging in the front foyer of my grandparents’ home had a powerful influence on me. I lived in the small prairie town of Raymond, where my grandparents lived. I could walk to their home, so I visited often. I remember frequently standing quietly alone in the foyer, reverently looking at that picture of the First Presidency. I remember thinking about why my grandparents thought it was so important to honor the First Presidency and have that picture prominently displayed in their home. All who entered would see it. Perhaps most importantly, for their children and grandchildren it was a constant reminder of what was deeply important in the hearts and lives of Grandma and Grandpa. ...

² “History of Joseph Smith,” *Millennial Star* 14, no. 37 (November 6, 1852), 584.

All who entered the home of James and Fannye Walker knew that written upon their hearts were the words “As for us and our house, we will serve the Lord.” As their grandson, I knew it, and I have never forgotten it.”³

³ William R. Walker, “Three Presiding High Priests,” *Ensign*, May 2008.