
The Call to Serve

D&C 106: Introduction

In 1834 on a missionary journey to the eastern states, the Prophet Joseph Smith stayed in Freedom, New York. In that small town in Cattaraugus County, he was welcomed into the home of Warren A. Cowdery, a farmer and a physician. Warren had joined the Church three years before after receiving proof sheets of the Book of Mormon from his brother Oliver Cowdery.

Of his host, the prophet wrote, “We were blessed with a full enjoyment of temporal and spiritual blessings, even all we needed, or were worthy to receive.”¹ During the prophet’s stay in Freedom, a branch of the Church was organized, with Warren Cowdery called to serve as the presiding officer. As such, Warren was given responsibility for Church members in the towns of Freedom, Genesee, Avon, and Livonia. Although the area covered over fifty miles, Warren was equal to the assignment.

In this revelation, the Lord revealed, “Warren A. Cowdery should be appointed and ordained a presiding high priest over my church, in the land of Freedom and the regions round about” (D&C 106:1). The Lord assured Warren that “the laborer is worthy of his hire,” suggesting he had the necessary talents to fulfill the assignment in the Freedom Branch (v. 3). The Lord promised Warren “grace and assurance wherewith he may stand and if he continue to be a faithful witness and a light unto the church I have prepared a crown for him in the mansions of my Father” (v. 6). Warren presided over the Saints in his region of New York from 1834 to 1836. He and his family then gathered to Kirtland, Ohio.

The same promise of “grace and assurance wherewith he may stand and if he continue to be a faithful witness and a light unto the church” is extended to branch presidents and bishops today. President Thomas S. Monson, in his general conference address in October

¹ History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834], 446.

2003, recalled serving as a bishop in Salt Lake City and being given “grace and assurance” to call an inactive husband and wife to serve:

As a bishop, I worried about any members who were inactive, not attending, not serving. Such was my thought one day as I drove down the street where Ben and Emily Fullmer lived. Aches and pains of advancing years caused them to withdraw from activity to the shelter of their home—isolated, detached, shut out from the mainstream of daily life and association. Ben and Emily had not been in our sacrament meeting for many years. Ben, a former bishop, would sit constantly in his front room reading and memorizing the New Testament. ...

I approached the door to their home and knocked. I heard the tiny fox terrier dog bark at my approach. Emily welcomed me in. Upon seeing me, she exclaimed, “All day long I have waited for my phone to ring. It has been silent. I hoped the postman would deliver a letter. He brought only bills. Bishop, how did you know today is my birthday?”

I answered, “God knows, Emily, for He loves you.”

In the quiet of their living room, I said to Ben and Emily, “I really don’t know why I was directed here today, but I was. Our Heavenly Father knows. Let’s kneel in prayer and ask Him why.” This we did, and the answer came. As we arose from our knees, I said to Brother Fullmer, “Ben, would you come to priesthood meeting when we meet with all the priesthood and relate to our Aaronic Priesthood boys the story you once told me when I was a boy, how you and a group of boys were en route to the Jordan River to swim one Sunday, but you felt the Spirit direct you to attend Sunday School. And you did. One of the boys who failed to respond to that Spirit drowned that Sunday. Our boys would like to hear your testimony.”

“I’ll do it,” he responded.

I then said to Sister Fullmer, “Emily, I know you have a beautiful voice. My mother has told me so. Our ward conference is a few weeks away, and our choir will sing. Would you join the choir and attend our ward conference and perhaps sing a solo?”

“What will the number be?” she inquired.

“I don’t know,” I said, “but I’d like you to sing it.”

She sang. He spoke to the Aaronic Priesthood. Hearts were gladdened by the return to activity of Ben and Emily. They rarely missed a sacrament meeting from that day forward. The language of the Spirit had been spoken. It had been heard. It had been understood. Hearts were touched and souls saved. Ben and Emily Fullmer had come home.²

² Thomas S. Monson, "Bring Him Home," *Ensign*, November 2003.