

Comments on the Consolidated Church Program

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On June 22, 1980, when I first wrote this paper, I stated, "Just recently the church went on what is called the consolidated church program. Namely, all meetings are essentially held in one block of time on Sunday instead of being strung throughout the week." Objectives were to save energy and to give members of the church more time with families and time to participate in more community affairs.

For seven years we lived in Schenectady, New York, in what we called "the mission field." This meant that the membership of local bodies of the church were not large enough to be called wards but were called branches. In our branch, as in many small branches of the Church nationwide and even worldwide, the members of the branch were distributed over quite a large area. Visiting teaching for the Relief Society sisters and the priesthood brethren usually meant traveling quite a distance every month to visit the members assigned to them.

Our grandchildren may not remember anything except the consolidated program. Let me tell you how it used to be when I was growing up, and indeed until your parents were grown. Sunday School started about 10 am and ended about noon on Sunday morning. Everyone would then go home, have lunch, and come back in the evening about six or seven for Sacrament Meeting, which would last an hour and a half or so. Primary would be held on a weekday after school. Relief Society and MIA also would be held on a weekday, but usually in the evening. However, many Relief Society meetings were held on an afternoon during the week to accommodate the older ladies in the ward. Most mothers did not work, so this worked out quite well.

In the olden days, it paid to live near the church building. What with scout meetings, parties, play and choir practices, etc., you could be on the go all the time if you were LDS. In the usual Wasatch Front ward, this was not too much of a problem, but in the branches it involved a lot of running back and forth for long distances to get to the meetings. On Sunday, members living any distance from the meeting house would have to bring lunches and wait for the late afternoon or early evening Sacrament Meeting unless they had dinner invitations from a kindly branch member who lived closer to the church. Many of the less faithful fell by the wayside. Even where members lived in close proximity to the ward building, parents worried about their daughters walking home in the dark, etc. I can remember a "Light the Way to Church" program we had in our ward. During the time when the young people would be at MIA, etc., everyone would turn their front lights on to diminish the danger to youth going home from evening meetings. Sometimes, as you might expect, this was not always effective, because the teenagers would linger, talking in groups, long after the lights had gone out. Many a father and mother or both would be out in the car or on foot looking for their errant offspring.

The consolidated program was a great boon to branches, because all the meetings could be accomplished in one day and in one block of time. It also meant that the chapel could be heated one day a week on a regular basis, and then only again when special programs or parties were held.

I presume that it was the same in foreign countries. In Zimbabwe for instance, where Tracy and I served our missions, members of the Church were very poor, and it was a sacrifice for them to save enough to pay bus fare to get to one meeting on Sunday. For them to do this twice on Sundays, once for Sunday school, and once for Sacrament Meeting, and

then get to the other meetings held during the week would have been too expensive even for the most devoted member of the church. Most members would simply not have been able to attend primary, MIA, Relief Society, and perhaps even Sacrament Meeting.

There are a few disadvantages to the consolidated program. For one thing, three hours is a long sitting time for any of us, but especially for the children. The Primary has moderated this by varying the program so the children have a rest now and then to ease the long stay. Another problem is that there is not as much time as on the former program for visiting or fellowshiping.

Another problem is that song practice has disappeared, except in the Primary, which uses singing time as a tool for relaxation and rest. We do not learn as many new songs as formerly.

Advantages of the new program: More time on Sunday to be together as a family—especially with the father in attendance—even if he is the bishop, more time to work on genealogy, journals, and read the scriptures, a time for Mother to worry about keeping the children involved in activities conducive to keeping the Sabbath holy. Suggestion: go visit Grandmother and Grandfather.

I personally like the new program. It is good to belong to a church that is not afraid to change if it is necessary. The programs change, but the basic doctrines or the fundamentals of our religion do not. Those are eternal, unchanging, and God-given. Gospel principles, such as faith, repentance, baptism, tithing, etc., and the covenants and ordinances remain the same. But the programs that evolve about and around the church structure can, do, and will continue to change. It pays to be flexible if you are a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.