
Question Time — Why Do We Have Camps and Reunions in the Restoration?

--- By Elder Don Norman

Spring is here and summer is just around the corner, and with it the hope of great vacations, and fun summertime activities. One activity I look forward to each year is reunion. I'm sure for our youth, it is summer church camp. Have you ever wondered when the first reunions or youth camps were?

At the RLDS World Conference in May 1883, a resolution was presented providing for the holding of reunions. It was discussed and then referred to a committee, which resulted in a recommendation to hold reunions. The Conference adopted the resolution. Although there had been reunions earlier, the first official reunion took place at Lelands Grove, Iowa, September 15-23, 1883. The church at this time was having two conferences per year and they decided to drop the fall conference and in its place have a reunion.

Quoting from Church History, Volume 4, page 434: "It [this first reunion] was pronounced a success, and from this success encouragement was had to make further effort. So well satisfied was the assembly that it promptly adopted the following preamble and resolutions:

Whereas, We, the Saints assembled in this reunion meeting, have realized spiritual blessings and favor from God, and have enjoyed the communion and fellowship of each other since we assembled together, and believing as we do that great good will accrue to the church generally as well as to us individually, in the continuation of these meetings; therefore be it

Resolved, That we are in favor of holding a reunion meeting annually, and that a committee of three be appointed and empowered to obtain control of the grounds where said meeting shall be held, and to let grounds for provision stands, and that the proceeds from the letting of said stands shall be used to defray the expenses of the meeting, reserving to the owner of land one stand for the sale of provisions. And be it further

Resolved, That no swings, shows, or intoxicating liquors shall be allowed on or nearer the grounds than is prescribed by law for such meetings. And we invite all districts who may desire to join with us in this movement for the advancement of the cause of Christ to cooperate with us in lifting high the standard of the cross, that the truth may be made known, our spiritual growth increased, and our God and Christ glorified.

The Herald stated editorially:

Profound peace prevailed in all hearts. Contentment and cheerfulness spread like a mantle over the camp. But few were sick upon the grounds, and most of these were helped by the anointing and laying on of hands. No murmuring, fault-finding, or grumbling were heard. Most came provided for rainy weather. The tents were so shielded by the woods that rain could not drift into tent openings, and except for the loss of four sessions after the meeting began the program of each day was carried out.

The feeling to hold another camp-meeting next year was unanimous. The place and time were determined in the utmost good humor . . ."

"...a week with other saints away from the hustle and bustle of life....uplifting, rewarding and spiritually strengthening."

Youth camps in Central Missouri Stake started in the early 1940's, according to one source (Leonard Smith). Some individual congregations and branches were already holding camps, but Central Missouri was the first stake to coordinate young adult and youth camps.

Now that you have a brief history, let me share why I look forward to reunion. My reunion experience goes back to my early childhood. Even then I recognized how special reunions can be. Now that I'm an adult, I find a week with other saints away from the hustle and bustle of life to be uplifting, rewarding and spiritually strengthening. So if you feel the need for a spiritual uplift or strengthening, consider attending a reunion or camp this summer. Hope to see you there!