On December 27, 1847, Brigham Young was sustained as President of the Church in the Kanesville Tabernacle, where he reorganized the First Presidency with Heber C. Kimball and Willard Richards as counselors.

Mark L. Staker

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Sharing Authority: Developing the First Presidency in Ohio

On Tuesday, November 30, 1847, Joseph Young organized a meeting of Quorum of the Seventy leaders at 11 a.m. in the log Council House just east of Brigham Young's cabin in Winter Quarters, Iowa. He invited the six Apostles in the settlement at that time, including Brigham Young, to join the meeting and give counsel. Thomas Bullock served as the clerk for the Apostles and kept the minutes, rapidly capturing the discussion as it unfolded. Robert L. Campbell was there as clerk for the Quorum of Seventy and took a second set of detailed notes.

Brigham Young's mind was clearly on other matters than business among the Seventy, and the conversation often drifted to the subject of a First Presidency. He frequently led out in asking questions and sharing his thoughts, but others also freely expressed their views. They discussed who could appoint a First Presidency and how its members

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should be selected and organized. Brigham Young recognized that Joseph Smith had shaped how that office should function. Throughout their meeting the men looked to the revelations Joseph had received and his own example in governing the Church for a model to follow. Brigham Young recognized that they had all the authority they needed to continue Joseph's pattern of governance and establish a First Presidency. Joseph Young acknowledged that his brother Brigham "has suggested a new thought to me that the church have the authority and can make a Presidency."[1] Brigham Young reasoned that "Joseph [Smith] was ordained an Apostle, but the church elected him as a President, Prophet, Seer, & Revelator, but he never was ordained to that office, why the one that ordained him would have to take his own hat off & put it on him [Joseph] & then go to hell[.] Oliver Cowdery ordained Joseph an Apostle. Oliver [was] ordained an Apostle by Joseph. they received their ordinations by Peter James & John before there was a church[.] take them that are ordained & elect them and they [are] selected & upheld by the church & therefore elected[.]"[2]

Brigham Young's insistence that Peter, James, and John ordained Joseph and Oliver Apostles before there was a Church emphasized the fact that the Church did not give its President authority or permission to govern but that his authority originated from an independent source. Even with independent authority, however, they were still "selected & upheld." The Church was also to play an important role in approving its leaders.

During the discussion, Orson Pratt took this concept further by arguing that "the 1st President has not the right of choosing his 2 Councillors . . . the three are chosen by the body."[3] Brigham Young insisted the President could choose his own counselors, "only he must be backed up by the church[.] the President has the right to make his selection or nomination & if the church won't back him up he may continue nominating till he has every male member in the church & if they won't back up his nomination he may preside alone—and the Church has no right to nominate for him."[4] Ezra T. Benson added later in the discussion, "I consider the Prest. can select just whom he pleases, even a lay man." Brigham Young stated:

"Go back a little further to the time of the 3 Wit[nesses]: when O. Cowdery had nearly as much power as Joseph—he went & bapd [baptized] a man & then [Joseph] sd. [said] I want you to be my 1st Cor.[Counselor]—that was (Fredrick Gee) [Williams]."[5]

The discussion by these Latter-day Apostles continued for some time and included a number of references to the early Apostles of Jesus Christ—Peter, James, and John. Heber C. Kimball asked rhetorically, "If Peter Jas & Jon had the right to come were they not a Prescy[?]" to which Brigham Young responded, "Joseph said so many a time."[6] The three early Apostles not only provided the authority to direct the Church but had served as a model for its administration. Peter, James, and John had become a symbol for Church governance.

Although Brigham Young and his fellow Apostles still had much to learn about Church administration and may have been imperfectly familiar with events that occurred before they became members, Joseph's teachings and example were clear enough that they could move forward less than a month after their discussion at Winter Quarters and reestablish the office of First Presidency on December 27, 1847. On that day, Brigham Young was sustained as President of the Church in the Kanesville Tabernacle, where he reorganized the First Presidency and called as his counselors two men who were also in that November 30 meeting, Heber C. Kimball and Willard Richards.

Brigham Young and his associates had personal experience and an oral tradition to help shed light on the published revelations they used to support their action. When Joseph Smith initially established the office of First Presidency, he had much less information to build on. It clearly took some time and continuing revelation before Joseph fully realized the model he would follow, and the governance system rapidly changed during the first three years of the Church's existence to meet the needs of a fast-growing membership. As this system took shape, Joseph Smith shared increasing levels of authority to govern with an expanding group of individuals that

eventually took shape as three Presidents modeled on the leadership of Peter, James, and John.

BEGINNINGS

The development of a First Presidency in Kirtland, Ohio, began with the restoration of priesthood authority to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery on May 15, 1829. Joseph later related how, after John the Baptist conferred priesthood authority and he and Oliver baptized each other, "I laid my hands upon his [Oliver Cowdery's] head and ordained him to the Aaronic Priesthood, and afterwards he laid his hands on me and ordained me to the same Priesthood—for so we were commanded" (Joseph Smith—History 1:71). Oliver recalled that when they "received the office of the lesser priesthood," the angel had made a promise that he would be "ordained to the Presidency."[7] The messenger, John the Baptist, noted that "he acted under the direction of Peter, James, and John, who held the keys of the priesthood of Melchisedeck," which would be conferred on them "in due time."[8]

At that point, both men shared equal priesthood authority and looked toward receiving additional authority from heavenly messengers. Although the Church was later formally organized on April 6, 1830, Oliver Cowdery believed that when he and Joseph Smith received the priesthood and baptized each other, this initiated the restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ on earth and that Oliver was "the first received into this church, in this day" upon his baptism.[9] After their baptisms, both men received revelation and prophesied the rise and progress of the Church.

Both men continued to receive exactly the same keys of authority as previously promised. Joseph Smith noted that in addition to the "lesser priesthood," both men received the Melchizedek Priesthood according to a prophecy that it "should come upon the Seer of the last days and the Scribe that should sit with him, and that should be ordained with him, by . . . those who had been held in reserve for a long season."[10] Oliver Cowdery wrote that both he and Joseph "received the high and holy priesthood" from these Apostles.[11] Every time Joseph Smith received priesthood keys, Oliver did

also—including in Ohio in 1836 when Moses, Elias, and Elijah conferred "the keys of this dispensation" (D&C 110:16).[12]

Even though Oliver understood he was the first person baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ when he went down into the Susquehanna River, he recognized the existence of the Church did not mean it was fully organized. Based on scriptural precedent, most Christian congregations require a confirmation by "the imposition of hands" to become a full member of the respective church.[13] Oliver Cowdery observed, "I was also present with Joseph when the Melchisedeck priesthood was confered by the holy angles of god," he recalled, " . . . which we then confirmed on each other by the will and commandment of god."[14] This confirmation was considered necessary to make them fully members of the congregation. Finally, when the Church was officially organized on April 6, 1830, members were rebaptized and confirmed, and specific individuals were acknowledged to have authority to lead the congregation.

It was this gradual development of an official Church organization through stages that Brigham Young likely referenced when he summarized, "This was a slow business, but at last he [Joseph] organized the Church, for the Lord had revealed to him the Aaronic priesthood upon which the Church was first organized; after that he received the Melchisedek priesthood, when the Church was more fully organized, and a few more believed, and then a few more and a few more."[15] The process of organization continued to expand as the Church grew.

JOSEPH THE SEER AS FIRST ELDER

From the very beginning, however, while Joseph and Oliver always shared priesthood keys, it appears Joseph still held a unique position as revelator. John Whitmer used the title "Joseph the Seer" in the introduction to his copies of the earliest revelations and in the earliest pages of his history of the Church.[16] Joseph used this same language when identifying himself along with Oliver as "the seer of the last days and the Scribe that should sit with him."[17] This title seems to focus on Joseph Smith's charismatic role as

a revelator of God's will and translator of God's word rather than as an administrator in the new Church, but it also confirms Joseph's special status.

Even during this early period, however, there were clear attempts by Joseph to share his role. He sought inspiration and received revelation that invited Oliver Cowdery to assist in translating (see D&C 8, 9). Although the translation attempt failed, Joseph received a number of revelations jointly with Oliver Cowdery and sometimes others that placed them in similar roles.

This joint sharing of authority between Joseph and Oliver was reflected in their calls by revelation and subsequent ordinations to the office of first and second elder at the organization of the Church on April 6, 1830 (see D&C 20:2–3).[18] In revelation given on that day, Joseph's title of seer was affirmed and expanded when he was told, "Thou shalt be called a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ" (D&C 21:1). Oliver was to ordain Joseph first elder, and in turn he was to be an elder "and the first preacher of this church" (D&C 21:12).

Joseph Smith's position as first elder and Oliver Cowdery's position as second elder separated them from other men in the Church who were also given priesthood authority. The nature of the authority given to others during the early period is not clear, but Heber C. Kimball came to understand that at least some others were ordained as Apostles of Jesus Christ. "Peter comes along with James and John and ordains Joseph to be an Apostle, and then Joseph ordains Oliver, and David Whitmer, and Martin Harris; and then they were ordered to select twelve more and ordain them."[19] Heber C. Kimball was not a member of the Church when it was headquartered in New York and may have imperfectly understood the events of that early period.[20] He placed Oliver as receiving his ordination from Joseph rather than directly from heavenly messengers, as Oliver recalled; but their apostolic ordinations may have been similar to the two men ordaining each other after John the Baptist gave them the Aaronic Priesthood, as Joseph Smith described. Heber C. Kimball placed the Three Witnesses in a special category similar in office to Peter, James, and John but not with the same authority

to govern. Other early members may also have held the title of Apostle, but this seems to have been a reference to the source of their authority rather than the office they held.[21] The Three Witnesses would later select twelve men in Kirtland and ordain them as Apostles.[22]

Available sources leave many unanswered questions about the nature of early Church administration, but it is clear that Joseph and Oliver held the two most prominent offices as first and second elder. The wording of the revelation directing their ordination (see D&C 21), however, suggests that Joseph and Oliver's relative positions in the Church were already subtly different from each other when the Church was organized and by September 26, 1830, these differences had become more pronounced. By September, Oliver had received five revelations jointly with Joseph in addition to their initial shared visitation by John the Baptist.[23] After Oliver Cowdery's criticism of one of Joseph Smith's revelations that summer, followed by Oliver's acceptance of revelations received by Hiram Page as valid,[24] Joseph received a revelation in September directed specifically at Oliver that affirmed, "No one shall be appointed to Receive commandments & Revelations in this Church excepting my Servent Joseph for he Receiveth them even as Moses."[25] In antiquity, Moses had Aaron to serve as his voice, and thus the revelation did not specifically restrict Oliver's involvement in receiving revelations jointly as long as they came through Joseph. Oliver could even receive revelations alone if they were not written "by way of commandment" (D&C 28:8). However, the practice of Joseph and Oliver receiving joint revelations immediately stopped. Oliver never shared in receiving a published revelation again, even though he shared all priesthood keys conferred on Joseph, including those keys conferred almost six years later during a joint visitation by Moses, Elias, and Elijah (see D&C 110).

Following Joseph's receipt of the revelation specifically appointing him to receive commandments and revelations, the Church conference met and "Br. Joseph Smith jr. [was] appointed leader of the Conference by vote" and "appointed by the voice of the Conference to receive and write Revelations & Commandments for this Church."[26] The participants in the conference

affirmed what Joseph had received in revelation. Although Oliver Cowdery's name was listed second among the names of the elders who attended the conference, he was not appointed to preside in the same manner.

The term "vote" fits comfortably with Brigham Young's later use of the word "elected" to describe their manner of affirming leaders, but the selection of Joseph Smith as the authority was not a democratic process where other candidates were considered. Less than three months before Joseph's appointment, revelation directed that "all things shall be done by common consent" (D&C 26:2). The phrase "common consent" was used as a legal phrase in the Middle Ages in England to express a joint approval of the lord of a manor and his tenants to legally binding bylaws that would govern them.[27] The word "vote" in 1828 still reflected this unifying agreement when it was used to mean "united voice in public prayer."[28] It was this united expression of support and dedication done through raising a hand that seems to have been the "voice of the Conference" formally appointing Joseph to receive and write revelations rather than a divisive expression of will through selecting one of several candidates. Even the term "election," as later used by Brigham Young, was defined in 1828 to include more than just a process for selecting from a range of choices. It acknowledged that an election could be the expression of approval for a king, president, or other leader to govern—sometimes through the raising of hands. It could also be the acknowledgment of approval of an individual by God, who "elected" that person for salvation.[29]

Less than four months after the conference, Joseph Smith began sharing in revelations with Sidney Rigdon in a practice that continued from December 1830 until February 1831, when Joseph received another revelation noting that there was "none other appointed . . . to receive commandments and revelations" than him (D&C 43:3). These joint revelations stopped for the rest of the year.

BISHOP OF THE CHURCH

The revelations addressing Joseph's role as revelator did not clarify how the Church should be governed. Revelations specifically addressing Church governance began when Joseph Smith first arrived in Kirtland and received a revelation directing the elders of the Church to assemble together to receive the law "that ye may know how to govern my church" (D&C 41:3). Significantly, the resulting revelation provided a specific list of commandments to govern behavior but also directed that Edward Partridge was to "be appointed by the voice of the church, and ordained a bishop unto the church . . . to see to all things as it shall be appointed unto him in my laws" (D&C 41:9–10).

Partridge was a convert drawn from the Reformed Baptist movement (or Disciples of Christ), as were many other newly baptized members in Kirtland. Their former religious denomination viewed bishops as overseers of distinct congregations. Some Kirtland members, including Joseph Smith, were exposed to denominations such as Methodism, which typically viewed bishops as overseers of multiple congregations. The revelation seemed to have this more broadly applied understanding by calling Partridge as the bishop of the Church rather than of a congregation. Partridge approached his calling in this way by immediately visiting multiple congregations, where he read and implemented the law of the Church.[30] Congregations or branches of the Church had overseers responsible for the temporal and spiritual needs of their community, but although *overseer* is the English equivalent of the Greek-derived term *bishop*, these individuals did not seem to share the same authority to govern that Partridge held.[31]

Edward Partridge's calling as bishop was the first one directing an individual to leave his business and "spend all his time in the labors of the church" (D&C 41:9). The same revelation reaffirmed Joseph Smith's calling as a translator in which he would still spend all of his time on behalf of the Church, but Partridge's calling as bishop gave him the only administrative position in the nascent Church of Christ. In fact, it was not until ten months later, on November 11, 1831, when Joseph first received a revelation

establishing the office of President of the high priesthood, that he learned in revelation that "the office of a Bishop is not equal unto it,"[32] clarifying that the bishop of the Church was not the highest office in the Church. This suggests that, between Partridge's ordination at the June 1831 conference and the establishment of a new office at the November 1831 conference, he held the highest specific Churchwide office available. At Kirtland's June conference, Lyman Wight ordained Edward Partridge and a number of others, including Joseph Smith, to the high priesthood. After these ordinations, Bishop Partridge blessed all those who were ordained, including Joseph Smith.[33] Then John Corrill and Isaac Morley, who had also been ordained to the high priesthood, were ordained by Lyman Wight as assistants to Bishop Partridge. Meanwhile, Oliver Cowdery, who was not at the conference, remained an elder in Missouri.

This arrangement created a potential for conflict where one leader, Joseph Smith, had never repudiated his title of first elder and was the only person authorized to receive revelation for the entire Church, while the other leader, Edward Partridge, had specific authority over the Church. Potential confusion became a reality during the next five months when Edward Partridge "insulted the Lord's prophet in particular & assumed authority over him in open violation of the Laws of God."[34]

Oliver Cowdery's position as second elder was also apparently never repudiated, and in every instance where he took minutes during the next year, he consistently recorded Joseph Smith's name first and his second in the list of what otherwise appears to be a random order of participants.[35] When Joseph did not attend a priesthood conference several times, clerks listed Oliver Cowdery's name first in the record.[36] A few months after Partridge's insult and assumption of authority over Joseph, Oliver Cowdery, who had been ordained a high priest on August 28, 1831,[37] took lead in a conference held in Missouri. Oliver sent his minutes of the conference to Kirtland and received a stinging rebuke that his minutes were not "binding on [t]his church neither . . . of God nor yet according [to] the mind of the holy Spirit." The conference, rather than Cowdery directly, was soundly

criticized for insulting Bishop Partridge by appointing him as moderator when Partridge had already been given that responsibility "by commandment." The correcting letter noted, "When God appoints authorities in his church let no conference take it upon them to reappoint these authorities." The written protest then took direct umbrage with Oliver Cowdery for "discarding the order established" by overstepping his bounds and infringing on the rights of the bishop and his counselors through transacting business that was rightfully theirs.[38] It was clear Cowdery did not have authority over Partridge.

The final two charges leveled condemned the conference for appointing Cowdery clerk rather than allowing Bishop Partridge that prerogative and for giving the bishop's counselor John Corrill additional responsibilities that were not the conference's prerogative to give. Although the evidence is sparse enough that it is difficult to draw specific conclusions about the relationship between Oliver Cowdery and Edward Partridge in Missouri, it is abundantly clear that there were unresolved issues about leadership and authority over the whole Church that continued until March 1832.

JOSEPH SMITH AS THE PRESIDENCY OF THE CHURCH

The resolution of this confusion began seven months after Partridge was called as bishop during the November 1831 conference held at the Johnson home in Hiram, Ohio. Joseph Smith received revelations at the Hiram conference that both shared authority much more widely and clarified priesthood governance. Although Joseph's earlier revelations emphasized that he was the only one authorized to receive revelation and commandments for the Church, in November he received a revelation directed to "all those who were ordained unto this priesthood whose mission is appointed unto them to go forth . . . [that] whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be Scripture."[39] This document dispensed authorization to receive revelation to all priesthood holders fulfilling their appointed mission within the context in which they served. Rather than consolidating

revelatory authority within an ever-tightening circle, this played the opposite role in placing responsibility for creating scripture on those who were acting in their specific spheres of authority. One month later, Sidney Rigdon began receiving joint revelations again with Joseph Smith, apparently in his role as a scribe.

The same November 1 revelation also addressed priesthood governance. It initially instructed that bishops were to be appointed "by a confrenc of high priests" and that these bishops could only be tried for infractions to the law of the Church "before a conference of high priests."[40] The revelation in this original form suggested a specific body of high priests was responsible for appointing bishops and sitting in judgment on them. Two days later, on November 3, the high priests attending the conference signed a document which affirmed that the revelations had come through Joseph Smith, "who was appointed by the vos [voice] of the Church for this purpose."[41]

A week later, on November 11, Joseph Smith received a revelation that provided order to the growing number of priesthood office holders. Although the term "quorum" would not become part of the discourse for another two and a half years, this revelation directed "there must needs be presiding Elders to preside over them who are of the office of an Elder." It went on to outline the same pattern for other priesthood holders: presiding priests would preside "over them who are of the office of a Priest," presiding teachers would preside "over them who are of the office of a Teacher, in like manner. And also the deacons." None of these individuals was initially identified as a president. That term was reserved for a specific office: "Then cometh the high Priest hood, which is the greatest of all wherefore it must needs be that one be appointed of the high Priest hood to preside over the Priest hood & he shall be called President of the high Priest hood of the Church or in other words the Presiding high Priest over the high Priesthood of the Church."[42] As if to emphasize the significance of the office of President, the revelation continued, "And again the duty of the president of the office of the High Priesthood, is to preside over the whole church, & to be

like unto Moses . . . to be a Seer, a revelator, a translator, & a prophet, having all the gifts of God, which he bestoweth upon the head of the church."[43]

The revelation made it clear that the President of the high priesthood would fill a different role from that expected of presiding officers of other priesthood groups. Not only would he be over the bishop (whom previous revelation had already directed was to be an ordained high priest and thus naturally under the jurisdiction of the high priesthood), but he was to "preside over the whole church" (D&C 107:91) and thus was over the other priesthood offices and general membership as well.

Although the revelation directed that Joseph Smith was to be the President of the high priesthood, the conference of high priests meeting at the Johnson home in Hiram, Ohio, did not act on it. A general conference held in Orange, Ohio, the month before, in October of 1831, had already determined that the next general conference of the Church would be held in Amherst, Ohio, fifty-five miles west of Kirtland, on January 25, 1832.

Joseph Smith waited to act until that conference. Two days before the scheduled Amherst conference an unscheduled general conference was held in Kaw Township, Missouri. It was at the Missouri conference where Partridge was appointed moderator and Cowdery served as clerk, eliciting sharp criticism from leaders in Kirtland as previously discussed. Although Oliver Cowdery wrote a cursory account of the Missouri conference in the minute book and then produced detailed minutes of the meeting which were sent to Kirtland, both sets of which survive, no minutes of the more important Amherst conference survive. It is through a brief reference made in passing in a letter and in later minutes that we know what occurred. At the Amherst "conference of High Priests, Elders and members," Joseph was ordained President of the high priesthood, with authority to preside over the whole Church.[44]

The November revelation had not mentioned assistants, counselors, or other positions of authority associated with the office, and there is no evidence that the concept of counselors was presented at the Amherst conference. Even when the term "presidency" was used six weeks later, it referred

to a single individual. The term "presidency" was seen as equivalent to "the office of president."[45]

Members in Missouri apparently received no advance notification that the ordination of Joseph Smith as President would take place in Amherst because the letter responding to the minutes of the Missouri conference that occurred at the same time specifically pointed out the charges leveled at Oliver and his companions in Missouri were brought "against that conference to the president of the high Priesthood our beloved brother joseph who has been ordained unto this office by the conference held in Amherst Lorain County Ohio on the 25 of January 1832."[46]

Six weeks after Joseph Smith's ordination, he noted during a meeting held in Hiram on March 8, 1832, "[I] Chose this day and ordained brother Jesse Gause and Broth[er] Sidney to be my councellors of the ministry of the presidency of the high Priesthood."[47] Jesse was a recent convert and unfamiliar to the general membership. This may be why his last name was specifically mentioned in the notation. Jesse Gause and Sidney Rigdon were not called to be *in* a Presidency but they were to be "of the ministry of the presidency"; in other words, they were to help with the management of the Presidency, an office that Joseph Smith held. This relationship is clear in a revelation Joseph Smith received on or about the same day that noted that Joseph was the sole holder of the office of the Presidency of the high priesthood. The revelation reads in part, "And unto the office of the Presidency of the high priesthood I have given authority to preside with the assistance of *his* councilors over all the concerns of the Church. . . . For *unto you* [Joseph] I have given the keys of the Kingdom."[48] Although Oliver Cowdery clearly also held priesthood keys, Joseph held the office of Presidency alone.

A week after he selected his counselors, Joseph Smith received a revelation urging Jesse Gause to "hearken to the calling wherewith you are called even to be a high Priest in my Church & counsellor *unto* my Servant Joseph *unto whom* I have given the keys of the Kingdom which belongs always to the presidency of the high Priest Hood."[49] Gause and Rigdon were clerks or scribes to Joseph Smith, who held the keys of the Presidency. This shift in

organization also seems to have changed Joseph Smith's relationship with his scribes because his last joint revelation received with Sidney Rigdon was on February 16 (see D&C 76), twenty-one days before Rigdon became a counselor to the Presidency.

The nature of the revelation addressed to Jesse Gause suggests some reluctance on his part to accept the calling he was given. Gause was a new convert to the Church and newly ordained as a high priest when the call was extended. He was unfamiliar to the Church in Missouri, as expressed in the minutes of the Literary Firm, which listed the names of Joseph Smith Jr. as President, followed by Sidney Rigdon with no special identification, and then a list of the rest of the participants, ending with "Jesse Gauss, one of the President's councillors," as if to identify him to the reader.[50] Later on the same day, Oliver Cowdery noted the participants in the minutes and gave the title of each, beginning with Joseph Smith as "President of Conference & also of the Highpriesthood," followed by his own name as "Clerk of Conference, and printer to the Church" and then the two bishops, Edward Partridge and Newel K. Whitney, each of which had stewardship over multiple branches. In the middle of the list he added Sidney Rigdon as "Counsillor of President," and the last name on the list was "Jesse Gauss Counsillor to the President."[51]

On or around the same day that Joseph selected Sidney Rigdon and Jesse Gause to serve as counselors to the Presidency, these two men signed a written protest, joined by several others, complaining about irregularities in Church administration in Missouri as previously discussed.[52] Sometime between March 8 and March 20, Joseph determined to go to Missouri.[53]

Although travel to Missouri was primarily to address issues connected to the publication of the revelations, which Oliver Cowdery, W. W. Phelps, and John Whitmer were overseeing, it also addressed Church governance issues. As soon as Joseph arrived he met on April 26 with "a general council of the Church" that included nine high priests and four elders.[54] The high priests at the meeting acknowledged that Joseph was "President of the High Priesthood, according to commandment and ordination in Ohio, at the

Conference held in Amherst."[55] Sidney Rigdon and Jesse Gause attended this meeting and had their names listed immediately after Joseph's. However, there was no reference to their positions, and they were not presented for the same affirmation of common consent that Joseph was. Because only the high priests acknowledged Joseph's role as President, even though the general membership attended the Amherst conference, it may be that only high priests sustained him there as well; a lack of minutes of the conference makes it impossible to determine.

After acknowledging Joseph's ordination, Bishop Partridge offered "the right hand of fellowship . . . in the name of the Church."[56] Bishop Partridge and Sidney Rigdon then patched up their differences during a break in the meeting. Jesse Gause, who was at the April 26 Missouri conference, then left on a mission on August 1 and went to the nearby Shaker community. Ten days later, one of his acquaintances in the Shaker community wrote that Jesse Gause "is yet a Mormon—and is second to the Prophet or Seer—Joseph Smith."[57] This suggests that although he did not hold the office of Presidency with Joseph Smith, the position of counselor gave Jesse prominence. On August 20, Jesse Gause parted from Zebedee Coltrin and soon left the Church. He likely had some kind of contact with Church leaders after this and is probably the Brother Jesse mentioned in Joseph Smith's journal that was excommunicated on December 3, apparently in absentia.[58]

A FIRST PRESIDENCY

Frederick G. Williams had been a scribe for Joseph Smith as early as February 1832. On January 5, 1833, he was formally called to replace Jesse Gause. The revelation reads, "I say unto you thou art called to be a councillor & scribe unto my servant Joseph."[59] Two weeks later, on January 22, Frederick was listed with the high priests, who attended a special conference, including "Joseph Smith Jun President, Sidney Rigdon chief scribe and High Councilor, Frederick G. Williams assistant scribe and counselor."[60] This reference to Joseph as president and his two counselors as scribes, with Rigdon clearly filling a more significant position, suggested that the

counselors played a supporting role with an emphasis on their scribal functions but were not considered Presidents in the same way.

A little over a month later, on March 8, 1833, exactly one year after Rigdon and Gause were called as counselors, Joseph received a revelation that transformed his relationship with Rigdon and Williams. The Lord revealed, "I say unto thy brethren, Sidney and Frederick . . . they are accounted as equal with thee in holding the Keys of this last kingdom . . . that through your administration, they may receive the word, and through their administration, the word may go forth unto the ends of the earth."[61]

The counselors were still to serve as scribes and Joseph was still to receive the word, but no longer were they counselors *to* Joseph—they were now counselors *with* him. They also held keys and used the title President. Ten days later, on March 18, 1833, "Bro Sidney arose and desired that he and Bro Frederick should be ordained to the office that they had been called to Viz of President of the High Priesthood and to be equal in holding the Keys of the Kingdom with Brother Joseph Smith Jr according to a revelation given on the 8th day of March 1833 in Kirtland."[62] Williams then copied the relevant portion of the revelation into the minute book and noted, "Acordingly, Bro Joseph proceded . . . and ordained them by the laying on of the hands to be equal with him in holding the keys of the Kingdom and also the Presidency of the High Priesthood." [63]

Frederick G. Williams had signed every minute entry up to that point with his name followed by "Clerk" or "Clerk of Conference." At the end of the minutes on the day he was ordained, and for the next nine months, Frederick G. Williams added after his name "Clerk P[ro] T[em]," identifying himself as a temporary clerk as an indication that his status had now changed. Even though he continued to keep the minutes of meetings for the rest of the year, he was no longer a clerk. Now Frederick G. Williams was a President. During the remainder of the year, Sidney and Frederick used the title "President" after their names in a variety of contexts.[64]

When Joseph Smith organized the Kirtland high council on February 17, 1834, he clarified how the presidents were both selected and

approved. He noted, "The president of the Church, who is also the president of the Council, is appointed by the voice of the Saviour and acknowledged in his administration by the voice of the Church, . . . and it is his privilege to be assisted by two other presidents, appointed after the same manner."[65] Joseph then added that if the two other presidents were absent, he could preside "without an assistant, and in case that he himself is absent, the other presidents have power to preside in his stead, both or either of them."[66] Although the term "First Presidency" does not appear in a document until Oliver Cowdery used it as he prepared the November 1, 1831, revelation (now D&C section 68) for publication in 1835,[67] by February 17, 1834, the office of First Presidency was firmly established as Brigham Young and his associates would come to recognize it.

Later that same year, on Friday, December 5, 1834, Oliver Cowdery was "ordained an assistant President of the High and Holy Priesthood."[68] Hyrum Smith replaced him in this office in 1841 and received "the keys whereby he may ask and receive, and be crowned with the same blessing, and glory, and honor, and priesthood, and gifts of the priesthood, that once were put upon him that was my servant Oliver Cowdery" (D&C 124:95).[69] In July 1835 the *Messenger and Advocate* identified Peter, James, and John as "forming the first presidency of the church of Christ,"[70] and by the following month the same newspaper identified "O. Cowdery and S. Rigdon, [as] Presidents of the first presidency."[71] When Brigham Young restored the office of First Presidency after Hyrum's death, he never filled the office of Assistant President. Instead he built on the pattern initially set with Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams in Kirtland.

NOTES

I am grateful to Jenny Lund, Gary Boatright, Robin Scott Jensen, Richard Jensen, Harold Hoyal, and LaJean Carruth, who all showed small kindnesses while I prepared this article.

1. First Council of Seventy Minutes, November 30, 1847, 4, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

2. First Council of Seventy Minutes, November 30, 1847, 8–9. Thomas Bullock's minutes at this point read: "Joseph was ordd. [ordained] an Apostle—but the ch[urch] elected him as a Prest. [President], Prophet Seer & Revr. [Revelator]—but he never was ordd. to that office[.] Josh. [Joseph] was ordd. an Apostle by O. Cowdery—they recd. [received] their ords. [ordinations] by Peter James & John bef[ore] there was a ch.[urch] They r taken & selected & upheld by the ch[urch] & therefore elected." Historian's Office, General Church Minutes, November 30, 1847, 2, Church History Library.
3. First Council of Seventy Minutes, 4.
4. First Council of Seventy Minutes, 4–5.
5. Historian's Office, General Church Minutes, 3. Robert Campbell recorded Brigham Young's comment as follows: "Go a little farther back to the time of De Witt—Oliver Cowdery came within a hair breadth of as much influence as Joseph but he went took a man & baptized him & then said I want you to be my first Councillor that is (Frederick Gee) [Williams]." First Council of Seventy Minutes, 5. While Brigham Young could have been referencing January 26, 1838, when Oliver Cowdery was removed from his position as President in Far West, Missouri, the context of the discussion suggests that Bullock's minutes were correct and he was referencing the Three Witnesses. See Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 135–36.
6. First Council of Seventy Minutes, 9.
7. *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 1:21.
8. *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:291.
9. Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, September 7, 1834, Norton, OH, in *Messenger and Advocate*, October 1834, 14.
10. Brian Q. Cannon, "Seventy Contemporaneous Priesthood Restoration Documents," in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press), 236.
11. Cannon, "Priesthood Restoration Documents," 243.

12. Note that Joseph Smith observed in the revelation that Moses "committed unto *us* [Joseph and Oliver] the keys of the gathering of Israel" and that Elijah "stood before *us*. . . . Therefore, the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands." D&C 110:11, 13, 16; emphasis added.
13. Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828), "confirm." This was based on biblical precedent found in Acts 8:14–17 and Acts 19:2–6. Protestants generally consider that this confirmation includes reception of the influence of the Holy Ghost. Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians also confirm members of their congregations by the laying on of hands but the gifts of the Holy Ghost are received at baptism.
14. Cannon, "Priesthood Restoration Documents," 244. Joseph Smith also noted when they received the Aaronic Priesthood that they had yet to receive "the authority of the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost." *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:299.
15. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 10:303.
16. Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Manuscript Revelation Books*, vol. 1 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2009), 9. He also referred to Joseph as "the Seer" in other contexts as well. See Bruce N. Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident: The Book of John Whitmer* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 4.
17. Cannon, "Priesthood Restoration Documents," 236.
18. Joseph noted that he and Oliver received revelation jointly when "the word of the Lord, came unto us in the Chamber, commanding us; that I should ordain Oliver Cowdery to be an Elder in the Church of Jesus Christ, And that he also should ordain me to the same office . . . and have them decide by vote whether they were willing to accept us as spiritual teachers, or not." *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:299. Joseph also noted that the command indicated that they were to ordain other individuals as elders as well, but the revelation was clearly only directed to the two men, and they were the only two presented for a sustaining vote.
19. Heber C. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses*, 6:29.

20. Heber C. Kimball's account identifies Peter as the individual who came and gave Joseph and Oliver authority to baptize each other and ordain one another as priests. However, later in the same account he identifies Peter as coming with James and John to ordain Joseph as an Apostle. Heber C. Kimball may have not understood the details of those early events well and believed that Peter appeared both times, but it is also possible that he misspoke or that Leo Hawkins made a mistake while recording the sermon and that Elder Kimball understood that John the Baptist had made the first visit. In *Journal of Discourses*, 6:28–38.
21. Greg Prince discusses the practice of calling various early priesthood holders "apostles." While he suggests the possibility that twelve individuals were specifically identified as Apostles in the early months of the Church's existence and thus filled a specific office, with the exception of the Three Witnesses, the individuals referred to seem to have used the terms as elders or holders of the Melchizedek Priesthood. *Power from on High: The Development of Mormon Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 11–14. Thus John Whitmer's license identified him as "an Apostle of Jesus Christ, an Elder of this Church of Christ" while the Articles and Covenants of the Church noted that "an apostle is an elder." Prince, *Power from on High*, 13. Further complicating an understanding of priesthood office, the term may have had a more general use such as that applied by a New York newspaper editor who indiscriminately referred to all of Joseph Smith's followers as "'Gold Bible' apostles." Abner Cole, "The Age of Miracles Has Again Arrived," *Reflector* (Palmyra, NY), June 30, 1830, 53.
22. Most members of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles were called on February 14, 1835. Parley P. Pratt, who was not at that initial meeting, was ordained an Apostle on February 21, 1835, and his brother Orson was ordained sometime afterward. See *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt Jr. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 118–19.
23. The joint revelations are published as D&C 6, 7, 18, 24, and 26, while the visitation of John the Baptist is recorded in D&C 13.
24. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 120–21.

25. Jensen, Woodford, and Harper, *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 51; compare D&C 28:2.
26. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 3.
27. Warren O. Ault, "Village By-Laws by Common Consent," *Speculum: A Journal of Mediaeval Studies* 29, no. 2 (April 1954): 378–94, especially 381–83.
28. *Dictionary of the English Language*, "vote."
29. *Dictionary of the English Language*, "election"; see also "elected." Webster acknowledges that the act of choosing is the central element of election, but his examples focus on the expression of assent rather than the element of choice.
30. Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident*, 37.
31. Benjamin Shattuck, "Letter to the Editors," *Telegraph* (Painesville, OH), April 26, 1831, 3. Shattuck identifies Edson Fuller as an overseer in the Chardon branch but also says that he is "one of the prophets or apostles, as they are called." The identification of Fuller as a prophet or apostle seems to be a general descriptive term applied to others as well (perhaps as Melchizedek Priesthood holders) but the use of the word overseer is a specific function to which he was appointed by "a majority of the society in Chardon."
32. Jensen, Woodford, and Harper, *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 217.
33. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 7.
34. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 41. A reply to these charges was produced November 14, 1831, in Hiram, Ohio, but since Partridge was in Missouri the charges were clearly made before Joseph Smith received his November 11 revelation addressing the office of President of the High Priesthood and its relationship to that of Bishop.
35. See examples in the *Far West Record* during 1831 under September 1, September 12, October 11, October 21, October 25, November 1, November 8, November 9, and November 11–13. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 11–12, 16, 18–19, 26, 28, 30–31.
36. See, for example, Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 15.
37. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 10.

38. "Charge Preferred Against [the] High Council Held in Zion Jany 1832," holograph, Joseph Smith Papers, Church History Library; transcription provided by Robin Scott Jensen.
39. Jensen, Woodford, and Harper, *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 199.
40. Jensen, Woodford, and Harper, *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 201.
41. Jensen, Woodford, and Harper, *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 215. Later, additional high priests signed this declaration.
42. Jensen, Woodford, and Harper, *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 217.
43. Jensen, Woodford, and Harper, *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 219.
44. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 1:267.
45. *Dictionary of the English Language*, "presidency." The phrase "his Presidency" was specifically used to describe Frederick G. Williams's office as one of the Presidents of the Church. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1961), 444.
46. "Charge Preferred Against [the] High Council Held in Zion Jany 1832."
47. Kirtland revelation book, 10, quoted in Robert J. Woodford, "Jesse Gause, Counselor to the Prophet," *BYU Studies* 15, no. 3 (Spring 1975): 363.
48. Revelation given to Joseph Smith March 1832, Newel K. Whitney Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University; emphasis added.
49. Jensen, Woodford, and Harper, *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 255.
50. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 46.
51. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 47.
52. "Charge Preferred Against [the] High Council Held in Zion Jany 1832."
53. Joseph Smith asked for inspiration on March 20, 1832, based on a previous decision to travel to Missouri. Jensen, Woodford, and Harper, *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 273.
54. *History of the Church*, 1:267.
55. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 44.
56. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 44; see also *History of the Church*, 1:267.

57. Matthew Houston to Seth Y. Wells, from North Union, OH, August 10, 1832, Shaker Manuscripts, Western Reserve Historical Society, quoted in D. Michael Quinn, "Jesse Gause: Joseph Smith's Little-Known Counselor," *BYU Studies* 23, no. 4 (Fall 1983): 490.
58. *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, rev. ed. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 22.
59. Revelation, Kirtland, OH, January 5, 1833. Frederick G. Williams Papers, Church History Library.
60. Kirtland High Council minutes, December 1832–November 1837, in *Selected Collections from the Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), DVD, January 22, 1833, 6.
61. Jensen, Woodford, and Harper, *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 313–15.
62. Kirtland High Council minutes, March 18, 1833, 16–17.
63. Kirtland High Council minutes, March 18, 1833, 11.
64. Joseph Smith and Frederick G. Williams to John Smith, July 1, 1833, in *History of the Church*, 1:370; see also 1:443–44.
65. Kirtland High Council minutes, February 17, 1834, 27.
66. Kirtland High Council minutes, February 17, 1834, 27.
67. At that time, he crossed out the phrase "a confrenc of high priests" from the manuscript. He generally wrote in "the presidency" or "the presidency of high priests" but in one case he wrote "the first presidency of the chich [church]" recording for the first time a new title for the principal governing body. Jensen, Woodford, and Harper, *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 201.
68. *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 49.
69. See *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 49n93.
70. "Dear Brother in the Lord, Letter No. 9," *Messenger and Advocate*, July 1835, 145.
71. General Assembly, *Messenger and Advocate*, August 1835, 181.