

The Longevity of Our Leaders

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We are greatly blessed in the Church of Jesus Christ to be led by inspired men of great experience and wisdom. This experience and wisdom is gained by many years of devoted service in the leading councils of the Church and by continual schooling in matters of the kingdom by the Lord Himself and by the association with other leading Brethren.

Many years ago, President Gordon B. Hinckley was interviewed by Mike Wallace as part of a national television program featuring the Church. During the interview, they had the following exchange:

Mike Wallace: There are those who say, this [church] is a gerontocracy, this is a church run by old men.

Gordon B. Hinckley: Isn't it wonderful? To have a man of maturity at the head, a man of judgment, who isn't blown about by every wind of doctrine?

Mike Wallace: Absolutely, as long as he's not dotty.

Gordon B. Hinckley: Thank you for the compliment.¹

President Hinckley's comment is true and appropriate. Maturity and judgment are the hallmarks of the great men who have led and continue to lead the Lord's kingdom.

Following are some interesting questions and answers that deal with the longevity of service of the Brethren, both recent and in the past.

Question 1: What is the longest period of time that has elapsed without a change being made in either the Quorum of the First Presidency or the Quorum of the Twelve?

Answer: The longest period of time that has elapsed without a change in the First Presidency or the Quorum of the Twelve is nine years and three months. Henry B. Eyring was sustained as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve on April 6, 1995, and no changes occurred in either quorum until Elder Neal A. Maxwell passed away on July 21, 2004. The second longest time period was six years and six months, from October 7, 1889, to April 6, 1896. Three vacancies in the Quorum of the Twelve were filled on October 7, 1889, with the ordinations of Marriner W. Merrill, Anthon H. Lund, and Abraham H. Cannon. The next change occurred on April 6, 1896, when Moses Thatcher was released from the Quorum of the Twelve. (If you correctly answered this question, you must either be the Church Historian or one of the Three Nephites.)

Question 2: Can you name the Apostle in this dispensation who served the longest as an Apostle without serving as President of the Church?

Answer: Franklin Dewey Richards. Elder Richards was born on April 2, 1821, at Richmond, Massachusetts. He was ordained an Apostle on February 12, 1849, and served faithfully as an Apostle until his death on December 9, 1899. He thus served as an Apostle for fifty years and ten months without serving as the President of the Church.

Question 3: President Gordon B. Hinckley and Elder David B. Haight served concurrently as nonagenarian Apostles (between ninety and one hundred years of age) from President Hinckley's ninetieth birthday (June 23, 2000) until Elder Haight's death (July 31, 2004). They thus were nonagenarians together for four years and one month. Only one other time in this dispensation have we had two nonagenarian Apostles serving concurrently. Can you identify the other occurrence?

Answer: The only other time that we have had two nonagenarian Apostles serving at the same time was with President David O. McKay and President Joseph Fielding Smith. President McKay turned ninety on September 8, 1963, while serving as President of the Church. President Smith turned ninety on July 19, 1966, while serving as President of the Quorum of the Twelve. They served concurrently as nonagenarian apostles until January 18, 1970, when President McKay passed away. They thus were nonagenarians together for three years and six months.

Question 4: President Gordon B. Hinckley, our current Church President, is a nonagenarian. Besides President Hinckley, we have had eleven other nonagenarian Apostles serve in this dispensation. How many of these other eleven can you name?

Answer: Besides President Hinckley, the other nonagenarian Apostles that have served (listed by order of call to the apostleship) are Wilford Woodruff, Charles W. Penrose, David O. McKay, Joseph Fielding Smith, J. Reuben Clark Jr., Spencer W. Kimball, Ezra Taft Benson, Marion G. Romney, LeGrand Richards, Hugh B. Brown, and David B. Haight.

Question 5: Which of the Apostles in this dispensation served the longest as an Apostle?

Answer: President David O. McKay has served the longest as an Apostle. He was ordained an Apostle by Joseph F. Smith on April 9, 1906, and he passed away on January 18, 1970. He was thus an Apostle for sixty-three years and nine months. Heber J. Grant was an Apostle for sixty-two years and seven months, and Joseph Fielding Smith for sixty-two years and three months.

Question 6: What is the longest period of time that has elapsed without a change being made in Quorum of the Twelve?

Answer: The longest time period that has elapsed without a change in the Quorum of the Twelve is ten years and two months. This occurred from March 17, 1921, to May 16, 1931. During this period, Heber J. Grant was the President of the Church, and Ruderger Clawson was the President of the Quorum of the Twelve. The second-longest period of time without a change in the Quorum of the Twelve was nine years and four months. This occurred from April 6, 1995 (with the ordination of Elder Henry B. Eyring), to July 21, 2004 (with the death of Elder Neal A. Maxwell). President Gordon B. Hinckley served as President of the Church during these years.

Question 7: What is the greatest length of time that has elapsed between the births of two future Apostles in this dispensation?

Answer: The greatest length of time that has elapsed between the births of two future Apostles in this dispensation is eleven years and six months. This was the length of time between the births of Elder Jeffrey R. Holland (December 3, 1940) and Elder David A. Bednar (June 15, 1952). The second greatest length of time was six years and five months, between the births of Elder Henry B. Eyring and Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf.

Question 8: Which of the Apostles who have served in this dispensation was oldest at the time of his apostolic call? (Bonus question: The fourth and fifth oldest Brethren at the time of their calls to the apostleship are both recent or current members of the Quorum of the Twelve. Can you name these two Brethren?)

Answer: The oldest to be called as an Apostle was George Q. Morris. He was eighty years and two months old at the time of his ordination (birthday: February 20, 1874, apostolic ordination: April 8, 1954). The fourth and fifth oldest Brethren to be called as Apostles are Elders David B. Haight and Joseph B. Wirthlin, both of whom were sixty years and four months old at the time of their apostolic ordinations.

Question 9: How many of the mothers of our latter-day prophets lived long enough to see their sons serve as the President of the Church? How many mothers of latter-day prophets were alive when their sons were ordained Apostles?

Answer: The only mother of a Church President who was alive during her son's service as President is Lucy Mack Smith, mother of the Prophet Joseph. Joseph was martyred in 1844, and Lucy Smith died in 1856. Seven of the mothers of our Church Presidents were alive when their sons were ordained Apostles. These seven are Lucy Mack Smith (Joseph Smith), Agnes Taylor (John Taylor), Rachel Ridgway Ivins Grant (Heber J. Grant), Sarah Farr Smith (George Albert Smith), Julina Lambson Smith (Joseph Fielding Smith), Louisa Emeline Bingham Lee (Harold B. Lee), and Nellie Marie Rasmussen Hunter (Howard W. Hunter).

Question 10: Which Apostle in this dispensation served the longest length of time in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles?

Answer: The Apostle that served the longest in the Quorum of the Twelve was Elder Joseph Fielding Smith. He was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve for fifty-nine years and ten months (April 7, 1910, to January 23, 1970). He then served as President of the Church for two years and five months. **RE**

Note

1. 60 Minutes interview by Mike Wallace, April 7, 1996, transcribed by Robert J. Woolley, <http://lds-mormon.com/60min.shtml>.