



Though it has been known by different names, the Young Women Organization has always sought to help young women improve themselves, develop their talents, serve others, and strengthen their testimonies of Jesus Christ. (© Intellectual Reserve, Inc. All rights reserved.)

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YOUNG WOMEN OF ZION: AN ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY

The Young Women program of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has grown from the desires of young women to improve themselves, develop their talents, serve others, and strengthen their testimonies of Jesus Christ. The various names of the organization are listed below:

- The Young Gentlemen and Ladies' Relief Society of Nauvoo, 1843
- The Young Ladies' Department of the Cooperative Retrenchment Association (Young Ladies' Retrenchment Association), 1869
- Young Ladies' National Mutual Improvement Association, 1877

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- Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association (YLMIA), 1904
- Young Women's Mutual Improvement Association (YWMIA), 1934
- Aaronic Priesthood MIA, Young Women, 1972
- Young Women, 1974

Though the name has changed several times over the years, the purposes have not. Marba C. Josephson, editor of the *Improvement Era* and general board member, described the goals as “aiding the LDS girl to gain a testimony of the gospel through wholesome lesson work and spiritualized recreation.”¹ Church leaders have long recognized the vital role that this auxiliary fills in helping adolescent girls to develop testimonies of the Savior and to become faithful, covenant-keeping women.

The programs and procedures have changed to meet the needs of an ever-growing Church population and to help young women face the challenges of their particular eras. Guided by inspiration from the Lord, each of the thirteen general presidents has built upon the foundations laid by her predecessors. The organizational history of Young Women can be divided into three major periods: (1) Getting Started, 1843–80; (2) Setting the Pattern, 1880–1961; (3) Maturing with the Worldwide Church, 1961–Present.

GETTING STARTED, 1843–80

The first Church organization for the youth, the Young Gentlemen and Ladies' Relief Society of Nauvoo, arose from a gathering of young men and women in January 1843 at Elder Heber C. Kimball's home. The group lamented “the loose style of their morals—the frivolous manner in which they spent their time—and their too frequent attendance at balls, parties, etc.”² Elder Kimball suggested a more formal meeting be held so that he could instruct them about their duties to their parents, their worthiness, and their avoidance of “evil company.”³

The name was soon shortened to the Young People's meetings. Officers were elected, and resolutions adopted to be charitable and to help the poor. Membership required a person to be under thirty years of age and of “good

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moral character.” Meetings were held the last Tuesday of each month until the Saints were driven from Nauvoo.

More than twenty-five years later and in another setting, the young ladies and gentlemen were again organized, but this time separately. On November 28, 1869, President Brigham Young rang a prayer bell to gather the women in his family into a parlor of the Lion House. He told them:

All Israel are looking to my family and watching the example set by my wives and children. . . . I desire to organize my own family first into a society for the promotion of habits of order, thrift, industry, and charity; and . . . to retrench from their extravagance in dress, in eating, and even in speech.

I have long had it in my mind to organize the young ladies of Zion into an association. . . . There is need for the young daughters of Israel to get a living testimony of the truth. . . . Retrench in everything that is bad and worthless, and improve in everything that is good and beautiful. Not to make yourselves unhappy, but to live so that you may be truly happy in this life and the life to come.⁴

President Young thus organized the Young Ladies’ Department of the Cooperative Retrenchment Association, whose aim was to help young women “set an example before the world.”⁵ He charged Eliza R. Snow, then Relief Society president and his plural wife, to organize and direct associations along the Wasatch Front. The Nineteenth Ward formed the first ward association in 1870, followed by scores of other ward groups for the Juniors, or younger women. The Seniors, or older sisters, remained as one organization.⁶ The Salt Lake Stake organized the first stake board in 1878.

Every group endeavored to follow Brigham’s admonitions. However, members quickly abbreviated the name to the Retrenchment Ladies, Young Ladies, YL, or Juniors and Seniors.⁷ Each ward association was an independent entity as there was no general presidency nor approved guidelines.

To commemorate Brigham Young’s birthday in June 1880, President John Taylor called a sisters’ conference and announced separate general

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presidencies for the Relief Society, Primary, and young women, with Elmina Shepard Taylor leading the Young Ladies' National Mutual Improvement Association.

SETTING THE PATTERN, 1880–1961

During this eighty-year period, the young women societies developed an organizational structure with a centralized presidency, uniform lessons, age-group divisions, a magazine, achievement awards, music and dance festivals, and a camping program. The patterns set during this formative period shaped programs and procedures even to this day. Each general president added to the program.

Elmina Shepard Taylor, 1880–1904. Presiding over an organization with no precedents to follow and no previous experience to rely on posed a significant challenge to Elmina S. Taylor. Susa Young Gates noted, “There was no General Board, no aids, no guides, no magazine nor other publications for their work; no quarterly or yearly conferences nor conventions, either stake or general; no headquarters, not even any regular meetings of the general officers.”⁸

Sister Taylor strived to bring uniformity and unity to the young women organization, for each ward had its own program. The presidency and central board met periodically and developed lessons in theology, literature, domestic science, parliamentary procedure, and good manners. The general leaders traveled by team and wagon, making hundreds of visits to give instructions and to gather ideas from the field. The first printed lessons appeared in the *Guide* in pamphlet form, then in the *Young Woman's Journal*, begun in 1889. This journal also included spiritually oriented materials as well as recipes, sewing patterns, and short stories. Tuesday night was designated as Mutual night, and the weekly program included the following:

1. Singing (Association choir), prayer, roll call
2. Miscellaneous business
3. Bible lecture

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4. Historical narrative or biographical sketch
5. Musical exercise
6. Book of Mormon, alternating with Church History
7. Answering questions
8. Declamation, alternating with select reading
9. Report of current events or an essay
10. Scientific lecture
11. Distribution of queries and reading programme
12. Closing exercise, singing, benediction⁹

By the turn of the century, twenty thousand young women were enrolled in Mutual programs in the Intermountain West as well as Canada, Mexico, England, New Zealand, and Hawaii.¹⁰

Martha Horne Tingey, 1905–29. Both Sister Taylor and her counselor Martha H. Tingey, who succeeded her, served twenty-four years as president. Thus Sister Tingey served for nearly fifty years. Early in Sister Tingey's administration, board meetings moved from quarterly to weekly, and in 1909 the general auxiliary offices were housed in the just-completed Bishop's Building at 40 North Main Street. The central board was renamed the general board in 1912.

Sister Tingey's presidency instituted leadership week in 1914. Those involved in YLMIA referred to the weekly meetings as "Young Ladies." Girls fourteen years and older were enrolled until they entered Relief Society. They were placed in either the Juniors or Seniors.

Because the Mutual year only ran from September to June, leaders sought a new endeavor for the summer months. Patterned after the Camp Fire program and considered a sister organization to the Boy Scouts, the Beehive program, announced in 1915, involved girls ages fourteen to eighteen. Requirements for advancement included knowing "the proper use of hot and cold baths," mending and caring for clothing, doing "one good turn" daily, and memorizing Doctrine and Covenants 89.¹¹ The Beehive experience, so well received, was incorporated into the general program.

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During Sister Tingey's tenure, cultural avenues of music, drama, dance, speech, and road shows expanded. Beginning in 1924, lessons appeared in manuals. Operational funds came from subscriptions to the *Young Woman's Journal* and the annual dime fund (later twenty-five and then thirty-five cents).

To encourage more physical activity among young people, the First Presidency assigned the recreational program to the youth leadership. After the Liberty Stake initiated a summer camp in 1912, the general board suggested that each stake develop a summer program, including hiking and camping, although such was not universally adopted.

Ruth May Fox, 1929–37. At age seventy-five, Ruth May Fox was surprised when called to lead the young women. President Heber J. Grant said that age was a quality of mind and blessed her to have “the same vigor of body and of mind in the future” that she experienced in the past.¹²

As many older Primary girls wanted to attend Mutual, parents could choose whether their daughters attended one or the other or both. At this time, the twelve- to thirteen-year-old group was called Nymphs. Later, the entrance age was determined by a girl's twelfth birthday. Over time, the older girls were divided into Seniors and Advanced Seniors. Then a Junior class was added. From the story of Ruth in the Bible, the Seniors were renamed the Gleaners.

Sister Fox announced a Churchwide summer camping program at June Conference in 1929. Another announcement followed: the *Young Woman's Journal* would be merged with the *Improvement Era*, the YMMIA magazine.

Sister Fox penned the words for a new anthem for the Church's centennial in 1930. Thousands of young people gathered in the Tabernacle to sing “Carry On” as they waved banners of gold and green, the official colors of the MIA. In 1931, the renovated Lion House became a social center for girls, offering classes in writing, speech, charm, and religion. To parallel the name of the young men's organization, the YLMIA was renamed the Young Women's Mutual Improvement Association in 1934.

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The first dance festival, held during the 1936 June Conference, became a popular and long-lasting annual event. Until that year, youth repeated slogans such as “We stand for the non-use and non-sale of tobacco” and “We stand for the preservation of our heritage through obedience to law.”¹³ Scripture themes then replaced slogans.

Lucy Grant Cannon, 1937–48. Lucy Grant Cannon, a daughter of President Grant, served for eleven years, a challenging era to administer as the Depression drew to a close and World War II began. YWMIA enrollment had grown to seventy-six thousand, concentrated in the United States but with increasing numbers in international areas. Lucy’s presidency gave each class its own manual, code, and symbol—a beehive for the Beehives, a rose for the Junior Class, and a sheaf of wheat for the Gleaners. The Gleaner class included young women up to age twenty-two, and earning a Golden Gleaner award was their crowning achievement. Those twenty-three and older belonged to a special interest group, nicknamed “Spingro.”

Never a static organization, the young women’s auxiliary at times adopted programs for the general Church that had originated in various stakes. Youth conferences were one endeavor, and firesides, another, when Gleaners and M-Men in California wanted more opportunities for socializing.¹⁴

The war deeply affected the program and the participants. With paper shortages hindering the publication of manuals, the MIA communicated to local leaders through the *Improvement Era*. Gas rationing significantly reduced travel to stakes, and June Conference was suspended. With the war introducing more worldly influences to young people, leaders sought to strengthen them through lessons and firesides, with an increased emphasis on moral standards, the Word of Wisdom, and temple marriage. Because many young women living in smaller towns had migrated to larger cities to work, the YWMIA developed a “Big Sister” program, so that local leaders could watch over and assist these girls. The Beehive House continued to house young women who had come to Salt Lake for work or school and was nicknamed the “Behave House.”

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Still, in the midst of war, the MIA provided vital spiritual direction and a social life for the youth of the Church. Wallace Stegner, a non-Mormon observer, wrote in 1942:

The social life of Mormondom is centered in the Ward House as surely as the religious life is, and every Mormon child from the age of twelve upward is a member of . . . the M.I.A., or Mutual. . . .

Designed as a faith-promoting scheme among the young people, the M.I.A. is in practice a highly-developed youth movement. . . .

All the way from hikes, outings, picnics, swimming parties, and hayrides to movies, dances, community singing, amateur theatricals, and athletic contests, the M.I.A. is the orbit within which the young Saint's life moves.¹⁵

When the great war ended in 1945, the restored peace allowed the MIA to return to its former programs, including June Conference. Three thousand dancers celebrated the war's end during the 1946 conference. The next year the centennial of the pioneers' arrival in the Salt Lake Valley was honored throughout the Church. Many of the one hundred thousand young women participated in parades, square dances, and pioneer treks in their various locales.

Bertha Stone Reeder, 1948–61. When Bertha S. Reeder was called in 1948, young women were enrolled simultaneously in YWMIA and the Girls' Program, the latter functioning as a separate auxiliary. Begun in the Granite Stake, the Girls' Program had been adopted for the entire Church in 1946. Sister Reeder asked the First Presidency to merge the two programs. Girls who attended 75 percent of their meetings and fulfilled other requirements, including keeping the Word of Wisdom, paying tithing, and giving service, received an Individual Award. According to general board member Ruth Hardy Funk, this incentive program resulted in "a great increase in the attendance of young women, . . . not only in Mutual but in all of the meetings. . . . It also had a parallel effect on the whole Church."¹⁶

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Sister Reeder's presidency realigned the age-groups: Beehives for ages twelve and thirteen; Mia Maids, ages fourteen and fifteen; Junior Gleaners, sixteen and seventeen; and Gleaners, eighteen to twenty-nine. The recreation department, renamed the sports committee, emphasized physical activity. Sister Reeder, an avid outdoorswoman herself, organized a general camp committee, suggested that all stakes purchase campsites, and visited many camps each summer.

"Be Honest with Yourself" posters, a forerunner to the current *For the Strength of Youth*, were displayed in meetinghouses, and wallet-sized cards were given to the youth.

June Conference continued to be the highlight of the MIA year, bringing thousands of youth and their leaders to Salt Lake City. Ruth Funk reported that 80 percent of stakes sent representatives to June Conference. She commented, "Of course we must remember that except for maybe ten stakes, all the stakes were in the United States."¹⁷

In 1959, the Special Interests group was divided into the Young Marrieds and the Mutual Study, for single adults. The Junior Gleaners were renamed the Laurels.

MATURING WITH THE WORLDWIDE CHURCH, 1961–PRESENT

Advent of correlation. During the 1950s, President David O. McKay had appointed Elder Harold B. Lee to chair the General Priesthood Committee and to study all Church programs and organizations. Starting in 1961, all curriculum planning and writing would be directed by the priesthood. As President Spencer W. Kimball would later explain, "The Church does not have several organizational lines running from headquarters leaders to their local counterparts. There is only one fundamental organizational channel, and that is the priesthood channel."¹⁸

Among the many facets of the correlation process, committees evaluated lesson and magazine materials.¹⁹ Ardeth G. Kapp, then serving on the Youth Correlation Committee, felt that young women "needed to be taught

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'matters of eternal consequence' at an earlier age, [and that] they needed Sunday instruction."²⁰ Previous lessons had been broader in scope, often with an emphasis on such self-improvement aims as good grooming and manners, or loyalty. Sister Kapp commented, "There were no *poor* lessons by way of principle or conduct . . . but many lessons were taught at the sacrifice of things [young women] couldn't get anywhere else except in the Church."²¹

Whereas the MIA generally had been considered the activity arm of the Church for girls, with Sunday School lessons bearing the main responsibility for spiritual instruction, by 1977 scripturally oriented manuals were introduced, with activities reinforcing lessons on gospel principles.²² Auxiliaries ceased to be financially self-sustaining, thus allowing leaders to focus more on the spiritual and leadership development of the young women.

Church growth and counterculture influences. By 1961, membership had risen to three hundred thousand, with more and more young women living beyond the Intermountain area and outside the United States. A number of factors influenced Church growth worldwide: the postwar baby boomers were of age to serve missions; President McKay emphasized every member a missionary; many Church members moved away from Utah for schooling and employment; the Church became less obscure due to media attention and the prominence of members in a variety of endeavors.

As the Church became a greater force for good in the world, evil influences also increased. The so-called Sexual Revolution was accelerated by the introduction of the birth-control pill in 1960, drugs, more daring themes in TV shows and movies, and the strident questioning of women's roles and the family as an institution. This atmosphere was a significantly challenging moral climate for young women. To counter these moral assaults, the young women leaders focused even more on girls developing spiritually, gaining strong testimonies, strengthening the family, and preparing to make sacred temple covenants.

Florence Smith Jacobsen, 1961–72. Florence S. Jacobsen began her service expressing the hope "that we can be so dedicated that not one single girl

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in this great Church will be forgotten.”²³ Her presidency and seventy-five-member board oversaw a myriad of activities with dance and music festivals, leadership training, youth conferences, and producing new manuals. She did all this while still having charge over the Young Marrieds and Special Interest groups.

Sister Jacobsen presided over the YWMIA’s centennial in 1969 with a program in the Lion House, where Brigham Young had organized his daughters. Under her careful supervision, the Lion House had been restored with authentic details and furnishings.

Since 1960, a section titled “The Era of Youth” was included in the *Improvement Era*. However, the auxiliaries no longer published their own magazines when the Church launched a new set of magazines in 1971, with the *New Era* designated just for youth.

Recent general presidents have served for about five years while the early presidents served a quarter of a century and their immediate successors around a dozen years. General boards dropped from a high of seventy-five members to about thirty and then to ten.

Ruth Hardy Funk, 1972–78. A few months after Ruth Hardy Funk was called, the First Presidency announced the organization of the Melchizedek Priesthood MIA, responsible for single adults over eighteen, and the Aaronic Priesthood MIA, for youth ages twelve to eighteen. As Presiding Bishop Victor L. Brown, who would supervise the MIA, explained, “The MIA under this reorganization becomes part of the priesthood and is no longer an auxiliary.”²⁴

Over the next few years the organizational structure continued to be refined and adjustments made in establishing the roles of the Young Women leadership, on both the general and local levels. Sister Kapp recalled, “I think that it was [an] interim period focusing primarily on the difference between local leaders looking to the general level for direction and local leaders . . . look[ing] to their own local priesthood leaders for direction. And that’s quite a dramatic change after a history of looking to Salt Lake for direction.”²⁵

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In 1974, President Kimball divided the Aaronic Priesthood MIA into two organizations: the Aaronic Priesthood and the Young Women. All in all, three major organizational changes to the Young Women program took place during this period.²⁶

Sister Funk introduced peer leadership, with youth leading out supported by adult advisers. President Lee suggested that shadow leadership would take at least five years to implement; thus, the years of Sister Funk's administration were a time of sorting out processes and establishing procedures.²⁷ Yet groundwork was laid for youth taking greater leadership roles in class presidencies and youth councils.

Replacing the Individual Award program, the Young Womanhood Recognition encouraged girls to achieve goals in the areas of spiritual awareness, homemaking arts, service and compassion, recreation and the world of nature, cultural arts and education, and personal and social refinement. The first version of *For the Strength of Youth* listed standards for young people.

In 1975, President Kimball announced that June Conference would be replaced by regional conferences to “take the program to the people.”²⁸ More responsibility was then placed on local leaders; for example, the general board no longer wrote scripts and programs for local use. Despite the trepidation of some local leaders about creating their own productions, the result was beneficial, with one leader saying their program was “better than June conference.”

Elaine Anderson Cannon, 1978–84. With the 1978 revelation on the priesthood, missionary work exploded in some African nations and such countries as Brazil. The scope of the Young Women program thus became more international and meeting the needs of developing areas an even higher priority.

Elaine A. Cannon organized the first general women's meeting (for ages twelve and up) held at the Tabernacle in September 1978 and broadcast to fourteen-thousand gatherings around the world. Elaine, Ruth Funk, and Barbara B. Smith spoke, followed by President Kimball. He said, “This is an

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unique and significant gathering. Nothing like it has ever been held before in the Church—and as far as I know, in the world.”²⁹

The consolidated meeting schedule, instituted in 1980, significantly changed the complexion of the Young Women program. The three-hour block thus provided Sunday instruction for girls at the same time the Aaronic priesthood met in their quorums.

Ardeth Greene Kapp, 1984–92. Ardeth G. Kapp’s administration further refined the Personal Progress program and introduced the Young Women values, theme, and motto (“Stand for Truth and Righteousness”) during a satellite broadcast in 1985. Sister Kapp said, “I see the crest of a great wave forming . . . that will move across the earth, reaching every continent and every shore, I call upon you to stand with me to prepare to take your place in a great forward movement among the young women of the Church—a movement of renewed commitment—a movement in which you are destined to shape history and participate in the fulfillment of prophecy.”³⁰

To foster a worldwide sisterhood among the young women, the first Worldwide Celebration was held in 1987, with celebrations continuing every three years until the year 2000. Reviewing her time in Young Women, Sister Kapp stated, “One thing I hope our administration will be remembered for was changing the mindset from saying ‘What shall we do?’ to the question ‘What do we want to have happen?’, so that we’re not focusing on activities but looking at outcomes.”³¹

Janette Callister Hales (Beckham), 1992–97. Janette C. Hales directed the publication of a new camp manual, with a focus on the Young Women values, service, and spirituality. The introduction states: “[Young women] can find joy in an outdoor setting that will strengthen their love for each other and the gospel and their commitment to stand together as ‘witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places.’”³²

From 1994 on, general Young Women meetings, separate from the Relief Society meetings, have been held a week prior to April general conference. At the first of these meetings, Sister Hales encouraged each girl to become “a righteous, problem-solving woman of faith.”³³ She also encouraged

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adults to learn the names of the youth in their wards, to call them by name and support them.³⁴ The 125th anniversary of the Young Women organization was observed in 1994, though not through a Churchwide celebration.

Margaret Dyreng Nadauld, 1997–2002. Margaret D. Nadauld reiterated the purpose of the girls' organization: "It is the mission of Young Women . . . to help young women grow spiritually and to assist their families in preparing them to come unto Christ."³⁵ Throughout her tenure, Sister Nadauld counseled young women to recognize and live up to their roles as daughters of God, that "women of God can never be like women of the world."³⁶

As the twenty-first century opened, refinements to the Young Women program developed with the revised *For the Strength of Youth* and the words *strengthen home and family* added to the Young Women theme. With many revisions to simplify the program and make it more fitting to the worldwide Church, Personal Progress was published in a smaller format.

Reminiscent of June Conference, youth again participated in dance and music festivals. According to Margaret, "It is strengthening to youth to establish a wider circle of friends than many have in their small wards or branches. This can be accomplished while they are *doing* and *learning* new skills."³⁷

Susan Winder Tanner, 2002–8. Whereas in the early days young adults were still a part of MIA, beginning in 1972 young women moved to Relief Society when they turned eighteen or completed high school. How to effectively help young adult women make this transition during a critical period of their lives was a prime concern of Susan W. Tanner, who worked closely with Relief Society president Bonnie D. Parkin. Together they presented workshops to suggest ways to help make this transition successful.

From the time camping was incorporated into the program in 1929, it has been a vital and fun part of Young Women. With camping property scarce to purchase and expensive to rent, many local units were unable to find suitable camps. The Church thus developed various large camping properties for use by multiple stakes.

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Today's challenges. Today's young women are bombarded with immoral behaviors and icons through the media, the Internet, and text messages. Commenting on the current moral climate, Angela Kays-Burden in the *Christian Science Monitor* wrote:

The purveyors of our pop culture often portray marriage itself as an arcane institution that our progressive society should move beyond.

In recent years, television shows and Hollywood movies have promoted our acceptance of—and even our appetite for—infidelity. Major networks are complicit in helping to erode the significance of lifelong commitments and loving relationships between husbands and wives.³⁸

President Boyd K. Packer commented, “Nothing in the history of the Church or in the history of the world . . . compares[s] with our present circumstances. Nothing . . . exceeds in wickedness and depravity that which surrounds us now.”³⁹ Though confronted by moral assaults, the youth, according to an earlier statement of President Gordon B. Hinckley, “are . . . the finest [and strongest] generation of young people ever in the history of the Church.”⁴⁰ Elaine S. Dalton told the young women, “There has never been a better time to live on the earth than this.”⁴¹

Elaine Schwartz Dalton, 2008–. As the new general president, Sister Dalton stated, “We [unfurl] our banner calling for a return to virtue. We believe that if there is anything that keeps people away from the Savior and . . . the temple it is not being worthy or pure and morally clean.”⁴² On the 139th anniversary of Young Women, the First Presidency approved Virtue as a new value and represented by the color gold. Elaine remarked, “The date is not a coincidence. . . . The Lord had His hand in this decision. It has been divinely inspired.”⁴³ The revised *Personal Progress* book, including the value of Virtue, came out in January. As part of the Brand New Year program and utilizing the positive aspects of the Internet, the Church launched a website for youth (youth.lds.org).

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CONCLUSION

“The Church moves on and programs change,” President Thomas S. Monson said, “but the basic responsibility of helping youth to choose the right . . . is as cardinal a rule today as it has ever been.”⁴⁴ Over its 140-year history, the young women’s auxiliary has grown from one small group in Utah to an organization of a half million worldwide. It has developed through inspiration from the Lord and under the leadership of thirteen faithful, dedicated women. From its inception, this auxiliary has striven to help young women mature in the gospel, gain testimonies of the Savior, prepare for the temple and for their later roles as wives, mothers, and Church leaders. As Susa Young Gates stated, “Mortality has no scales with which to weigh, no rule by which to measure, the value of the Mutual Improvement work to the young women of Zion!”⁴⁵

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