

Building an Environment of Trust

JANETTE C. HALES

Thank you for coming. As I anticipated being here on an August evening, I tried to imagine who might come. August is year-end for me.

It's a time to evaluate, a time to get excited about new beginnings. I suppose I am one whose fiscal year will always be connected to the academic year. School is a symbol to me of lifelong learning and growth. On long hot days, my love for football makes me imagine even the mountains standing up a little straighter as the band begins to rehearse and crisp new students flood into this valley.

I love this valley. I was born and raised here. I feel connected to the past and a part of the changes that have come through the years. Perhaps it's my age, but change seems to be coming faster in recent years, and some of those changes cause me concern.

In my present calling in the Church, I spend a good deal of time thinking about young people and what needs to happen in their lives in order to build the foundation of a righteous and responsible life. I realize more all the time that what young people need is what we all need as we continue to develop and meet the challenges of life. As you do, I listen to the news and read the papers. I feel a

need to try to understand the experiences of others and to be in touch with the environment. I try to listen to young adults and their leaders as much as I can. When I was surrounded by my own children, I sometimes got out of touch. I remember one night at the dinner table making the comment to my family, "I think people use better language than they did when I was growing up. Either that, or I'm a little more sheltered."

I saw my children's chins drop nearly down to the table with shocked expressions as one exclaimed, "Mom, I think you're a little more sheltered!"

Media coverage these days makes it a little harder to remain sheltered. Yet most adults do have a certain advantage in having input into creating the environment in which they live. Tonight I'm going to talk about building an environment of trust. I believe the environment we create has a great deal to do with the kind of people we become. I believe one person can make a difference. I believe as members of

Janette C. Hales was Young Women general president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 7 August 1994.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints we are responsible for that difference. The environments in which we live, work, and play do have an impact on our behavior, and our behavior has an impact on the environment.

The media tells me there are many reasons to be concerned, even to feel overwhelmed. Here is something from a recent Associated Press release:

The number of Juvenile court cases involving serious offenses such as murders and aggravated assaults grew 68 percent between 1988 and 1992. . . .

Of the . . . serious crimes committed by youngsters, aggravated assault cases increased the most in the period, up 80 percent. . . .

Homicides increased by 55 percent . . . ; robberies went up by 52 percent . . . ; and forcible rape cases rose by 27 percent. . . .

“Criminals are getting younger, victims are getting younger.”

In a high-stress environment, the news tells us that victims are not always strangers. In *Newsweek* we read:

*What kind of [a person] heaps physical and emotional abuse on [a spouse]? . . . researchers have begun asking. But one thing they agree on is the abuser’s need to control. “There is no better way of making people compliant than beating them up on an intermittent basis.” [“Pattern of Abuse,” *Newsweek*, 4 July 1994, p. 29]*

The most vulnerable are

women who are less educated, unemployed, young and poor. . . . Pregnant women seem to make particular targets: according to one survey, approximately one in six is abused; another survey cites one in three. [“Pattern of Abuse,” p. 28]

And here’s an appalling description from another article:

*[A] prisoner—call him “J”—has committed 14 serious disciplinary offenses and is confined to his cell in the lock-down unit 20 hours a day. Last week “J” attacked two guards. . . . As one guard knelt to unfasten his leg irons, “J” bolted from his cell and swung the door at the other, then hit the first guard in the head. The guards . . . wrestled him to the floor, then zapped him with pepper spray, a chemical agent that leaves its victim choking and in pain. Hours later, “J” was still banging on his cell door and shrieking in fury. . . . All this occurred . . . where “J” is doing time for assault with a deadly weapon. He is 16 years old. [“California’s Teen Gulags,” *Newsweek*, 4 July 1994, p. 40]*

Frightening, yes. But even more, it is heart-breaking. This is happening in America. Gang members report that the reason they join gangs is to find safety and a feeling of belonging.

How greatly we need a better way to find safety in a more caring environment. Contrast the gang approach with the teachings of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12.

Paul compares us as individuals or members of the Church to the parts of the body. Although we are each different, we are each important. “If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?” (verse 17).

Paul tells us how we can all be alike: “That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another” (verse 25).

In other words, everyone is important—each one different, but we’re all part of the whole.

The members should have the same care one for another.

And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. [1 Corinthians 12:25–27]

Our caring for one another builds an environment of trust.

Currently we see many good people who are becoming discouraged, even overwhelmed. The world's difficulties will require action on our part. Listen to the words of our living prophet, Howard W. Hunter, as quoted from the *Church News* this year. He said, "I pray that we might treat each other with more kindness, more courtesy, more humility and patience and forgiveness" ("Prophet Focuses on Christ's Message," *Church News*, 9 July 1994, p. 3).

We don't read much about this—the Lord's admonitions—in the press; we read about those things that run contrary. President Hunter said,

I feel a great responsibility, because I believe the Church—the Christian Church, at least—has a definite responsibility to turn the thinking of the world.

Then the question comes to mind, "What have I to contribute to that?" We all have to assume a responsibility, and it can come about through the teachings of a Christ-like response to all the problems of the world. It won't come through any other source. We all have an obligation to that. ["Prophet Focuses," p. 3]

A prophet said it: "We all have to assume a responsibility. We all have an obligation."

People of my generation often report that they counted on adults to teach the truth and respond in Christlike ways. I may have been afraid of mean dogs or even of the dark, but I don't remember being afraid of people. Somehow my home and my hometown made me feel like I was in an environment I could trust. There was a war going on in Europe and in the Pacific for a good many of those years. Even when bad things are taking place, good things can be happening. A friend of mine who is a psychiatrist said, "I've learned that people can handle almost anything if they have a place to go to be recharged." A temple is that place. Home is that place. Where you live is

that place. A small apartment can be that place. Wherever you are, you can contribute to that environment of trust.

Recently, Virginia Pearce, a counselor in the general Young Women presidency, was writing an article, and she reminded me of an experience written by Arthur Henry King in his book *The Abundance of the Heart*. He describes an experience with nature and his father. An environment of trust can have to do with a special experience, a place, another person, or people.

*My first real discovery of nature in life came one morning in April 1916. My father put me on the back of his bike, where I had a little seat, and said, "Off we go." And then he turned in the wrong direction for I thought he was taking me down to Quakers' meeting—it was a Sunday. "No," he said, "we are going somewhere else today." And we rode for about eight miles, and we stopped at a wood. . . . We went into the wood; and there, suddenly, was a great pool of bluebells stretching for perhaps a hundred yards in the shade of the oak trees. And I could scarcely breathe because the impression was so great. The experience then was just the bluebells and the scent; now, when I recall it, it is also the love of my father who chose to do that that morning—to give me that experience. I am sure he had been there the day before, found it, and thought, "I'll take my son there." As we rode there and as we rode back, we heard the distant thud of the guns at the Battle of the Somme, where thousands were dying every day. That overwhelming experience of a natural phenomenon, a demonstration of beneficent creation, and at the same time hearing those guns on the Somme—that experience has remained with me almost more clearly than anything else in my life. [*The Abundance of the Heart* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986), p. 88]*

Before joining the Church, Arthur Henry King belonged to a family who were Quakers. This is a man who served on the British Council and was twice decorated by the Queen

of England for his contribution. He describes his environment when he was young.

I lived as a child during the First World War right in the heart of the country in Essex. Our Essex village cottage-slum was small: two tiny rooms down below, ten by ten, and an earth-floor kitchen at the back where the rats ran and the spiders lurked. I had a little cubby-hole by a window. ["Abundance," p. 73]

This description suggests that though the environment may not be grand, a person need not be limited. This is a man who enlarged his environment through great books. I would suggest that one of the ways we can improve the environment is by putting good things in our minds.

People often tell me that one of their greatest challenges these days is the media—R-rated movies, late-night videos, corrupting music. I know people like to make their own choices. But if I ever felt inclined to make a suggestion, I'd say, "Why don't you just turn it off?" Do you ever pull up to a stop sign next to a car that is literally bouncing off the asphalt with a power bass sound that could rock the *Titanic*? I'm always so relieved when the light turns green before the vehicle either shakes apart or the occupants blast through the roof. As modern citizens, we concern ourselves with the ozone layer and carbon monoxide. I would like to suggest that we should consider sound pollution. As a substitute, good reading and healthy discussions can increase the potential for a positive environment. Arthur Henry King says:

Literature is a way in which we can learn to live deeper lives—husband with wife, parent with child, brother with sister, fellow member with fellow member. Most good authors are better than we are. They are much better company than our own friends. . . .

What comes from good company? What comes from good company is better manners, greater

sensitivity, greater sensibility, greater empathy, greater sympathy. Reading good literature makes us more capable of understanding other people, of loving other people. ["Abundance," p. 99]

And there is this admonition in Proverbs 23:7: "As he thinketh in his heart, so is he." The experiences we have in our homes when we are very young have a strong impact on our values. Lalah Matheson, a woman who spoke in sacrament meeting recently in my home ward, talked about her love for music and the blessing it had been in her life. Sister Matheson described early memories of her childhood. She lived in a small town and said, "We were very poor, as were most of the other people in my town. Our home was small, and in the wintertime, our living room was closed off with no heat, and the limited coal was used to heat the rest of the house where we spent our time." She remembers that each Saturday when she was just a little girl, her father would bundle her up in her winter coat, gloves, and scarf, take her into the unheated living room, and sit beside her with their two chairs facing their large Philco radio. Each Saturday she and her father sat and listened to the opera and sometimes the symphony. She said, "I remember my father exclaiming during a beautiful aria, 'Isn't she beautiful? Isn't she magnificent?'" She said, "We weren't seeing anything, just an old Philco radio." This lovely woman seemed to have no bad memories of being poor and cold. She had wonderful memories of time with her father and learning to share his love for music in that caring environment.

As my own children have left home, lived in apartments, and gone on missions, I have wondered what values would be carried into their new environments. Their experiences have been a reminder to me of the importance of service as one starts to create trust in a new environment.

After a mission my youngest daughter decided to face apartment living again. On her first trip home I inquired about the apartment.

Mary said, "This is going to be hard! One of my roommates is newly engaged, and her boyfriend and his friends are always hanging around. There are piles of dirty dishes, and nobody seems to pick up anything."

The next time Mary came home, she seemed cheerful. I said, "How's the apartment doing?"

She replied, "A little better."

"What happened?" I said.

"Well," she said, "the first day I got home before the others, I scrubbed down the bathroom. I was surprised, but it made a difference."

The first roommate came home and walked out of the bathroom with a shocked expression and asked, "Who cleaned the bathroom?"

Mary said, "I did."

"Yourself?"

"Yes."

"How come?"

Mary said simply, "I like clean bathrooms."

Mary told me, "I'm surprised, but I just try to do little things, and there is a good feeling. It's far from perfect, but I think I'm going to like it."

Within a few weeks one of the roommates suggested it might be nice to have prayer together. It does take time and effort to create a caring environment and to learn to love people, but an act of service is a good beginning. Each one of us, like Mary, must make a contribution in order to feel like we belong. This contribution of love and service is essential to an environment of trust.

Steve Bennion, the president of Ricks College, told of a student there who contributed to an environment of trust as a leader on that campus. This young student spent her first semester at Ricks feeling a bit lonely and left out. She went home at Christmastime and talked to her parents about her feelings and

even considered not returning to school for the next semester. Her parents encouraged her to continue her schooling, and her mother made a suggestion. She told her daughter to do something for someone each day that she was not required to do. This young woman followed her mother's advice and eventually became an outstanding leader on campus and served as president of the Associated Women Students. President Bennion stated that it would be difficult to believe that this strong and accomplished young woman had ever felt discouraged and lonely. The transformation in that school environment for her began with simple acts of service.

Shared experiences help build relationships of trust and enhance a caring environment. Traditions that bind us together often begin with simply doing simple things together.

Sometime ago when one of my daughters had her first baby and I was feeling a renewed reverence for that miracle of birth, I said to my daughter, "If I had a chance to do one thing over again with my children, I would read to them more from the scriptures while they were infants."

My daughter's face brightened, and she said, "Michael's already in 2 Nephi. Dan has been reading to him every night since we came home from the hospital." Jane later mentioned that story time had become her favorite time of the day—a bonding time, a caring time, an environment of trust where little Michael had heard the entire Book of Mormon before he was a year old.

Why is an environment of trust so important? Dr. Paul Robinson, a psychologist and author of books on family relationships, said that kids in trouble with the law can rarely refer to a good memory that they have had with their family. Why is an environment of trust important then? I believe it is in an environment of trust that growth takes place. We feel safe to acknowledge mistakes and make corrections. We are more likely to do our best

when we feel love and security. It is a place where the Spirit can be felt. I often ask young people what they think it was like when we lived with our Heavenly Father. Usually they respond with words like *safe, happy, secure, beautiful*, and additional thoughts like, *We learned there*. I ask, “Do you think you could provide a place like that for someone else?”

It takes some work and some planning. Each one of us could develop the ability to create in our homes, apartments, communities, even classrooms a place where each one of us could maximize our potential. Contrast that possibility with some of the prevailing attitudes.

Let me read you this from *Futurist* magazine:

Sixty percent of college business students said they would be willing to spend three years in Jail and have a Jail record in return for \$5 million.

*In a 1992 poll of the under-30 population, 38 percent said that being corrupt was “essential” in getting ahead. [Marvin Cetron, “An American Renaissance in the Year 2000: Seventy-Four Trends That Will Affect America’s Future—and Yours,” *The Futurist* 28:2 (March–April 1994), pp. 27–38]*

Those attitudes don’t foster trust. As President Hunter suggested, we have a “responsibility to turn the thinking of the world.”

Getting ahead will be of little value if it is not connected to principles of righteousness. It is righteousness that allows us to grow. The “getting ahead” that requires corruption is sin, and the consequence of sin is damnation. Have you thought about what it means to be damned? It means that our progress is stopped; our growth is stopped. Fear, anger, and hate are damning characteristics. Real prosperity is growth opportunity. Our Heavenly Father wants us to become like him. He wants our experience to change us from a state of

innocence to becoming spiritually mature. Study, work, keeping the commandments, loving and serving one another—these allow us to realize that divine potential. Building an environment of trust where growth and change can take place is as important as preparing the soil and nourishing a plant.

Jan Zwick, one of our Young Women board members, gave a good story about growth in one of our recent meetings that I’d like to share.

The bamboo seed is a nut with a tough skin. After it is planted it needs to be watered and fertilized. During the first year nothing happens. The second year it must be watered and fertilized again. Yet again, nothing happens. This process is repeated through the third year and the fourth year. Still, nothing happens. In the fifth year the stalk bursts up through the ground, and then, within a period lasting no longer than six weeks, the bamboo grows ninety feet.

Did the bamboo grow ninety feet in six weeks, or ninety feet in five years? I believe that five years is more accurate because at any time during that interval, had the fertilizing and watering not been maintained the plant would have died.

We can never quit fertilizing, watering, or growing. During the process of personal growth, we often only see the pain. But in time we recognize the benefits of having gained passage on the right path. Growth takes place in its own time, but the environment needs to remain healthy.

Much of growth requires self-effort and personal work, but as we contribute to a growth environment, we keep ourselves reaching out instead of turning in. In Elder Richard G. Scott’s conference address of April 1994, he reminds us of the necessity of individual effort in the growth process.

Don’t say, “No one understands me; I can’t sort it out, or get the help I need.” Those comments are

self-defeating. No one can help you without faith and effort on your part. Your personal growth requires that. ["To Be Healed," *Ensign*, May 1994, p. 8]

Individual effort is necessary, but progress doesn't usually take place in isolation. Elder Scott adds,

Love comes by learning how to give it to another in a spirit of trust. . . . Yet sustained concern and support of others will engender their interest and love. You will feel needed. You become an instrument through which the Lord can bless another. The Spirit will let you feel the Savior's concern and interest, then the warmth and strength of His love. ["To Be Healed," p. 9]

Elder Malcolm S. Jeppsen, a physician by training, spoke in the same general conference. He referred to the importance of the environment for those who have special needs. He made reference to physical healing as he discussed the process of spiritual healing.

I've had occasion to see many patients who were sick or who had sustained injuries to their bodies. I hereby make an admission: physicians do not cure patients. This marvelous and complicated machine we call the human body has built into it its own wonderful healing mechanism. All a physician can do is to provide a good healing environment. ["A Divine Prescription for Spiritual Healing," *Ensign*, May 1994, p. 17]

My own husband as a medical student was taught by a wise professor who said, "Remember, you put the stitches in the wound, but you don't knit the skin together. Healing takes place from the inside out, and *that* is a miracle." That lesson has always been a reminder to me that patience, love, and caring, or, in other words, a healing environment, are like the stitches in the wound. When a person has been injured physically, emotionally, or

spiritually, the healing must take place from the inside out, and that is a miracle. A good healing environment helps make that miracle possible.

An environment of trust is a place where growth can take place, where healing can occur, where the Spirit can be felt. We can't realize our divine potential without developing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith grows best in an environment of trust.

In this important time of preparation for your future, consider the advice of Alma:

And also trust no one to be your teacher nor your minister, except he be a man of God, walking in his ways and keeping his commandments.

Thus did Alma teach his people, that every man should love his neighbor as himself, that there should be no contention among them. [Mosiah 23:14–15]

Section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants describes the Lord's message of peace to us:

Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God. . . .

See that ye love one another; cease to be covetous; learn to impart one to another as the gospel requires.

Cease to be idle; cease to be unclean; cease to find fault one with another; cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated.

And above all things, clothe yourselves with the bond of charity, as with a mantle, which is the bond of perfectness and peace. [D&C 88:119, 123–25]

Isn't that a wonderful scripture for students—and for all of us?

The way the Church is organized helps provide an environment of trust to which the members contribute. D&C 115:6 reminds us

that our stakes “may be for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm.” We should do our planning in the Church with that in mind. We don’t need to compete with the world.

As I was called to be the president of Young Women and met with my counselors and administrative assistant, the first thing we tried to do was to focus on what we might do for the youth. One day after a long day’s work, we decided we needed a little break and went out for a brisk walk. As soon as we got outside, it started to rain, so we darted into the mall and were going to continue our walk there, but within five minutes you might guess what happened. The distractions and the noise of the mall started to cause us to take little side trips into the stores. Our thinking quickly turned to our own needs and the anxiety of schedules, approaching birthdays, and new items in windows. Then my administrative assistant said to me, “Oh, it has stopped raining.” So we went outside and continued our walk, and ended up at the Brigham Young Cemetery. Because one of my counselors knew some of the history of the area, we started to talk about the homes, the families, and the people who had lived there in the past and had contributed so greatly to the growth of the Church.

During that time, as we spent time in the cemetery talking also of Brigham Young and the past, another feeling came into our hearts—a feeling of peace, a feeling of being connected, a feeling of continuity with the past. When we went back to our table to work and talked again about the youth, particularly about young women, and talked about what we wanted to have happen in their lives, I said, “It is like the difference between what we felt in the mall and what we felt in the cemetery.” People of all ages need a feeling of peace, a feeling of being connected, a feeling of continuity with the past.

Ezra Taft Benson has said, “The world shouts louder than the whisperings of the Holy Ghost” (“Beware of Pride,” *Ensign*, May 1989,

p. 5). It takes planning to eliminate that shouting.

Our stakes and wards can provide a place removed from worldly influences. The ward is such an important place for every member of the Church. It can be an environment of trust where every member can feel loved, understood, respected, and able to contribute. We each have to assume a responsibility. We each have an obligation.

Our prophet, President Howard W. Hunter, said,

We never pick up a newspaper or hear a newscast that we don’t hear comments made where people in the world have objectives and are following a course that is contrary to what the Lord has said on many occasions, “Love one another” and “have charity for all people.” [“Prophet Focuses,” p. 3]

He further stated that we have an obligation as members of the Church to teach that we can build and not tear down. We have a responsibility to turn the thinking of the world.

Help make every place where you are an environment of trust, a place where growth can take place, a place where healing can occur, a place where the Spirit can be felt. The world needs the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That faith grows best in an environment of trust.

I believe one person can make a difference. I believe you can make a difference. I believe as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we are responsible for that difference.

I am so thankful for those who have provided an environment of trust for me, and for those who set an example for me. I am thankful for those who love, who teach, who listen, who forgive, who hold me together when I’m hurt. I have a testimony of our Heavenly Father’s plan for us. I have a testimony of the love of our Savior Jesus Christ and of his atoning sacrifice for us. I bear that testimony in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.