

Religious Freedom Advocacy and Civility



Elizabeth A. Clark
Associate Director, BYU
International Center for Law
and Religion Studies

Why does civility matter?



Comments by general leaders of
The Church of Jesus Christ of
Latter-day Saints

“I know of no more important ability and no greater integrity for us to demonstrate . . . than to walk that careful path — taking a moral stand according to what God has declared and the laws He has given but doing it compassionately and with understanding and great charity.”

--Elder Jeffrey R. Holland



“Defend your beliefs with courtesy and compassion, but defend them.”

--Elder Jeffrey R. Holland



“ [T]here are some who feel that venting their personal anger or deeply held opinions is more important than conducting themselves as Jesus Christ lived and taught. I invite each one of us to recognize that how we disagree is a real measure of who we are and whether we truly follow the Savior.”

--Elder Quentin L. Cook



“Let me be clear that all voices need to be heard in the public square. Neither religious nor secular voices should be silenced. Furthermore, we should not expect that because some of our views emanate from religious principles, they will automatically be accepted or given preferential status. But it is also clear that such views and values are entitled to be reviewed on their merits.”

--Elder Quentin L. Cook



“As you participate [in the public square], regardless of the media involved, remember who you are. You are Latter-day Saints. Where possible, be peacemakers. Explain your beliefs in gentle, loving terms. Be wise, thoughtful, considerate, and friendly.”

--Elder Quentin L. Cook



“Let us be defenders of marriage as the Lord has ordained it while continuing to show love and compassion for those with differing views.”

--Bonnie L. Oscarson,
Young Women
General President



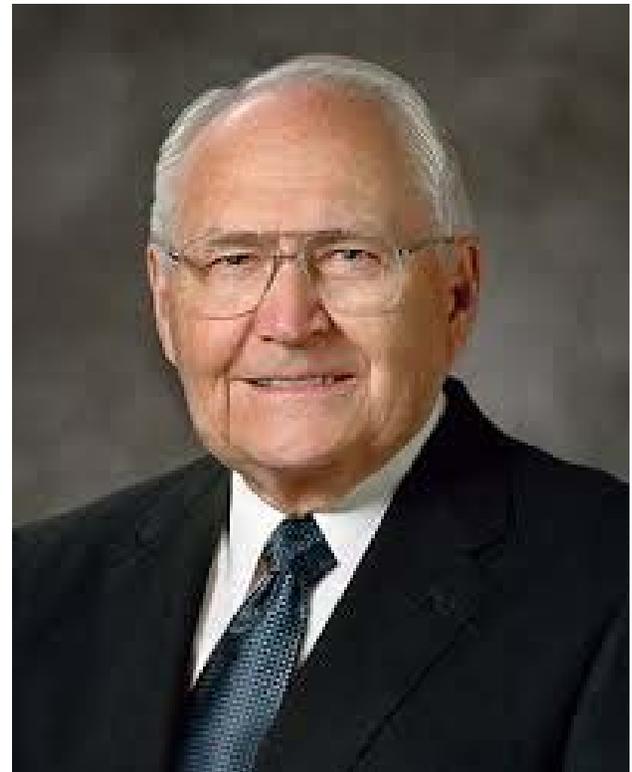
"We have all committed to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and this discipleship should be at the heart of all that we do. Each of us is in a different place in our spiritual journey. Those who are struggling for whatever reason should be able to find within our sisterhood a spirit of warmth, inclusion and love. . . . [I]t is important to remember the Savior's message of leaving the ninety and nine safely in the fold and reaching out with love, with kindness and with compassion to the one. We can demonstrate that compassion by ensuring that our communications with one another are respectful and kind."

--Bonnie L. Oscarson, Young Women General President



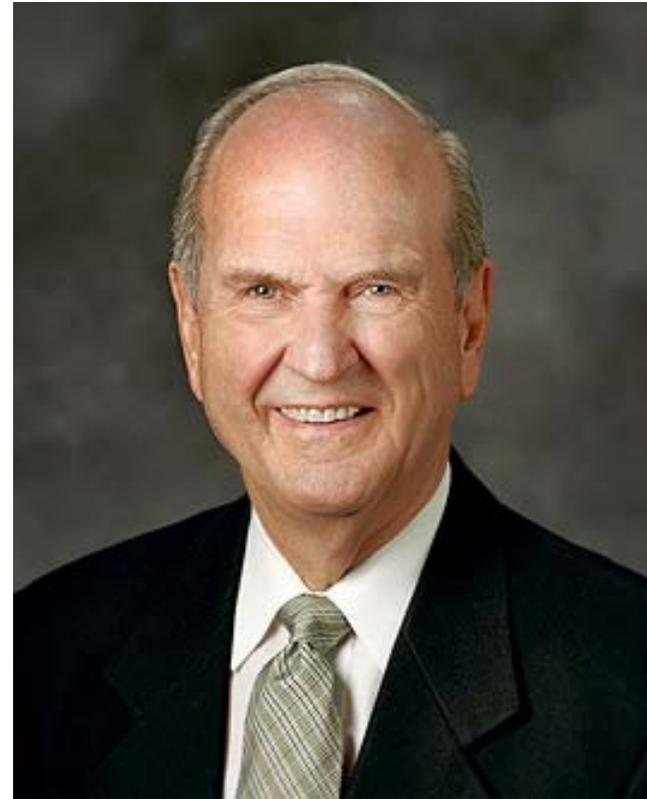
“We must show mutual respect for others, and treat all civilly. No one should be belittled for following their moral conscience.”

--Elder L. Tom Perry



“While we are to emulate our Savior’s kindness and compassion, while we are to value the rights and feelings of all of God’s children, we cannot change His doctrine. It is not ours to change. His doctrine is ours to study, understand, and uphold.”

--Elder Russell M. Nelson



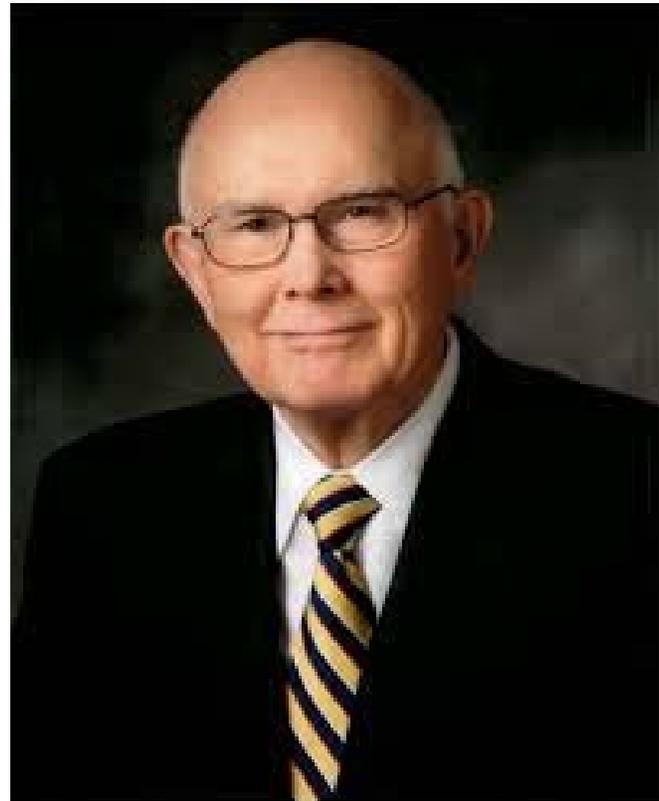
“[W]e and our messages should seek to edify and uplift rather than to argue, debate, condemn, or belittle. As Paul counseled the Ephesians, ‘Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.’”

--Elder David A. Bednar



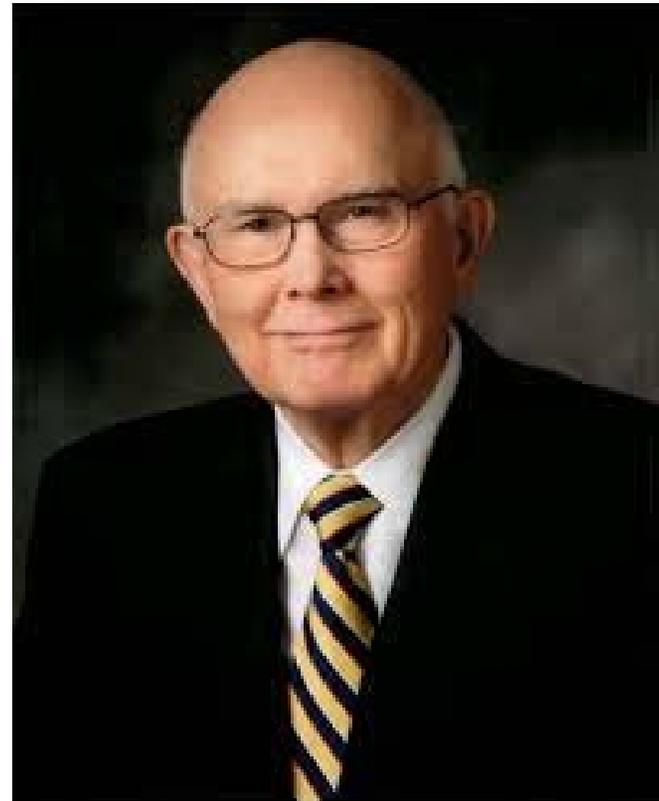
“On the subject of public discourse, we should all follow the gospel teachings to love our neighbor and avoid contention. Followers of Christ should be examples of civility.”

--Elder Dallin H. Oaks



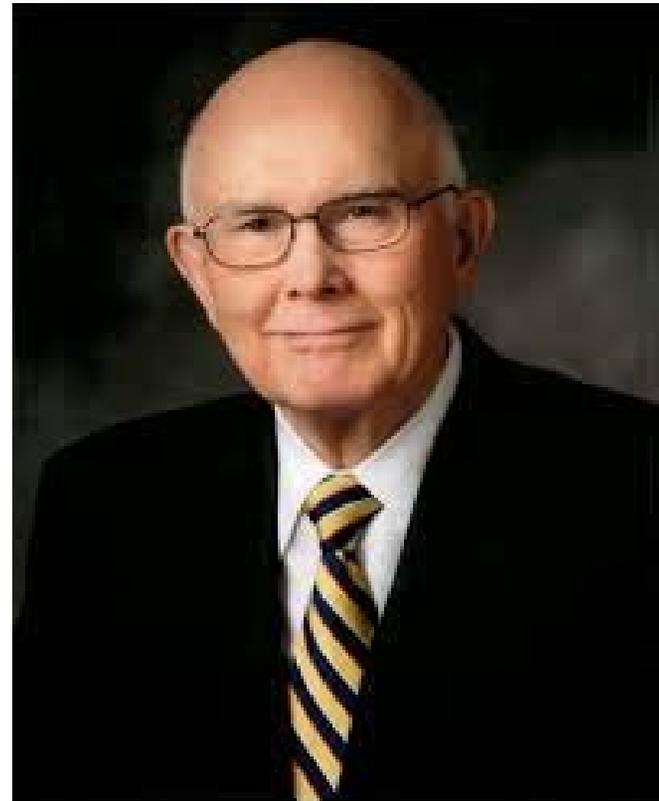
“We should love all people, be good listeners, and show concern for their sincere beliefs. Though we may disagree, we should not be disagreeable. Our stands and communications on controversial topics should not be contentious.”

--Elder Dallin H. Oaks



“When our positions do not prevail, we should accept unfavorable results graciously and practice civility with our adversaries. In any event, we should be persons of goodwill towards all, rejecting persecution of any kind, including persecution based on race, ethnicity, religious belief or nonbelief, and differences in sexual orientation.”

--Elder Dallin H. Oaks



“Ask yourself these questions: . . .
How do I respond to others with
whom I disagree in matters of
religion, lifestyle, or politics?”

As parents and leaders exemplify
and teach respect for others, we
confirm in the hearts of our
children that each of us is truly a
child of God and all are brothers
and sisters through eternity. We
will focus on the things we have in
common – on the qualities of heart
that bind the family of God
together, rather than on our
differences.”

--Margaret S. Lufferth

First Counselor in the Primary
General Presidency, 2009



“[I]f neighbors become testy or frustrated because of some disagreement with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or with some law we support for moral reasons, please don’t suggest to them – even in a humorous way – that they consider moving someplace else. I cannot comprehend how any member of our Church can even think such a thing! Our pioneer ancestors were driven from place to place by uninformed and intolerant neighbors. They experienced extraordinary hardship and persecution because they thought, acted, and believed differently from others. If our history teaches us nothing else, it should teach us to respect the rights of all people to peacefully coexist with one another.”

--Elder M. Russell Ballard



“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.’

That is what Jesus taught His disciples . . . through the parable of the good Samaritan. And that is what He is teaching us today through living prophets and apostles. Love one another. Be kind to one another despite our deepest differences. Treat one another with respect and civility.”

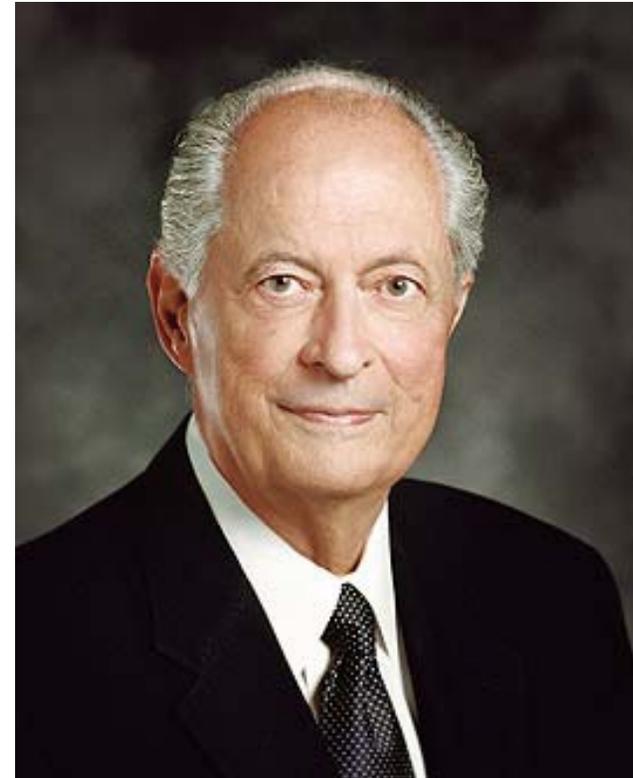
--Elder M. Russell Ballard



“Brothers and sisters, we are responsible to safeguard these sacred freedoms and rights for ourselves and our posterity. What can you and I do?

. . . [L]ive your life to be a good example of what you believe – in word and deed. How we live our religion is far more important than what we may say about our religion.”

--Elder Robert D. Hales



“We're at our best as fellow citizens when the push-pull of different viewpoints, freely and thoroughly aired in national debate, lead ultimately to compromise and resolution and we move on as a nation, stronger than before.

“The debate we speak of today is about how to affirm rights for some without taking away from the rights of others. On one side of the debate we have advocates of LGBT rights. This movement arose after centuries of ridicule, persecution and even violence against homosexuals.



“Ultimately, most of society recognized that such treatment was simply wrong, and that such basic human rights as securing a job or a place to live should not depend on a person’s sexual orientation.” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believes that sexual relations other than between a man and a woman who are married are contrary to the laws of God.

“This commandment and doctrine comes from sacred scripture and we are not at liberty to change it. But, God is loving and merciful. His heart reaches out to all of His children equally and He expects us to treat each other with love and fairness.



“There's ample evidence in the life of Jesus Christ to demonstrate that He stood firm for living the laws of God, yet reached out to those who had been marginalized even though He was criticized for doing so. Racial minorities, women, the elderly, people with physical or mental disabilities, and those with unpopular occupations all found empathy from the Savior of mankind.

“It's for this reason that the Church has publicly favored laws and ordinances that protect LGBT people from discrimination in housing and employment. “

--Neil F. Marriott, Second Counselor in the Young Women General Presidency



“Of special concern to us should be those who struggle with same-sex attraction. It is a whirlwind of enormous velocity. I want to express my love and admiration for those who courageously confront this trial of faith and stay true to the commandments of God! But everyone, independent of his or her decisions and beliefs, deserves our kindness and consideration.”

-- Elder Neil L. Andersen



“The Savior taught us to love not only our friends but also those who disagree with us — and even those who repudiate us. He said: ‘For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? ... And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?’

... In the gospel of Jesus Christ, there is no place for ridicule, bullying, or bigotry.”

--Elder Neil L. Andersen



“We need you to speak up – to express your views and defend the faith. And we need you to do so with respect for the beliefs of others and with dignity and decency as disciples of Jesus Christ.”



“And, just as important, you must live your faith so that others . . . will see your good works, experience your genuine love and friendship, and feel the Spirit working through you. Because as they do, they will want to listen to you and understand when you say your religious freedom is being abridged.



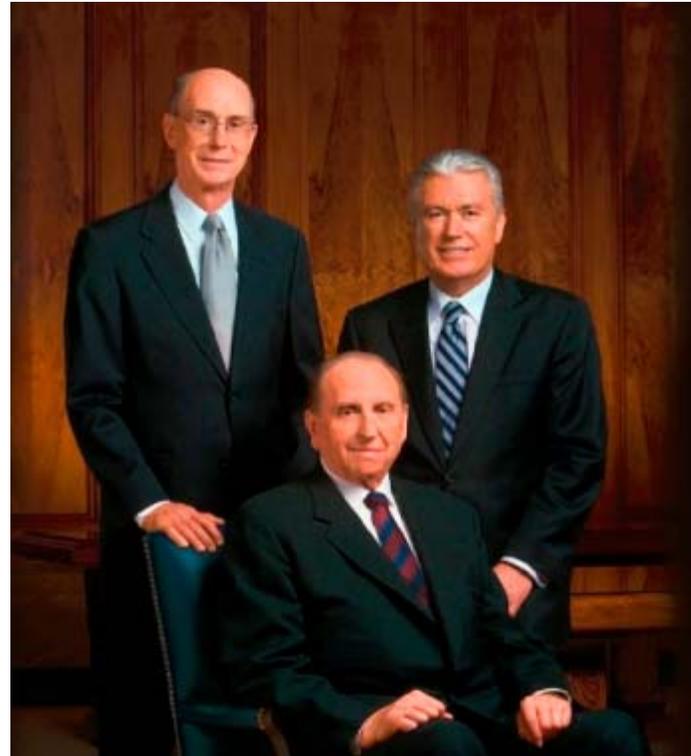
“They may not agree with you or even understand entirely the issue that is so important to you. But if they know you and respect you because you are a true disciple of Christ, they will be far more inclined to work toward a solution that respects the religious freedoms of both you and the Church.”

--Elder L. Todd Christofferson



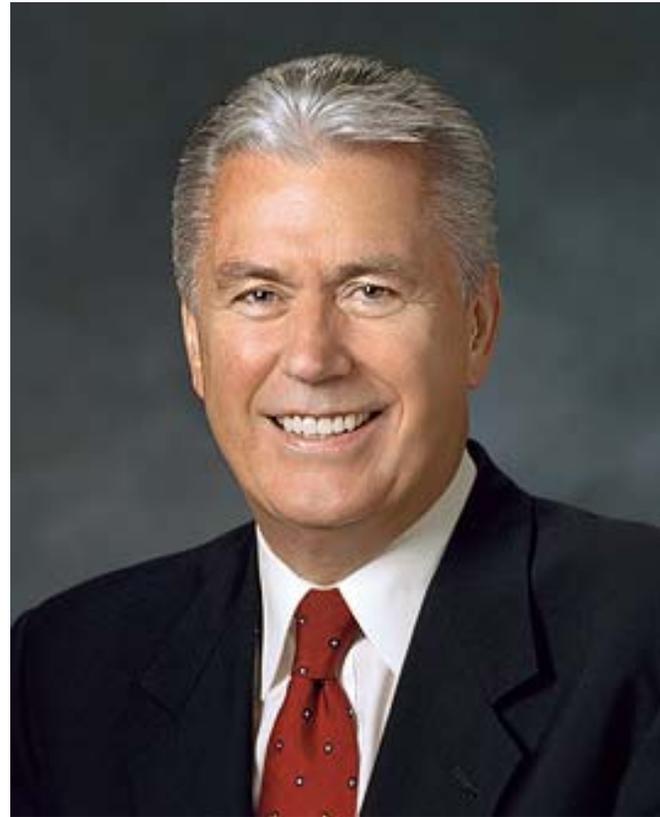
“The gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us to love and treat all people with kindness and civility – even when we disagree. We affirm that those who avail themselves of laws or court rulings authorizing same-sex marriage should not be treated disrespectfully.”

--First Presidency Statement
2015



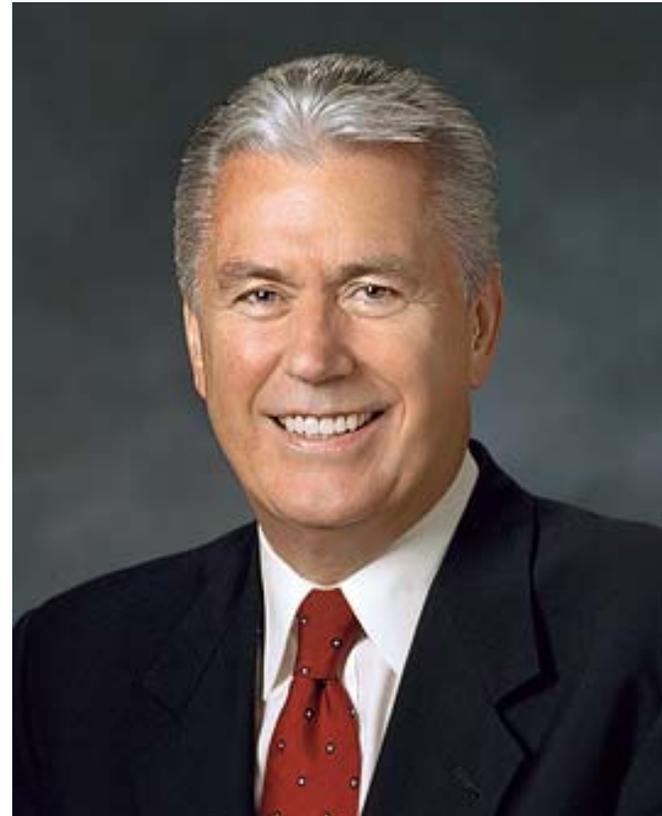
“Because love is the great commandment, it ought to be at the center of all and everything we do in our own family, in our Church callings, and in our livelihood. . . . Love is the power that initiates friendship, tolerance, civility, and respect. It is the source that overcomes divisiveness and hate. . . . Love should be our walk and our talk.”

--President Dieter F. Uchtdorf



“[W]e must realize that all of God’s children wear the same jersey. Our team is the brotherhood of man. This mortal life is our playing field. Our goal is to learn to love God and to extend that same love toward our fellowman.”

--President Dieter F. Uchtdorf



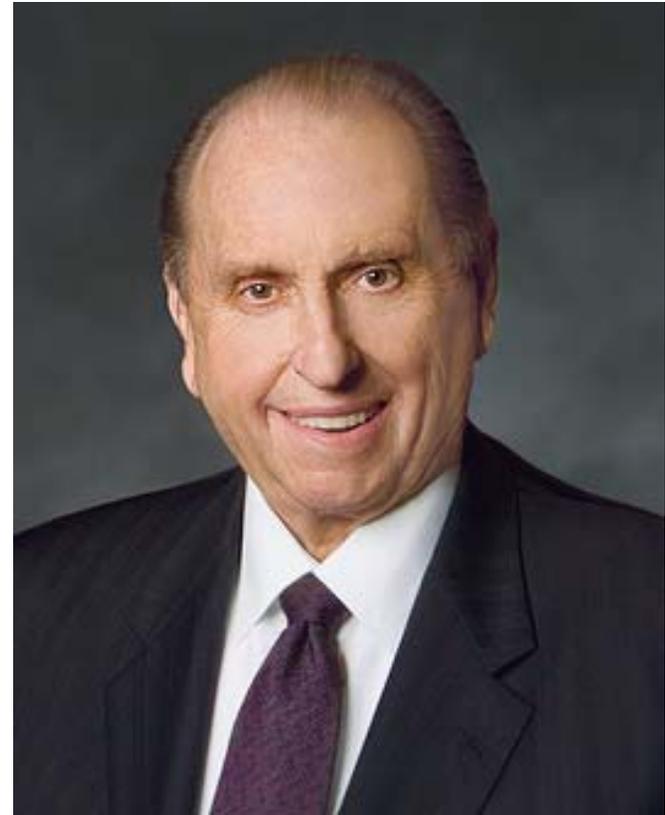
“The change that is needed [to create a renaissance of successful marriages and family life] is in people’s hearts more than in their minds. The most persuasive logic will not be enough unless it helps soften hearts.”

--President Henry B. Eyring



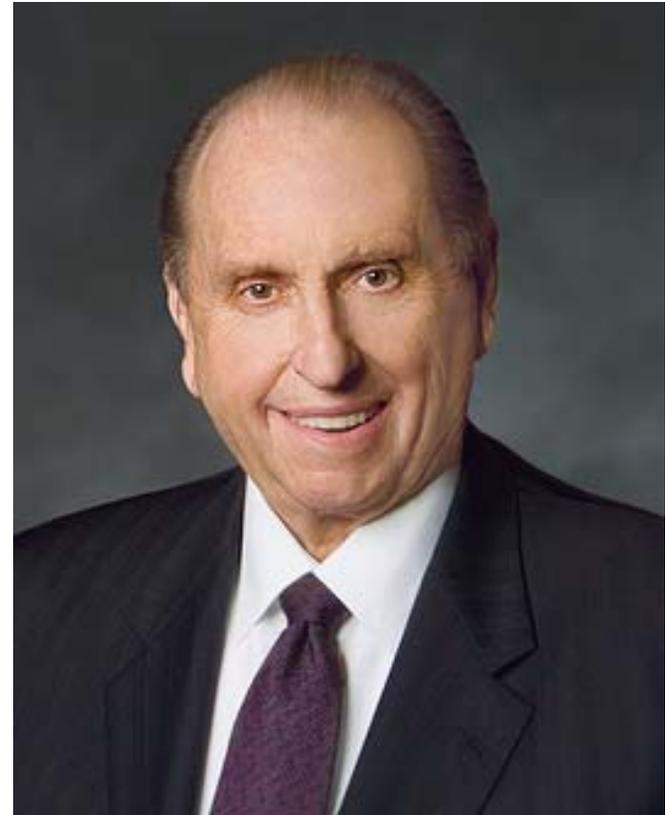
“May we begin now, this very day, to express love to all of God’s children, whether they be our family members, our friends, mere acquaintances, or total strangers. As we arise each morning, let us determine to respond with love and kindness to whatever might come our way.”

--President Thomas S.
Monson



“My earnest prayer is that you will have the courage required to refrain from judging others . . . and the courage to stand firm for truth and righteousness. As you do so, you will be ‘an example of the believers,’ and your life will be filled with love and peace and joy.”

President Thomas S. Monson



“May we be a little kinder and more thoughtful. May we reach out in helpfulness, not only to our fellow members but also to those who are not of our faith. As we associate with them, may we show our respect for them.”

--President Thomas S. Monson

