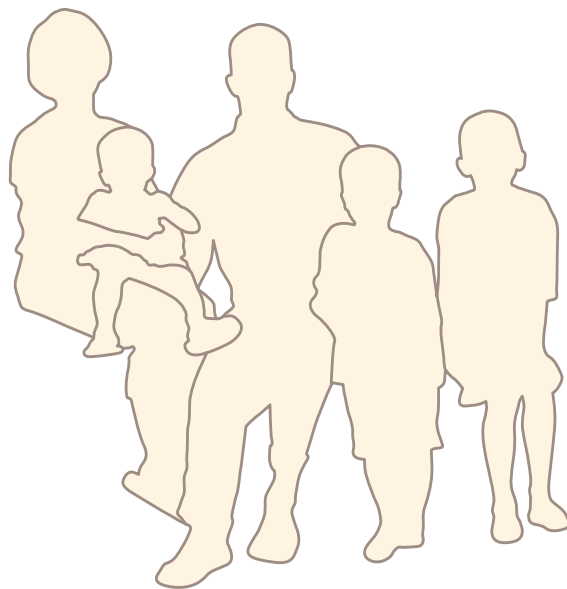


thoughts

on the family

A PROCLAMATION TO THE WORLD



by Annette W. Jarvis, '79 /// Photography by Bradley Slade



Several years ago I was talking with some friends of mine who were devout Catholics. I worked with the husband and through that relationship became good friends with both him and his wife. We had begun a discussion on religion, and in the course of this conversation, the wife asked me the following question: “Annette, I think I know you well enough to ask you something I want to know, and I hope you won’t be offended that I ask. I thought you were a devout Mormon, but Mormon women aren’t allowed to work. Can you explain to me how you can be a devout Mormon and work?”

Some time after this conversation, my husband and I were asked to teach a lesson on The Family: A Proclamation to the World to the high priests in our ward. We used this story to begin the lesson. After telling this story my husband, Joe, turned to the room of high priests and asked them how they would have answered my friend’s question. There was dead silence for several minutes. No one said a word. Finally, the high priest group leader said: “Well, this is the first time I have seen this group reduced to absolute speechlessness!” As I looked around the room, I was thinking that probably half of the men were thinking: *“I’m not touching that question with a 10-foot pole, particularly not with her in the room.”* I think the other half were probably thinking: *“Yeab, I’d like to know the answer to that question too!”*

Fortunately, in real life, when I was asked that question, I was not reduced to silence. Rather, as a working mother I had necessarily thought a lot about it. The way I answered it was to explain to my friend my understanding of the fundamentals of the proclamation on the family.

First, I would like to address my friend’s question about our church’s stance on working women, particularly working mothers. This is an issue that for women so dominates any discussion of the message of the proclamation on the family that it often becomes the only part of the proclamation that is addressed, both inside and outside the Church. As evidence of the pervasiveness of this single issue, consider the fact that when my friend asked me her question, the only thing she knew (or thought she knew) about our church’s stance on the family was some-

thing that was not even true—that women in our church were not *allowed* to work. Further, in almost every discussion I have been involved in with women in the Church on the proclamation on the family, this issue becomes both the focus and the cause of tremendous dissension. Perhaps, in our church’s more public struggles over the issue of working mothers, the greater messages found in the proclamation are not being heard.

To address the question of working mothers, I would like to tell you about my paternal grandparents. I grew up within an hour’s drive of their home in El Monte, California. As a child I admired my grandmother’s strong personality, her inquiring mind, and her ready laugh. My grandfather was one of the hardest working persons I have ever known. He taught me the importance of doing a job well, even a job of relative unimportance. While I grew up with warm and loving memories of their influence in many areas of my life, it was not until I was an adult that I truly appreciated what they had accomplished and what they had taught me.

My grandmother was an amazing woman. She lived a hard life. She was the oldest of five children. Her father died when she was eight years old. Her mother could not emotionally and physically care for the children, so they were divided up among the relatives. My grandmother was sent to live with her aunt and uncle, who did not really want her. Although she was only eight, they made her work long hours in the fields on their farm. I know this not because she told me (because she never complained) but because my grandfather told me. She was a very bright woman and was able to put herself through BY Academy and receive a degree as a bookkeeper. I was lucky to have known her so well as a child, because she died during my college years, just as I was maturing into an adult.

My grandfather also lived a hard life. He grew up on a farm in southern Utah, and when his older brother, the oldest in the family, died in the bed next to him one night during the flu epidemic of 1918, he was forced to leave high school and take his brother’s place on the farm to support his family. Consequently, he was never able to graduate from high school, something that bothered him to the end of his life.





My grandparents moved to California in the mid-1920s, when my father was a baby, so that my grandfather could find a job after the factory where he had been a sugar-beet boiler closed down. My grandmother had worked as a bookkeeper at the factory, which is where I believe they met. Life went well for them in California until the Great Depression hit. My grandfather lost his job and could not find another one. My grandmother, being better educated than my grandfather, found a job as a bookkeeper for a small business, although she was paid far less for doing the job than a man would have been in her place.

When we lived in Reno, I worked from a home office for a large New York law firm with multiple offices throughout the United States. While there I began to work a lot with my firm's Los Angeles office. I was always happy to travel to Los Angeles, because it gave me a chance to visit my grandfather in El Monte. One particular time when I was visiting, my grandfather expressed his admiration for me as a mother of then four (later to be five) children and as a lawyer. He told me that I reminded him of my grandmother, a comment that made me very proud. Then he said something that really surprised me. He said: "You probably get criticized a lot by people in the Church because you work. Your grandmother suffered the same criticism. People in our ward called her a 'career woman' and accused her of not caring about her family. She tried to let these criticisms slide off her back, but I know they hurt her, and it angered me to see her treated that way."

I was astonished. How could anyone have criticized a woman in my grandmother's situation for working? Where had people in our church come up with the idea that if a woman worked, that made her a person who did not care about her family? Yet, based on my own personal experience, I believe there are plenty of people in our church who come to the same conclusion today. In criticizing me and other women like me, many members of the Church ostracize and make life even more difficult for working women who are already stressed by trying to balance

their lives between home and office. I think these members sincerely believe that this attitude is appropriate and sanctioned by the proclamation on the family. This hard-line approach burdens not only married mothers like me, who may be more capable of deflecting the hurt, but also single mothers, whose children are just as important to them as women who have the luxury of being married to a good man who provides physically for them.

The proclamation on the family does not say, as my non-LDS friend thought, that a woman in our church is not allowed to work. It says:

Fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.

It is easier sometimes to try to draw a bright line so you do not have to think and pray about individual situations, but there is no bright line here, nor does this language give any license for stereotyping women who work as career women who do not care about their families. When I read this part of the proclamation, it clearly gives guidelines to the mother and father, but how they work out their situation is between them as they are "obligated to help one another as equal partners." I can guarantee you that my own situation arose out of what my husband and I felt, after much discussion and prayer, was in

the best interests of our family. We should assume that everyone who fervently tries to live the gospel makes equally careful and prayerful choices.

Joseph Smith was once asked how he was able to effectively govern so many people. He said: "I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves" (quoted by John Taylor, in *Millennial Star* 13 [15 November 1851], 339). I believe that idea applies to this issue as well. We need to be here to support each other in the very difficult jobs we have

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in raising children in today's world, not in criticizing another because they have made a different choice than we have under different circumstances.

It has surprised me that I have experienced criticism for being a working mother from women in the Church who spent more time outside their homes on volunteer or community activities than I did at work. While the proclamation only addresses the issue of women working, the principle is the same whether time spent outside the home is paid for or not. Each of us needs to carefully consider whether our time spent away from home for any reason is in accordance with what is taught in the proclamation on the family. I might add that in our country alone, statistics support the fact that most women will have to work in their lifetimes and that more and more families require two wage earners to survive. In foreign countries like the Philippines, where my son served his mission, women are often the only parent who can get work. Women in our church, in particular, need to pull together and get beyond having the "work" issue be our primary focus when we talk about families, in order to support each other and to effectively provide leadership on the very important issues raised in the proclamation on the family.

In discussions with my sister-in-law about the part in the proclamation about fathers presiding in the home, she pointed out to me how important this directive is to families in countries like Argentina (where her children served their missions) where unemployment among men is so high and women are usually the ones who can find jobs. In those societies many men have lost their place in the family and their self-esteem and have been marginalized by their inability to materially provide for their families. This directive in the proclamation instructs men to preside in their homes independent of their ability to financially provide for their families. What a difference it makes for these families where men are taught by the proclamation that their role in the family is of paramount importance and is not confined solely to providing financially for their families. Further, the use of the word *presiding* is, I believe,

meant to invoke the idea of fathers using the priesthood effectively in the home, which is an important way that fathers are bound to their children.

Mothers are bound to their children biologically at physical birth, and this bond is what, I believe, helps women to often more effectively prioritize their children in their lives. This concept was brought home to me recently when I heard a panel of LDS men speak on the subject of balancing career and family. One of them said that he realized his life was out of control when he missed his own son's birth. I sat there thinking to myself that somehow, as a woman, it was not possible for me to miss that event. Women are, by biological necessity, required to balance their families and the other aspects of their lives, working or not. If men are to understand the message that pregnancy and childbearing teach women, men need to stop thinking of balancing family and careers as an option and come to where women are biologically driven—that balancing is a necessity.

Men in our church need to realize that the priesthood is what provides them with this opportunity to shift their thinking. Although missing the strong biological bond a woman has with her children, men are and can be equally bound to their children by effectively using their priesthood to baptize their children and bring them through this second, spiritual birth. If men have a true vision of the priesthood, as set forth in D&C 121: 40–46, they will understand that simply providing for the physical needs of their spouse and children is not the definition of whether they have met their obligations under the proclamation on the family. If they are not showing "love unfeigned" and "kindness," if their "bowels" are not "full of charity" for their wife and children, and if they are not presiding in a "household of faith" where "virtue" garnishes their thoughts "unceasingly," they are not "presiding" over their families "in love and righteousness" as the proclamation requires. Being a good provider is not a substitute for being a good husband and father.

Several years ago I was asked by a woman friend of mine in New York, who was an orthodox Jew, what I

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thought about her decision to leave our firm, give up her opportunity at partnership, and go with a smaller firm in Philadelphia where she could work part-time and spend more time with her two young daughters. She had written me an e-mail on this subject, because she knew I had spent much of my career working part-time and was raising five children. She was worried that she was making the wrong decision and sought some guidance from someone she knew would understand her situation.

I responded to her e-mail and told her that when I had decided to work in a home office part-time in order to spend more time with my children, I did so fully expecting that my career was at an end. I had decided at that time that sacrificing my career was the right thing to do. My reason was simply that there was only one period of time in your life that you have with your children, so subordinating your career for your children makes sense then. I further told her that although I had expected my decision to stay home to be the end of my career, the most surprising thing happened. The eight years I worked part-time at home turned out to be the real start of my success and of broader recognition in my field. I therefore told her that you cannot know what to expect, because, for me, the result was that I eventually succeeded in both worlds: I had time with my kids and success in my career. I told her, however, that she must go into this decision feeling fine about it whether or not her career failed. I told her that she needed to make her decision on what was right for her family today and to let tomorrow bring whatever it may.

A few months later I was in our firm's New York office when one of my women partners, hearing I was there, sought me out. This woman was not the woman to whom I had written the e-mail and, in fact, was a woman who was divorced and had no children. She told me that my e-mail had been shared among all of the younger women lawyers in the New York office. She told me how much they all had appreciated what I had said. I was truly surprised. At that moment, I realized how many people outside the Church (because none of these women were LDS or probably even knew any other LDS women besides me) are looking for leadership in putting their families first. I have come to understand this even more fully because my distinctiveness in my field as a successful woman attorney with five children has given me the opportunity to

acquire friendships with many young non-LDS women attorneys across the country who approach me for advice in balancing families with their careers and for support in making hard decisions in this area. Sometimes this includes making the decision to leave their professions to stay home with their children. My admiration for these young women friends of mine is great, because they refuse to accept the artificial and unfair constraints placed on women in my generation that resulted in many believing they had to forego a family if they wanted a career.

There is a need for leadership by real-life example in putting our families first in our working lives, and it reaches to men as well as to women. Earlier this year I had lunch with a male friend of mine from another city who is divorced and trying to raise his two young children who live with him. He said to me that his circumstances had forced him to change his perspective on his life. He finally understood how hard, but how important, it is to balance families and careers. He sought my advice and support because he knew I would understand.

The message of the proclamation on the family that "husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children" is not the message given in our society to either men or women. In most successful circles it is not acceptable to sacrifice career goals for your family, and yet, I believe, if either of us as husband and wife has never made a sacrifice in our career or in our personal wants in order to put our family first, we need to reexamine what our true priorities are, not in what we say but in the way we live our lives. As members of the Church, we should be leaders in this area, again, not by what we say but in the way we live our lives. In my experience I would also suggest that women are critical in creating an environment to spread and promote this message. I have spent my career working in a world of men, but in my experience women are natural leaders in the areas of family issues and can have a huge impact on the men around them, including a persuasive influence on their husbands, sons, fathers, brothers, and male colleagues at work.

The crux of the proclamation to me comes in the paragraph just referenced:

Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children.

"Children are an heritage of the Lord" (Psalms 127:3). Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God and to be law-abiding citizens wherever they live.

Then following into the next paragraph: "Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities." The home needs to be a place that focuses on relationships and service among individuals, where we as adults teach our children how to love by loving them, where we truly enjoy our children, and where our failings, which will be more apparent to our families than to anyone else, are worked on and dealt with by exercising forgiveness, respect, and compassion.

When my daughter was married last year, she had a ring ceremony after the temple ceremony designed to include the non-LDS members in her new husband's family. As part of this ring ceremony, she and her husband each read something to each other. I began to cry as she read from an entry in her journal expressing her general feelings about the concept of marriage. She had written that she wanted to be married some day because she wanted to be happy like her parents were happy. This meant so much to me because I knew at that moment that, with all of my failings as a parent, I had at least succeeded in teaching my children this one vital lesson.

As parents we realize it is of paramount importance that our children know how much we, as spouses, love and respect each other and truly enjoy each other's company. I am fortunate that I married someone with whom I can truly be an "equal partner," someone who is (like my grandfather was with my grandmother) proud, not jealous, of my accomplishments; encouraging of, not threatened by, my education and talents; and who, while sharing equally household and parenting duties, is an amazing person in his own right. Showing appreciation for our spouses is imperative. We can become so busy meeting the needs of our children that we as parents forget to focus on each other. After all, your spouse is the one other adult in the household that you expect can take care of himself or herself. My daughter's com-

ment, however, reminded me that this relationship is the key to the family and cannot be neglected. We need to make time for each other. Ideally, at the heart of a family is love between husband and wife.

Having been a stay-at-home mother and a full-time working mother, I have a taste for the difficulties of both worlds. I am fully aware of how difficult it is to compete in the working world with people who have no life outside their jobs and to meet the current expectations of clients who demand 24-hour service and sometimes, as in my area of the law, actually require 24-hour service if people's jobs are to be saved. It is a struggle, and I fail at balancing these demands as often as anyone. The tangible rewards of getting patted on the back for a job well done rather than facing a teenager who tells you how stupid you are can often spur us to avoid our more difficult, but more important, home jobs. Nor can our church jobs be a substitute to accomplishing our central jobs as parents, children, and spouses. We simply have to keep trying to do better.

For me, I have inherited my grandfather's strong work ethic and his passion for doing a job well. When this is added to the commitment that I feel to my colleagues who depend on me to generate and supervise work and to my clients who need my best efforts to solve their difficult problems, it is often hard for me to contain my working life appropriately. At times this balancing act can become overwhelming. I once had a colleague tell me to stop worrying, because it did not matter whether I was really there for my children; it only mattered that they perceived that I had been there. I could not stop worrying, however, because I could not disagree with this statement more strongly. Appearance does not replace reality, because I know (and God knows) whether I have really been there to do my job as a parent.

I have also frequently been asked by working mothers whether you ever get over the guilt you feel in leaving your children every day when you go to work. I tell them that I never have, but that I have come to realize that I would not want to lose that feeling, because it forces a constant, but necessary, reassessment of your situation. I also now have the comforting perspective that comes with being the mother of adult children who have grown up to be capable, confi-

dent, independent, and loving individuals who contribute to the world around them in so many ways.

Even in my busiest times at work, I try to let my children know that they reign paramount in my life. They know that I will excuse myself from important meetings to take their calls to help them solve their latest teenage problems, that I will reschedule even court hearings to be with them at important events, and that I will stay up all night, if necessary, to do for them what my stay-at-home mother did for me in assisting them with a school project, making a fairytale prom dress, baking treats for birthday celebrations, or establishing and carrying out important holiday family traditions. Some of my adult children's favorite childhood memories come from accompanying me to work seminars, where I was able to combine work with family and spend time with each one of them individually in some interesting and memorable locations. What helps me is that I honestly enjoy my children. For me, being with my children is not about fulfilling an obligation. It is about treasuring the time I have with them, because, particularly in my situation, I do not take my time with them for granted.

I am also fully aware of the isolation and difficulties that are experienced by stay-at-home mothers, where the job is never-ending and at times very tedious, the results are long-term, and the acclamations are few. Being told you are the Meanest Mom in the World is not as fun as receiving an award for being Employee of the Month. It is not enough for us in the Church to pat women on the head and assume that, of course, they are happy because they get to stay home with their children. We need to reach out to each other and recognize the stresses that come with this job, try to alleviate those stresses, and show true gratitude and respect for women (and sometimes men) who do this difficult job well.

A couple of years ago, my sister-in-law, a talented attorney who decided to become a stay-at-home mom after her fifth child was born, was taken to lunch for her birthday by one of her brothers. In the course of their discussions, he basically asked her what she had done of importance in the world. She told me that when he asked this question she was driven to think about what she had been

doing every day since she had quit work—doing laundry, driving kids around, listening to teenagers, picking up messes, cooking yet one more meal—and she felt totally worthless. Yet, what is of more importance in this world than loving our children and raising them well? It is not a glamorous job, but that does not lessen its importance. Our Heavenly Father does not ask us to call Him Mr. President or the CEO; He asks us to address him as our Father. This is what is most important to Him. He does not credit the design and assembly of this beautiful world and this amazing universe as His most important work. Rather, in Moses 1:39, He says, "For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."

Let me end with one final thought. The proclamation on the family is meant for us all, whether we are married, single, divorced, or widowed. When we think of a family only as what we would term a "traditional family" with two parents and children, however, we sometimes use the proclamation on the family as an excuse to fail to reach out to those in the Church and in our circle of influence who do not fit this mold. Divorced and widowed parents need our love and support, not our intentional or unintentional ostracism. Single friends and couples who are not blessed with children need the opportunity to bless the lives of children around them and to be blessed by that association in return. In striving to focus on our families, we must not become too insular. We need to make our families a building point for blessing the lives of those around us and for being blessed by our associations with others in return. The proclamation on the family is fundamentally about the importance of relationships, which is the key part of a family, whether the family consists of a husband and wife, a parent and children, brothers and sisters, or aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews. We need to use it to inspire us to love one another, to teach one another by our examples, not our approbation, and to constantly reexamine our priorities and better our compliance with its precepts.

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