

**Lengthening Our Stride: The
Remarkable Administration of
Spencer W. Kimball**

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Dennis L. Lythgoe

When Spencer W. Kimball became President of the Church in December 1974, many people wondered whether he would be adequate to the task. The charismatic, forceful Harold B. Lee had seemed indomitable, and the brevity of his tenure as President was difficult to accept. President Kimball seemed physically frail. He had undergone open heart surgery only twenty months before assuming the mantle of prophet. Earlier he had lost one vocal cord and part of the other to cancer of the throat. Since then, he spoke with great difficulty. Little wonder, then, that some foresaw a stalled period in Church history under a caretaker administration.

In an October 1977 conference address, Elder William Grant Bangerter of the First Quorum of the Seventy looked back on those difficult days. He described an uncomfortable period among the Saints as they mourned the loss of President Lee and struggled to accept the new prophet: “We knew, of course, that he would manage somehow, until the next great leader arose, but it would not be easy for him, and things would not be the same. ‘O Lord,’ we prayed, ‘please bless President Kimball. He needs all the help you can give him.’”

According to Elder Bangerter, all of that charged miraculously on 4 April 1984, when “a new awareness” fell on the General Authorities and 1974, when “a new awareness” fell on the General Authorities and Regional Representatives as they listened to an address by President Kimball:

We became alert to an astonishing spiritual presence, and we realized that we were listening to something unusual, powerful, different from any of our previous meetings. It was as if, spiritually speaking, our hair began to stand on end. Our minds were suddenly vibrant and marveling at the transcendent message that was coming to our ears. With a new perceptiveness we realized that President Kimball was opening spiritual windows and beckoning to us to come and gaze with him on the plans of eternity. It was as of he were drawing back the curtains which covered the purpose of the Almighty and inviting us to view with him the destiny of the gospel and the vision of its ministry.

I doubt that person present that day ever forget the occasion. . . .

The Spirit of the Lord was upon President Kimball and it proceeded from him to us as a tangible presence, which was at once both moving and shocking. He unrolled to our view a glorious vision. He told us of the ministry performed by the apostles in the day of the Savior, and how the same mission was conferred on the apostles under Joseph Smith. He demonstrated

how these men had gone forth in faith and devotion and were clothed with great power, by which they had carried the gospel to the ends of the earth, reaching further, in some ways, than we with the strength of this modern church are doing at the present time. He showed us how the Church was not fully living in the faithfulness that the Lord expects of His people, and that, to a certain degree, we had settled into at that moment that he sounded the now famous slogan, "We must lengthen our stride."

Elder Gordon B. Hinckley told President Kimball, "That was the greatest talk ever given in these seminars. . . . None of us can ever be quite the same after that." Elder Bangerter remembered the sermon as

totally unlike any other in my experience. I realized that it was similar to occasion on the 8th day of August, 1844, when Brigham Young spoke to the Saints in Nauvoo following the death of the Prophet Joseph. . . . Many people testified that as Brigham Young arose, the power of the Lord rested upon him to the extent that he was transfigured before them, with the appearance and the voice of Joseph Smith. That moment was decisive in the history of the Church, and the occasion of April 4, 1974, is parallel.

In Elder Bangerter's view, the Church from that moment took giant strides, and "no one has worried the least little bit about who is the Lord's prophet."

Speaking with great force on that occasion, President Kimball outlined his conception of an expanded missionary program: "My brethren, I wonder if we are doing all we can. Are we complacent in our approach to teaching all the world? We have been proselyting now 144 years. Are we prepared to lengthen our stride? To enlarge our vision?" He called for more missionaries:

I am not asking for more testimony-barren or unworthy missionaries. I am asking that we start earlier and train our missionaries better on every branch and every ward on the world. . . . The question is frequently asked: Should every young man fill a mission? And the answer has been given by the Lord. It is "Yes." Every young man should fill a mission.

President Kimball's tenure saw the fruition of his challenge. The number of full-time missionaries grew from 17,258 in 1973 to approximately 29,265 at the end of 1985, an increase of 70 percent. The number of missions increased by 74 percent, from 108 to 188. The annual number of convert baptisms increased 148 percent, from 79,603 in 1973 to an estimated 197,640 in 1985.

In his sermon, the President also expressed a desire to "enlarge our field of operation" and teach the gospel in every nation. Speaking of King Benjamin's causing a tower to be erected so he could speak to his people, President Kimball said, "Our Father in Heaven has now provided us mighty towers—radio and television towers with possibilities beyond comprehension—to help fulfill the words of the Lord that 'the sound must go forth from this place unto all the world.'" He called attention to "Early

Bird satellites . . . stationed high in the heavens, relaying broadcast signals back to almost every corner of the earth's surface." Quoting D&C 58:64, he declared that "the gospel must be preached unto every creature."

Indeed, with the prolific use of satellites the gospel has been preached around the world as never before. Every stake center in the United States has a satellite receiver, making it possible for great numbers of people to see and hear the general conferences of the Church as well as other special broadcasts emanating from Salt Lake City. The "mighty towers" President Kimball so eloquently described have become major communications tools for the Church.

Always known for his humility, Spencer W. Kimball insisted that there were "many, many men greater than I who could have done a better job." He once commented that he thought the Lord had made a mistake in calling him to be President—"unless He knew that I didn't have any sense and would just keep on working." As President of the Church, he established a vigorous work schedule, beginning his days at 6:45 A.M., usually skipping lunch, and ending at five or six P.M. Then he took two to four briefcases of material home and often spent the evening working at his desk until 9:30 or 10:00. In spite of the operation on his throat, he spoke often throughout the Church with the help of a special miniature microphone attached to his eyeglasses which amplified his voice. Harold B. Lee was correct when he told a surgeon about to operate on Spencer Kimball to proceed with care because this was "no ordinary man."

It was soon evident that President Kimball had become personally very popular known for his personal warmth and genuine interest in people. He was also respected for his book *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, published in 1973, a Church best-seller that called the people to repentance and described the process.

In 1977, Bookcraft published *Spencer W. Kimball*, a biography written by President Kimball's youngest son, Edward, and his grandson Andrew. The book received immediate critical praise and sold nearly 150,000 copies in its first year, becoming another Church best-seller. It was unprecedented in Church history for a biography to be written about a President while he was still living. The book's warm reception indicated the special niche President Kimball had carved out in the minds and hearts of thousands of Latter-day Saints. Prior to the publication of this book, publishers to the LDS market held the view that biographies did not sell well among Church members.

As often happens, many anecdotes spread about President Kimball, some true, some false. One of these concerned a man who stepped into an elevator, noticed Spencer Kinard, who delivers the "Spoken Word" during Tabernacle Choir broadcasts, and said casually, "Push three for me, will you, Spence?" At this, President Kimball, who was also in the elevator, said,

“Surely,” and pushed the button. Allegedly the man was mortified at having appeared to call the prophet “Spence,” but President Kimball was not offended. Such a true story illustrates the down-to-earth qualities of the man and seems more in character with the image of “Brother Joseph” or “Brother Brigham” than with the more formal image of twentieth-century Church leaders.

In one of the apocryphal stories, a non-Mormon waitress, not recognizing President Kimball, asked, “Would you like some Pabst Blue Ribbon?” Supposedly, he replied teasingly, “No. Bud!” before he declined. The person telling the story was delighted that the prophet would engage in such repartee and that he would know the nickname for Budweiser beer. When Edward Kimball recounted the anecdote to his father, President Kimball said, “What’s Bud?” Obviously, the story was inaccurate. Another widely circulated rumor claimed that President Kimball, while speaking in a sacrament meeting in 1976, asked for a show of hands of those who had stored a year’s supply of food. When he saw relatively few hands, he supposedly said, “If you have not listened to what I said before, there is no point in saying more now,” and then sat down. Although it might have been a “telling sermon,” it was definitely “out of character” for his father.

Almost immediately after assuming the Presidency, Spencer W. Kimball began to decentralize the leadership of the Church and make other changes to cope with burgeoning growth. In 1974, he established a new policy of allowing stake presidents by delegation from the General presidents. In 1975, stake presidents were authorized to ordain and set apart bishops, and in 1976 their authority was extended to the calling of seventies presidencies. General conferences were reduced to two days instead of three and no longer necessarily met on 6 April, the birthday of the Church. In 1978, stake conferences became semiannual instead of quarterly, the frequency of leadership meetings was reduced, and local Church leaders were encouraged to be more flexible about holding interviews. In 1979, sacrament meetings were discontinued on the Sunday of stake conference. In 1980, in a major change of policy, the prophet announced the new consolidated meeting schedule, in which all Sunday meetings would be shortened and combined into one three-hour block. The major motivation was to allow Church members more time with their families as well as more time to study scriptures and engage on service to others on the Sabbath while reducing travel time and cost. In 1981, stake presidents were authorized to call and ordain patriarch. In 1982, it was announced that Church buildings would be constructed from General Church funds. Local members would no longer have to sacrifice so much in a short period in order to “qualify” for a building in their area of the world. The ultimate effect of these procedural

changes was to extend more authority to the local officers of the Church, lessening the burden on General Authorities and simplifying Church administration for the benefit of the members.

One of the most important administrative developments came at the October 1975 general conference when President Kimball announced the reorganization of the First Quorum of the Seventy. The quorum had not been filled since the Nauvoo period. The First Council of the Seventy was originally detailed to preside over the First Quorum, but since the days of Joseph Smith Church leaders had not felt the need to organize the quorum. Now the organization was to take its place among the governing bodies of the Church. Three men were called at the October 1975 conference as new members of the quorum, in addition to the seven Presidents, and it was announced that more would be added until the number reached seventy. One year later, the assistants to the twelve were officially called into the First Quorum of the Seventy, raising the membership of the quorum to thirty-nine. President Kimball said that this development would “make it possible to handle efficiently the present heavy workload and prepare for the increasing expansion and acceleration of the work.”

In an effort to bring the Church closer to the people, President Kimball inaugurated a plan of holding area conferences throughout the world. He called it “a great new adventure in taking the whole program of the Church out to the people of the whole world.” In 1974, he presided over an area conference in Stockholm, Sweden, in company with other General Authorities. In 1975, he presided over similar conferences in Argentina, Brazil, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea. In 1976, there were conferences in Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands. In each conference, President Kimball and several other General Authorities spoke, and cultural programs were presented by the people in the regions involved. In a memorable visit to Poland in 1977, President Kimball dedicated the country for future Church work in the first visit of an LDS church President behind the Iron Curtain.

From 1977 through 1980, area conferences were held in Central and South America, South Africa, Canada, the South Pacific, the Far East, and Hawaii and other regions of the United States. As he traveled the world, President Kimball frequently called on heads of state in an effort to acquaint them with principles and practices of the Church. In his first five years as President, he traveled some 347,864 miles. When the prophet’s health became delicate, the frequency of area conferences declined.

In November 1974, President Kimball dedicated the Washington Temple, the largest yet completed, at ten dedicatory services. He announced plans to renovate two older temples in St. George, Utah, and Mesa, Arizona. Both temples were rededicated in 1975. President Kimball also announced plans

for a temple in Sao Paulo as well as others in Tokyo, Mexico City, and Seattle. He said, "We will continue to build temples, and there will be hundreds, possibly thousands, of temples built to the Lord our God. We expect the Lord is just beginning." From the sixteen operating temples after Spencer W. Kimball dedicated the one in Washington, D.C., the number of temples increased to forty-seven at the end of his tenure, including several in various stages of planning and construction.

One of the most dramatic changes in the Church's approach to genealogy and temple work concerned the process of extracting names from old records. People were called, set apart, and trained in extraction procedures, old record-keeping practices and handwriting styles, and, where necessary, foreign languages. Then they extracted names from the records and sent them to the Genealogical Department, where the names were processed so that vicarious temple ordinances could be performed. This program was conceived in 1976 in response to President Kimball's plea that the Genealogical Department strive for simplification. Department officials prayerfully devised the extraction program and presented it to him. He reviewed it, received spiritual confirmation that it was right, and at April 1978 general conference announced a two-fold emphasis in genealogy work: "We want to emphasize again the obligation to complete the four generation program. Families may extend their pedigree beyond the four generations if desired. Secondly, we are introducing a Churchwide program of extracting names from genealogical records. Church members may now render second-mile service through participating in this regard in extracting these names in this program supervised by the priesthood leaders at the local level."

As part of his emphasis on a world-wide church, President Kimball began calling General Authorities from outside the United States. Beginning in 1975, General Authorities were called from Belgium, Holland, Japan, Germany, England, Canada, and Argentina, as well as the United States.

As an Apostle, Spencer W. Kimball had been known for the unusual literary quality of his sermons. When he became President, his sermons changed character and took on a machine-gun rapidity, as if he did not have enough time to give all the advice that was necessary. "Lengthen your stride." "Do it." "Plant gardens." "Clean up your yards." "Live clean, moral lives." "Fight pornography." "Strengthen your families." These specific instructions are typical of his sermons as President. He warned against polygamy cults, gambling, and profanity, and urged parents to teach children honesty and integrity. He criticized the prevalence of sex and violence on television and asked parents to be selective about the shows their children watched.

Besides more common themes such as marriage, family life, and keeping the Sabbath day holy, President Kimball chose to speak about such practical needs as food storage. Some of his more memorable addresses were about kindness to animals, as in "Don't Kill the Little Birds," in 1978.

Often President Kimball would present ten or twelve topics one after another in a single general conference address, like a loving father giving advice to his children. He constantly called for more missionaries and stressed the importance of getting an education, receiving patriarchal blessings, living frugally and avoiding debt, an keeping journals and writing personal and family histories. At the October 1978 conference, he said:

Any Latter-day Saint family that has searched genealogical and historical records has fervently wished their ancestors had kept better and more complete records. On the other hand, some families possess some spiritual treasures, because ancestors gave recorded the events surrounding their conversion to the gospel and other happenings of interest, including many miraculous blessings and spiritual experiences. People often use the excuse that their lives are uneventful and nobody would be interested in what they gave done. But I promise you that if you will keep your journals and records they will indeed be a source of great inspiration to your children, your grandchildren, and others, on through the generations.

At the October 1980 conference, he reported of his own journal-keeping, "There have been times when I have been so tired at the end of a day that the effort could hardly be managed, but I am so grateful that I have not let slip away from me and my posterity those things which needed to be recorded." Indeed, the strength of the biography *Spencer W. Kimball* is directly attributable to his extensive journals.

Under President Kimball's direction, two revelations given to earlier prophets were officially added to modern scripture at the April 1976 general conference: Joseph Smith's vision of the celestial kingdom and of the salvation of those who died without hearing the gospel, given to him in the Kirtland Temple in 1836; and Joseph F. Smith's vision of the redemption of the dead. It was the first time in nearly seventy years that a revelation had been added to the existing body of scripture comprising the standard works of the Church.

Certainly, the most dramatic change instituted under President Kimball's leadership was the revelation to ordain blacks to the priesthood. On 9 June 1978, the First Presidency addressed a letter to the general and local officers of the Church throughout the world. In it, they said that they had been pleading "long and earnestly in behalf of these, our faithful brethren, spending many hours in the Upper Room of the Temple supplicating the Lord for divine guidance." The letter went on to declare that the Lord had "heard our prayers, and by revelation has confirmed that the long-promised day has come when every faithful, worthy man in the Church may receive the holy priesthood, with power to exercise its divine authority, and enjoy with his loved ones every blessing that flows therefrom, including the blessings of the temple. Accordingly, all worthy male members of the Church may be ordained to the priesthood without regard for race or color."

The *New York Times* called it “without question the most important shift by the church since it outlawed polygamy.” Later, President Kimball recalled that he had prayed over the matter for many days in the temple. “I was very humble. . . . I was searching for this. I wanted to be sure.” After his many visits to the temple to meditate and pray, President Kimball called a special meeting of the Quorum of the Twelve and asked them to remain following their meeting.

We considered this very seriously and thoughtfully and prayerfully. . . . I offered the final prayer and I told the Lord if it wasn't right, if He didn't want this change to come in the Church, that I would be true to it all the rest of my life. . . . We had this special prayer circle, then I knew that the time had come. I had a great deal to fight . . . myself, largely, because I had grown up with this thought that Negroes should not have the priesthood. . . . But this revelation and assurance came to me so clearly that there was no question about it.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Quorum of the Twelve said that President Kimball “prayed with great faith and great fervor” and when he finished his prayer the “Lord gave a revelation by the power of the Holy Ghost.” Elder McConkie noted that the revelation came to the “President of the Church and to each individual present.” The result, he said, “was that President Kimball knew, and each one of us knew, independent of any other person, by direct and personal revelation to us, that the time had now come to extend the gospel and all its blessings and all its obligations, including the priesthood . . . to those of every nation, culture, and race, including the black race.”

One of the most controversial chapters of President Kimball's administration was the Church's stand against the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution. The First Presidency decided to take a stand on the ERA because they interpreted it as a moral issue. In a statement issued in October 1976, they noted that Utah Territory had been one of the first places to give women the right to vote and that the Church regarded women in an “exalted role.” They admitted there were “additional rights” to which women were entitled, but they firmly believed that the Equal Rights Amendment “was not the answer.” They asserted that it was “a blanket attempt to help women” which would instead bring “far more restraints and repressions. We fear it will even stifle many God-given feminine instincts. It would strike at the family, humankind's basic institution. ERA would bring ambiguity and possibly invite extensive litigation.” They further warned that passage of the amendment might and concluded, “We recognize men and women as equally important before the Lord, but with differences biologically, emotionally, and in other ways. ERA, we believe, does not recognize these differences. There are better means for giving women, and men, the rights they deserve.”

As the ERA debate continued, the first Presidency felt constrained to issue a follow-up statement in August 1978, warning that the ERA's "deceptively simple language deals with practically every aspect of American life, without considering the possible train of unnatural consequences which could result because of its very vagueness—encouragement of those who seek a unisex society, an increase in the practice of homosexual and lesbian activities, and other concepts which could alter the natural, God-given relationship of men and women."

Great publicity surrounded the 1979 excommunication in Virginia of Sonia Johnson, the head of "Mormons for ERA." Local Church leaders emphasized that she was excommunicated, not for her support of the ERA, but because her activities on behalf of ERA were blatantly anti-Church. Ironically, the excommunication made Sonia Johnson a national public figure because of the extensive press coverage of her trial and its connection to the ERA. The resulting publicity was embarrassing to the Church because it created the impression that the Church was antiwomen. In one significant effort to indicate his sensitivity to women, President Kimball had already initiated the first all-Church women's fireside in 1978 to correspond to the general priesthood meeting for men. Women were also authorized to offer prayers in sacrament meetings, after many years during which this privilege had been reserved for men.

Another issue with political and moral overtones was the proposed basing of the MX missile system in Utah and Nevada. In May 1981, "after the most careful and prayerful consideration," the First Presidency spoke out against the proposal. Consistent with previous prophetic statements renouncing war and proclaiming peace, this statement deplored the "terrifying arms race" and the "building of vast arsenals of nuclear weaponry." President Kimball and his counselors, N. Eldon Tanner and Marion G. Romney, expressed their grave concern at the plan, which would have involved the construction of thousands of miles of heavy-duty roads and more than four thousand shelters to house two hundred missiles, each armed with ten powerful warheads. They were worried about the adverse impact on water resources and about sociological and ecological factors. They expressed concern about the effects of placing such a weapons system in their own region, but they affirmed that they would have felt the same about building it anywhere else in the nation: "With such concentration, one segment of the population would bear a highly disproportionate share of the burden."

Recalling that the Mormon pioneers came to the West "to establish a base from which to carry the gospel of peace to the peoples of the earth," they found it ironic that in this same region "there should be constructed a mammoth weapons system potentially capable of destroying much of

civilization.” Concerned with “the pressing moral question of possible nuclear conflict,” they pleaded with national leaders “to marshal the genius of the nation to find viable alternatives” in order to “secure at an earlier date and with fewer hazards the protection from possible enemy aggression which is our common concern.”

This statement was criticized by some portions of the press for the apparent tendency of a church to involve itself in political matters. Some critics apparently misunderstood the statement and accused the Presidency of arguing against the basing system for “parochial reasons,” whereas in fact they had condemned nuclear war in general. There is some evidence that the Church’s position had a significant impact on the Reagan administration’s decision to withdraw the MX basing system proposed at that time.

Beginning in the early 1970s, there was an increasing desire in the Church for a unified Latter-day Saint edition of the King James Bible as well as proved reference material for the other standard works. In 1972, as Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve, Spencer W. Kimball had called several specialists to work on a committee headed by General Authorities and given the charge to prepare unified editions of the scriptures. The committee recommended that the LDS edition of the Bible contain cross references to all standard works, have chapter headings emphasizing doctrinal content, and make use of the Joseph Smith translation. When Spencer W. Kimball became Church President, he provided great impetus for the completion of this work. The LDS edition of the Bible was issued in May 1979 and the triple combination in August 1981.

In the fall of 1974, the Church announced it would divest itself of the fifteen hospitals it had been operating in Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming, turning them over to a nonprofit corporation called Intermountain Health Care. It was felt that an international church should spend its money on the health needs of members throughout the world, not just the needs of members in a few states. Under President Kimball’s direction, additional health missionaries were called to augment the 120 already serving on Indian reservations in the United States and in twenty foreign countries.

In 1976, President Kimball announced that he no longer had time to act as chairman of the board of various businesses in which the Church had an interest. While his lengthening stride was applied to more vigorous Church activity, he relegated the business world to others. Other General Authorities assumed positions as board chairman or board member of such corporations as ZCMI, Hotel Utah, Utah-Idaho Sugar, Beneficial Life Insurance, Zion’s Securities, Deseret Book, Deseret Press, and the *Deseret News*.

In 1979, President Kimball began suffering health problems, beginning with surgery to correct a subdural hematoma. Because of his advanced age, the latter condition took a heavy toll on the prophet, and after recurrence

of the problem in 1981 his activity was drastically curtailed. In July 1981, he called Elder Gordon B. Hinckley of the Quorum of the Twelve to be an additional counselor along with Presidents Tanner and Romney. When N. Eldon Tanner died in December 1982, Marion G. Romney was made First Counselor and Gordon B. Hinckley Second Counselor in the First Presidency. Because President Romney's health was also failing, President Hinckley had to carry the whole burden of the First Presidency in directing the administrative affairs of the Church.

In retrospect, it is obvious that President Kimball's leadership had a dramatic impact on the Church. The membership grew by more than two-thirds, and the number of stakes more than doubled. President Kimball was responsible for literally internationalizing the Church. This was fitting for the man who had years been a leader in the Church's work with American Indians, and who as President received the revelation extending the priesthood to black people. Although he will undoubtedly be remembered for the growth he spurred and for the administrative changes he made to streamline the Church and simplify its operation, he will be most fondly remembered for his compassion, which infused his religion with an authentic universalism. He succeeded in striking a balance between creative—even adventurous—growth and change on the one hand and the protection of cherished values and a love of humanity on the other.

Always genial and friendly to both members and nonmembers of the Church, President Kimball became more expressive of that love in his later years. First-time visitors as well as old friends often received an embrace and sometimes a kiss on the cheek. One person termed this an experience that "melts the marrow in your bones." President Hinckley declared:

President Kimball's love for the people and their love for him as the prophet of the Lord and as President of the Church have been as a catalyst in building a great spirit of unity among the membership of the Church. Love for other is of the very essence of his nature, and his outreach has touched Latter-day Saints far and near. He has embraced the whole membership in that spirit of brotherhood and mutual concern which are the very heart of the Gospel of the Master.

I came to know President Kimball's love for others in a personal way. Several years ago, my mother developed a sore on her lip which did not heal. The family worried about it and urged her to seek medical attention, but she refused. She wanted to treat it in her own way, and she had doubts about the efficacy of medical science. Her own treatment did not work, and the sore grew larger. Members of the family spoke with one voice in urging her to see a physician, and we had the support of local Church leaders, but still she refused. Finally, I got in touch with a General Authority for whom I had special respect and asked for his help. He responded kindly and

invited me to bring her to his office, where he told her the story of his own skin cancer and its removal by a physician. He urged my mother to take the same course. Before we left, he gave her a beautiful blessing in which he promised her that if she would seek medical help she would “live long and bless many.” Although she was very impressed with the experience, she still resisted medical treatment.

Three years later, in 1976, I reached a point of incredible frustration. The sore had grown so large that she was embarrassed to go out and had great difficulty eating. In desperation, I wrote a letter to President Kimball in which I recounted the history of my mother’s sore and our unsuccessful efforts to persuade her to seek medical attention. I asked him if there was any way he could help. Soon afterward, his secretary called my mother and endeavored to make an appointment for her to see President Kimball in his office. She wanted very much to see him, but she was in a weakened condition, had suffered a fainting spell, and was so distressed that she hesitated to go. The next day, President Kimball called her on the phone and talked with her for approximately half an hour. He told her of his own medical history, suggested that his own life had been saved through medical science, and implored her to see a physician. He was gentle, yet firm, and he did it with a touch of humor. He told her that he and the other brethren would pray for her at their regular temple meeting. Immediately afterward, my mother agreed to seek medical help. She entered the hospital, and with the help of a renowned cancer specialist the cancer was arrested through radiation treatments. As a result of the direct intervention of President Kimball, her life was prolonged for an additional eight years before she finally passed away in her late seventies.

The man who asked the members of the Church to lengthen their stride and quicken their pace was always the exemplar. In 1979, he declared, “This impression weighs upon me—that the Church is at a point in its growth and maturity when we are at last ready to move forward in a major way. . . . Now the basic decisions needed for us to move forward, as a people, must be made by the individual members of the Church.” The people have responded to his impressive leadership, and President Kimball’s remarkable administration will be remembered as an historic period marked by great change; by stirring missionary energy; and by deep, unconditional love.

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