

Physical Beginning of the Church Welfare Program

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Paul C. Child

People sometimes speak of the “pilot project” in Pioneer Stake. The Stake Presidency was reorganized in December of 1930, if my recollection is correct. The new presidency, consisting of President Harold B. Lee, Charles S. Hyde and Paul C. Child found themselves confronted with very distressing conditions and problems and set about to find solutions to them. If my recollections are correct, more than half of our brethren in the Stake were unemployed and of course most of these families required assistance. One of the first problems therefore was to endeavor to find employment for them. President Lee assigned the responsibilities of the welfare work to me. During my tenure as Bishop of the Poplar Grove Ward I had found considerable success in securing employment for my people through Ward members who held positions of foremen, department heads, etc., at Kennecott and other institutions, so one of our first efforts was to broaden the scope of this activity and set up an employment program in each of our wards and units. As we counseled on this matter we were led into the creating of Ward Work Directors for men and later for women.

We were unable to find employment for all our people and found ourselves with many who needed something to do; hence as we counseled we arrived at the creating of work projects for both men and women where they could work for the assistance they needed. We soon found that we could not place a monetary value on labor as we did not have the money to pay for it; hence we decided (and properly so) that it should be done on a basis “of need.”

Some wards were of course in more dire circumstances than others, and we decided to request the Presiding Bishop to permit us to retain all funds coming to us from tithes and fast offerings and create a Stake Welfare fund or account to which the Bishops could draw for their cash needs. We were given permission to do so and functioned for a time in this manner. However, conditions steadily worsened. As weather improved we organized our men under work directors and their assistants and sent them to assist the farmers and orchardists in their work which they of course could not afford to pay cash for. As the crops developed and matured we continued this type of activity. The farmers could sell only their prime produce, which left them a considerable quantity of produce for which there was no

market. This they gave to us in compensation for our assistance to them and thus we were able to supply our families with produce from the fields and fruit from the orchards.

To supplement all this, after counseling with our high council, we decided to operate a farm for ourselves on which we could grow a "Cash Crop." We applied for and were given permission to use some vacant land west of 2nd West and between 11th and 13th South Streets. The city agreed to give us free use of water from the fire hydrants. We decided that the best cash crop would be sugar beets, and so President Lee had samples of the soil sent to either the Agriculture College at Logan or field representatives of the sugar company for analysis. While this was being done President Grant held a meeting of the Priesthood in the Assembly Hall in which he made an urgent appeal of those assembled to plant sugar beets to keep the factories in operation and provide a strengthening influence on the economy. Shortly after the meeting we received the report back from the soil experts that our land was not suitable for the production of sugar beets. As we talked about this development in our council meeting President Lee turned to me and asked, "Now what shall we do?" My reply was, "President Grant wants sugar beets, so let us go ahead with our plans to plant them." President Lee then laid our decision and plans before our High Council and they approved. We had the city dump leaves, etc., on our property and we ploughed them under. President Lee then asked the Council after our meeting in the temple where we held a prayer circle each Sunday, that we all assemble at the farm site. This we did and stood in a group. After a few remarks from President Lee we prayed unto the Lord that He would bless our efforts and bless the soil that it would yield abundantly. Following this we set about to further prepare the soil for seeding, etc. We cared for our crops as well as we knew how and when harvest time came, imagine our joy as we harvested these beautiful beets, many weighing from 20 to 25 pounds!

As you can well imagine, despite all our efforts we still lacked the necessary means to adequately provide for our people. In desperation and after much prayer and counsel President Lee decided we should appeal to the First Presidency and accordingly he arranged for a meeting of the First Presidency and the presidency of the Pioneer Stake. President Lee laid our problems before the First Presidency and told them what we had done and were doing to solve them. The First Presidency, by President Grant, said to us, "You will go back, you will take care of your people, and the First Presidency will stand behind you."

Prior to this meeting we had decided to establish a storehouse and canning factory. The scriptures, which we constantly use as our guide, seemed to require it. Into this storehouse on Pierpont Street (donated to us by its owner) we brought the products of our labors and commodities which we

had to purchase, from which we administered relief to our families. We also established a coal yard as we had trackage there and bought coal by the car-load. We practiced every possible economy.

Much of the commodities coming to us consisted of onions. Through our senior High Councilman, Theodore T. Burton, we secured free use of 3 or 4 empty warehouses and in these we stored our onions, constantly sorting them to prevent spoilage. We learned that in Southern California there were no onions, so we had our mechanics repair such trucks as our people possessed, loaded them with onions and sent them to California to exchange for citrus fruit for which there was no market. We soon found that we could sell our onions for cash which we needed badly and also purchase the citrus fruit, and thus money began to come into our program. If my recollection is correct, we never had to make request on the First Presidency for money.

We found that ladies' knit suits were available at the woolen mills in Logan, etc., at ridiculously low prices. We contacted the mills and they were glad to make deals with us. We brought the garments to our Stake Center and made them available for our Relief Society sisters who remodeled them, etc., and thus many of our women became elegantly clothed with "garments of their own make." We purchased yardage and had the sisters make layettes, etc., for the lovely babies that the Lord was sending to us. Each ward had its supply. From yardage purchased the sisters also made dresses for themselves and children, and shirts for the brethren. Thus from the Lord's Storehouse and by His blessings the crises were met and solved.

It seems that President Grant had received "word" that he was to "immediately begin to state those fundamental principles regarding the care of the poor which had been in the gospel from the beginning"; and as President Lee laid before the First Presidency what he had done and what we were doing, that President Grant and his counselors recognized in it an answer to their prayers and quandaries as to how they should initiate the instruction which had come to him.

Bro. Child is retired and lives in Salt Lake City.