

President M. Russell Ballard

October 8, 1928 ~ November 12, 2023

We are saddened to announce that President M. Russell Ballard, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has died. After a recent brief hospital stay, he returned to his home where he attended to duties as he was able to before passing away at approximately 11:15 p.m. on Sunday, November 12, 2023, surrounded by loved ones. He was 95.

President Ballard became an Apostle on October 6, 1985. He was announced as Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles on January 16, 2018. As with the Apostles in New Testament times, today's Apostles are called to be special witnesses of Jesus Christ. President Ballard was one of 15 men who oversee the growth and development of the global Church, which now numbers more than 17 million members.

"President Ballard was never indecisive," Church President Russell M. Nelson said. "He knew exactly what the Lord taught and how it could be applied in one's personal life and bring joy and happiness."

"We worked together closely, and I always loved his warm manner," said President Dallin H. Oaks of the First Presidency, who sat beside President Ballard in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles for more than three decades. "He was a man to be trusted. And he was a man who trusted you."

President Ballard is survived by his seven children, 43 grandchildren 105 great-grandchildren and one great-great grandchild.

Funeral services will be held in the Tabernacle on Temple Square on Friday, November 17, 2023, from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. MST. The services will be streamed live on the Church's Broadcasts page and Inspiration and Events YouTube channel (both available in Cantonese, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish), as well as BYUtv.

Learning a Work Ethic Early in Life:

Melvin Russell Ballard Jr. was born in Salt Lake City, Utah, on October 8, 1928, to Melvin R. and Geraldine Smith Ballard. He learned his work ethic early in life — at an auto dealership. His father established Ballard Motor Company, and the young Russell, the only boy in a family of four children, worked in every department at the company, including driving cars around the used car lot when he was barely in his teens.

These experiences set a pattern for work that served President Ballard well in all facets of his life. "I learned through my dad that when you start something, you finish it," he said. "Ultimately, it works out to your satisfaction that either you win, and it becomes profitable, or you learn that it's not going to work, and you step away from it, but you never leave wondering if you're willing to stay with it."

Such an enduring attitude came in handy throughout his life — including his days at the University of Utah; his professional life in the automotive, real estate and investment industries; and his various Church assignments.

“His business experience served him well in asking the probing questions that need to be asked when you propose a program or when you ask, ‘Are we using the resources effectively?’” President Oaks said.

A Church Leader with the Blood of Prophets in His Veins:

President Ballard had busts of three renowned Church leaders in his office: Church founder Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum (President Ballard’s great-great-grandfather), as well as Hyrum’s son President Joseph F. Smith, who was the faith’s sixth president. Their legacy of Christian discipleship, which, of course, includes the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum in 1844, motivated President Ballard until his dying days.

“When I came to realize who they were and who I was, it was unbelievable,” President Ballard said in 2019. “I am constantly aware that I have a duty just by virtue of the fact that I have a connection. I hear them saying all the time, ‘Get with it; do something worthwhile. Get going, boy; don’t just sit there.’ They were doers. They had to be doers.”

He wanted every Latter-day Saint, including his children, to think deeply about the lives of faith lived by those early Church leaders. He told his son Craig, a 19-year-old missionary at the time, “Remember, the blood of prophets flows in your veins.”

“Well, no pressure there,” Craig remembered thinking. “[My father] looked at [those busts] every day in his office … and I think he felt he had to do his best. He instilled that in the rest of us.”

President Nelson said conversion, commitment and consecration “were in [President Ballard’s] blood. Can you imagine — we had the privilege of sitting beside a man who is the great great grandson of Hyrum Smith. And Joseph Smith was his great great uncle. Every day, I feel a debt of gratitude for the privilege of associating with a direct descendant of those respected and revered leaders. He’s got that same integrity that they had.”

In his final general conference address given on October 1, 2023, he spoke of the Prophet Joseph Smith and of his central role in restoring the gospel of Jesus Christ and of the blessings therein.

President Ballard’s ecclesiastical service included his time as a young missionary in England, bishop, president of the Canada Toronto Mission, a member of the Presidency of the Seventy and more than three decades as an Apostle.

“I would not do this for money,” President Ballard said. “You could not hire me for money to do what I’m asked to do as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. But for the Lord, it’s the greatest privilege that could ever be given to a man. We are witnesses of the reality of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.” President Ballard took this responsibility seriously, whether as former chairman of the Church missionary council (which included work to develop “Preach My Gospel,” the instruction guide for all missionaries), with then more than 50,000 missionaries under his charge, or as a father of five daughters and two sons.

A Special Witness, a Special Father:

President Ballard said some of his greatest experiences came from teaching his children about the gospel of Jesus Christ. “You learn to capture the teaching moments, and if you’re awake and alert, they come along, and when those moments are there, it’s a shame for any father to miss an opportunity to teach a principle to his children.”

One of those moments came in the late 1980s after President Ballard became an Apostle. Craig, his youngest son, admits being “a little bit bitter,” because his father was often away from home on assignment. It wasn’t easy to share the man he called “Dad” with Latter-day Saints around the world. “When I was young, I didn’t understand it,” Craig said. Fortunately, President Ballard perceived that misunderstanding. Recognizing a teaching opportunity, President Ballard brought Craig along on a Church assignment to Tonga and Samoa.

“When we got off that airplane, for the first time I realized how others saw him,” Craig said. “Many had walked for two days to come and just get a glimpse of an Apostle. That’s when it changed from a burden to a blessing for me to know this person intimately.”

This was, Craig said, a reflection of President Ballard’s gift to not only tell people something but also to teach them.

“He didn’t just say, ‘Well, deal with it.’ He knew that I needed to understand it, and I needed to be part of sustaining his call,” Craig said. “That was a great experience for me to learn, and he’s done that many times over in unique ways. He was not only a special witness — he was a special father.”

Another teaching moment came after his school-age daughter Tammy was playing with friends in a car that somehow rolled backward, smashing the door. Tammy said she was petrified to learn that the car she thought was her father's actually belonged to someone else. President Ballard said when he returned home and saw the look on his daughter's face, he knew he had her complete attention. "I taught her that she was far more precious than the Cadillac that she'd smashed up and that what happened in her life and how precious she was to me was far more important. We could fix the car, but if she did something wrong in her life, that would be far harder to fix."

"He'll be remembered as a wonderful husband and a great father," President Nelson said. "This is where his highest priority was. He set a good example for us on that, even though he'd had many, many demands upon his time. His family always came first."

Through the years, President Ballard's children came to rely on his spiritual strength. His late wife, Barbara, said, "When we were in Canada on our mission, our little boy was just starting kindergarten and didn't know one person. He was frightened. My husband took him to the office, knelt down with him and prayed that Heavenly Father would help him find friends. They had that prayer together several days in a row. He's helped several of our children that way when they've had special needs."

The Ballards not only prayed together regularly but also played together on adventurous family vacations. President Ballard recalled a trip they took to California in one of the very first motor homes to roll off the assembly line. "I took them to Chinatown, and everybody in San Francisco looked at that great big thing and were pointing at it and laughing at it," he said. "I couldn't find a place to park it, so I let everybody out in Chinatown and kept driving around those hills in San Francisco and finally ended bailing them all back in again."

Marrying His "Angel," Barbara:

President Ballard couldn't talk about his family without praising Barbara. "She's just an angel. It's awfully hard to live with somebody that's almost perfect," he said. They met at the "Hello Day Dance" at the University of Utah. "She was not only beautiful but had a sparkling personality. I knew from the beginning that I wanted to marry her, but she didn't share the same feelings. It was a little hard convincing her. I kid her that getting her to agree to marry me was the greatest sales job I ever did."

President Ballard praised Barbara as a wonderful mother whose calm approach made home life more like heaven. "All seven of our children, if you were to bring them in here and ask them if they've ever heard their mother raise her voice within the walls of our home, their answer would be no; she never did that. She has a temperament of being able to work through a crisis in a very calm and quiet way. She's sweet, she's loving, she's caring, she's watchful, and her children adore her. There's nobody in the world that holds a candle to what our children feel about their mother."

Their second child, Holly, agrees. She said her parents' love and respect for each other influenced her and her siblings' behavior in life-shaping ways.

"We felt like the best place to be was to come home and be there in that environment because our parents were very good with each other," she said. "I learned that you need to treat everybody with respect. And they were very good about doing that with us as children."

President Oaks, who was called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles a year before President Ballard, said he "so admired the way President Ballard has treated his eternal companion, Barbara. In her advanced age and his advanced age, he has just been an exemplary husband. So thoughtful. And so gentle."

Barbara passed away on October 1, 2018, at age 86. She faced a long battle with some health issues, including Alzheimer's, with her characteristic grace and sense of humor.

"How grateful I am to know where my precious Barbara is and that we will be together again, with our family, for all eternity," President Ballard said at a general conference five days after Barbara's death.

A One-on-One Ministry:

President Ballard's tender feelings toward his family extended to individuals he taught from the pulpit. During an address at the Church's general conference in April 1980, he invited Latter-day Saints to send him the names of people in need. He promised in return to write those people a letter of encouragement. Hundreds of letters streamed in from all around the world. President Ballard ultimately wrote over 600 personal letters of

encouragement to people who needed spiritual help. One recipient wrote, “I feel that your letter was the real beginning of this fantastic change in my life, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

“We ought to be reaching out to the one,” President Ballard said. “We ought to be looking in every way that we can to help one another through this journey of mortality. I think people down deep are basically good, and I think they want to know what the truth is, but they don’t know where to find it. They are asking, ‘Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? What is this all leading to? Where’s this taking me?’”

President Ballard put pen to paper to answer those questions in the book “Our Search for Happiness” (1993), which helped in teaching others about the Church and their purpose in life. President Ballard’s authorial life also included “Counseling with Our Councils” (1997), used by many local leaders throughout the Church.

Through all his experiences as a husband, father and Apostle, President Ballard looked to Jesus Christ for inspiration and assurance in all things. In fact, he often carried a small image of the Savior in his lapel pocket for encouragement on difficult days.

“Whenever he would get discouraged, he would pull that out and look at [the image of Jesus Christ] and think, ‘I can do this. I can do anything for Him,’” Holly said.

President Ballard came to know that the gospel of Jesus Christ is an anchor in a world of shifting values. “I have strong convictions that those who are really anchored in their faith in the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the mission of the Prophet Joseph and in the revelations that have come to the Church through him, which confirm and declare that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that the gospel is upon the earth, will be able to handle whatever life passes to them.”