

Letter to President Rob Rolfe, March 21, 2008

Dear Brother Rob,

Please forward to the officers of the Joint Conference of Restoration Branches:

Dear Brothers,

A group of Restoration Seventy met in council all day of March 18, 2008. In the course of our deliberations, we were pleased to receive brother Steve De Vera back into full fellowship, and recognize him as an active Seventy in the Restoration. He had previously associated with the Remnant church but has felt the Spirit of God urging him to withdraw and rejoin with his fellow Seventy in the Restoration. He has applied to Atherton Restoration Branch to be restored to their membership and has been warmly received. We wish to ask the officers of the Conference to include brother Steve De Vera in the list of those seventy who would ask to be sustained by the conference.

By a vote of 6 to 1, the Seventy decided to form their group of priesthood formally into a quorum as per the request of the conference. Two of our number abstained by not being present.

Following our decision to form a quorum, we chose four from our number to present to the conference for its consideration as Presidents of Seventy. The four so designated, in order of their seniority in the Seventy are:

Seventy Neil Simmons	(40 years in the Seventy)	Ordained 1968
Seventy Frank Frye	(32 years in the Seventy)	Ordained 1976
Seventy Ron Smith	(27 years in the Seventy)	Ordained 1981
Seventy Steve De Vera	(26 years in the Seventy)	Ordained 1982

The Seventy would be pleased if the Chairman of the Conference would preside over the consideration of the priesthood calls of these men to the office of President of Seventy.

If the conference gives its approval for the ordination of these men, and after their ordinations, they would meet together to consider whom among these four is to be the Senior President of Seventy. They would then convene the Seventy to select from among the Presidents of Seventy another to preside over them and officially form the quorum. The Presidents of Seventy would also meet together to ask the Lord whether there are callings to the office of Seventy among the elders. If these potential Seventy can be contacted, and if they accept their calling, it is conceivable that some names could be presented to this Conference for action if there is sufficient time to accomplish all of these requirements.

We ask for your prayerful support for the Seventy, and especially for the brethren who have not supported our action.

Your brother in Christ,

Ronald K. Smith
For a group of Restoration Seventy

Dear Saints,

On Tuesday, March 18, 2008, a group of Restoration Seventy met and voted to formally organize a quorum of Seventy. This action has raised questions in the minds of many, so we would like to take this opportunity to clarify and explain the current circumstances so that everyone who has an interest in the subject will have sound and correct information.

To this end we will address briefly the question of whether Seventy should be in the Church of Jesus Christ. We will then explore the legality of further calls to the Seventy and their quorum organization.

We will address the issue of the Lord's direction to us and to the Church in this matter, and give a history of our decision. At the end, we've also included responses to many of the Saints' questions.

George Thomas	Ron Smith
George Knotts	Neil Simmons
Frank Frye	Steve De Vera

The Question of Seventy in the Church

There is little doubt that the Lord intended for the office of Seventy to exist in His Church. Seventy Elders were selected by Moses, and continued as the Sanhedrin down to New Testament times. Jesus chose his own Seventy as recorded in the tenth chapter of Luke, and sent them to go before him and prepare the way in every city and village where he would go. The Lord restored the Seventy in 1835 and they have continued in the Reorganization. Latter day instruction has indicated that the office of Seventy is contained within the general office of Elder. The Seventy is an Elder who is "set apart" by ordination to be an especial witness for Jesus Christ, and is specifically called to travel beyond the branch to preach and teach the gospel of the Kingdom. There is certainly still an urgent need for the restored gospel to be preached in all the nations of the world.

The question as to whether the Seventy should continue among the Restoration Branches has been a heavy burden upon those of us who hold that office. We recognize that the current Seventy are too few, too old, and too infirm as a group to be able to carry this burden much longer. Because the responsibility to call Seventy rests uniquely upon the Seventy, we believe that we are obligated to act according to the Scriptures to do what we lawfully must do, to ensure that the office of Seventy will continue in the Restoration.

Legality of further calls to the Seventy

Many of the Restoration Branches have accepted a "tradition" that no calls to priesthood can be processed other than Deacon, Teacher, Priest or Elder. While this is lawful for a Branch business meeting, this rule does not apply to conferences larger than a single branch.

We can remember when the individual Restoration Branches nearly died in the late 1980s and early 1990s, almost before they had a chance to form, because Pastors were afraid to make any priesthood calls at all, because there was no officer above them to approve. Eventually, each Branch learned that the Lord expected them to continue, and priesthood calls began to be processed. Now because the Branches are beginning to come together in delegate conferences as in the early Reorganization, it is necessary to reconsider the informal tradition that no calls to office other than Deacon, Teacher, Priest or Elder can be processed.

We all recognize that Apostles cannot call Apostles, nor can Bishops call Bishops, so that any restoration of these offices to the Restoration must certainly require special further instruction from the Lord. The office of Seventy, however, is unique in that the Lord provided for the Seventy to be self-perpetuating. That is, Seventy have the scriptural right to select their own Presidents and they in turn may call other Seventy. (DC 104:43a, 124:4-5.)

The only requirement in the law is that approval of these priesthood calls be subject to a conference of the Church. (DC 124:5a–b) In particular, calls to the Seventy are not subject to the approval of the Quorum of Twelve or of the First Presidency.

It is not lawful for a group of Seventy, or any one else, to act on their own to call other Seventy. It is, however, lawful for the Seventy by simple majority vote to select the council of Presidents of Seventy so that they may act to call other Seventy according to the pattern given in Scripture. There is no law that the Seventy must have a unanimous vote to select members of the Presidents of Seventy. In the history of the Reorganization, to our knowledge there has never been a selection to the Presidents of Seventy that was unanimous.

It is important to note that the office of Seventy is not a "higher office" than that of the Elder, but a narrowing of the required ministries to be concentrated on traveling and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom. As they travel in the world it becomes impossible for their home branch to provide either their support or demand the accountability necessary. Thus, in the Church government, they are not accountable to their local branch. Because they travel, their ministry is "detached" from the branch and made accountable to larger conferences of the Church.

We submit that it is not only lawful, but expedient for the Presidents of Seventy to be organized so that they can fulfill the law as given in 1954 and by calling other Seventy as required in DC 143:3a.

Legality of quorum organization

The question of the legality of quorum organization for the Seventy is complicated by the dual nature of those quorums in Church law. Unlike other quorums of Elders, the quorums of Seventy function within the law both as a priesthood quorum and as a quorum having presidential authority. Let us begin with the priesthood function.

Consider the following: Deacons of the Church have the right to assemble and choose a president of their group. Similarly, Teachers, Priests, and Elders have the same right to organize their priesthood and choose a president to preside. When a President of Deacons is chosen and ordained, he is not ordained to a higher office than that of the Deacon, but to a special servanthood to the Deacons. Similarly, a President of Teachers, Priests, or Elders is not ordained to a higher office than that of their respective priesthoods. The president of a quorum is chosen to serve the needs of that quorum of ministers, but not to have any special

authority or power in the Church beyond that of any of the regular members of the quorum. The President of the Elders' quorum is simply an Elder. He is not ordained to "a higher office" but is set apart to serve the Elders. Similarly, a man ordained as a President of Seventy does not receive a higher office, but is required instead to serve the special needs of his quorum.

The law also provides a limited Presidential role for the Seventy

A quorum of Seventy has a maximum of seventy members. If a quorum of Seventy has more than half present, and votes unanimously, Latter Day Revelation indicates that it will be equal in authority with the First Presidency, the Twelve Apostles or a High Council (DC 104:11a-g).

This provision is clearly not intended as a means for handling the day-to-day business of the Church, but only to be used in times of extreme need. Given the difficulty of getting an entire quorum of Seventy to agree on anything, it can only be construed as a provision for the exercise of Presidential authority on issues of the greatest importance and in times of great emergency (DC 122:10a). If this number of men voted unanimously, their vote should be considered seriously by the Church as inspired of God. However, until at least 36 men have been sustained by the Church as Seventy, this provision within the law cannot be implemented.

This limited presidential role does not apply to the procedure of calling of Presidents of Seventy or the calling of Seventy.

Mechanics of quorum organization and the calling of Seventy

The prophet Joseph Smith, Jr. was inspired to give the Church the specific law with regard to the calling of the Seventy. Doctrine and Covenants 104:11a–g:

- a. *“Of necessity*, there are presidents, or presiding offices, growing out of, or appointed of, or from among those who are ordained to the several offices in these two priesthoods.
- b. Of the Melchisedec priesthood, three presiding high priests, chosen by the body, appointed and ordained to that office, and upheld by the confidence, faith, and prayer of the church, form a quorum of **the Presidency** of the church.
- c. The twelve traveling councilors are called to be the **Twelve Apostles**, or special witnesses of the name of Christ, in all the world; thus differing from other officers in the church in the duties of their calling.
- d. And they form a quorum **equal in authority and power** to the three presidents previously mentioned.
- e. **The Seventy** are also called to preach the gospel, and to be especial witnesses unto the Gentiles and in all the world—thus differing from other officers in the church in the duties of their calling; and **they form a quorum equal in authority to** that of the twelve especial witnesses, or apostles, just named.
- f. And every decision made by either of these quorums **must be by the unanimous voice** of the same; that is, every member in each quorum must be agreed to its decisions, **in order to make their decisions of the same power or validity one with the other.**
- g. **(A majority may form a quorum**, when circumstances render it impossible to be otherwise.)”

Doctrine and Covenants 104:43a–b states:

- a. And it is according to the vision, showing the order of the Seventy, that they **should have Seven Presidents to preside over them, chosen out of the number of the Seventy**, and the seventh president of these presidents is to preside over the six;
- b. and **these Seven Presidents are to choose other Seventy besides the first Seventy, to whom they belong**, and are to preside over them; and also other Seventy until seven times seventy, if the labor in the vineyard of necessity requires it.

Here we see that the Council of Presidents of Seventy is charged with discerning the Lord's call to the office of Seventy. This Council consists of a maximum of seven members. It is therefore required that a minimum of four Presidents would have to be selected (more than half of the seven) to restore the lawful means to call men into the Seventy from the Eldership.

Only after their ordinations, would it be lawful to begin the process of considering calls from the Eldership and prayerfully seeking God's will in the matter of selecting new Seventy.

That process includes the following steps:

1. The Council of the Presidents of Seventy have always voted unanimously when calling men to the office of Seventy.
2. The Branch President would be contacted to ascertain any objections to the call.
3. The Elder who is to be called would be contacted, and he must be willing to accept the calling.
4. If he is willing, then his name will be placed before the Seventy. All of the Seventy meet to approve it by majority vote before the call can proceed to the conference for final approval. (DC 124:5a)
5. If he is approved by the Seventy, then the calling is placed before the conference for their discussion and vote for approval or disapproval, again by majority vote.

Only after all these steps have been taken can an Elder be ordained to the office of Seventy. Conferences are needed to sustain the calling of new Seventy through the Presidents of Seventy. Branch business meetings are inadequate here, because the Seventy are not called to serve in branches, but as traveling ministers for the entire Church.

Direction from the Lord

The most important question confronting us is whether the Lord is directing the formation of a quorum of Seventy and the provision for the calling of Seventy at this time. In our deliberation, there were two particularly important considerations. The first was the message given from the Lord through Brother Marlin Guin in April 2006. It states:

“To the Seventy: I am pleased that you have continued your calling to the world. Be not discouraged. I know the desires of your heart. I am pleased that you have rightfully discerned your place in the present condition of the church until I can more fully move among the people. Your willingness to wait on the greater voice of the whole church is rightfully discerned and in harmony with My will. It has brought healing to the body of saints. This has caused them to begin the process of trust that has

been absent for so many years. My people cannot proceed to become one body without this trust in one another.

There are many more that desire to come and must not be kept from the fellowship of the saints. Be patient. Do not use your standing to move more quickly than I will allow. Set aside any temptation that would cause you to use the influence of your office for your own desires. You are to be servants.

This is My work and I will give further direction as necessary to recover My people. Unify yourselves, and place all your diligent efforts on bringing to Me the many souls that now wait to hear the fullness of the gospel.”

Brother Guin gave counsel to the whole Church later in the same message:

“Much can be done while the fuller organization of My church is left to Me. Give those things that can be done your whole and unified response. Come unto Me by also coming unto each other. **I am waiting for you [the Church] to decide.** All things are in My hands.”

Then the message which was also recognized as the word of the Lord at the 2007 Conference (as Brother Marlin tendered his resignation) was brought to us for consideration. In it the Lord instructed the conference:

“And I will say in my own words, simply this—without elaboration—that the Lord gave council and admonition to the church last April, the last thing He said was, ‘**I’m waiting for you to decide.**’ And when He said ‘**you,**’ He was referring to **the whole church**—not just this chamber, these saints. **The Spirit of the Lord rested upon me and told me that *the Church has decided.*** It is now in His hands. So, we will see what the Lord thinks of that. I know not. And just trust Him, it is His work and not mine or yours.”

This message has given confidence to the Seventy that the requirement to wait had been lifted. While we understand that many will not interpret the words in the same way, we are very aware of the promise that the Lord would give further direction. The Seventy have met many times during the two years since this counsel to prayerfully considered the wisdom and timing of obeying the commandment to form a quorum. One of our number, who originally resisted the idea of forming a quorum, bore testimony that he was awakened in the middle of the night last fall and the voice of the Lord spoke to him saying: "*Now is the time to form the quorum of Seventy.*" We believe that the Lord has given more light, and that He will continue to do so as we are obedient to the command.

History of our decision

In the chaos of the 1984 to 1986 period, independent groups began to form, hungry for ministry. Many honest leaders gave ministry where little existed. But some men directed the Saints to organize themselves in unscriptural ways. A small group of the Seventy between 1988 and 1989 decided to call the RLDS Church out of order. However, they did so in meetings that specifically excluded other members of the Seventy, including two of our current number, in order to assure a "unanimous vote." They did not submit themselves or their decision to the vote of any conference.

Norman Page and Marcus Juby first led the church that resulted. It later became known as the *Jubyite* church and it eventually disintegrated. A number of the remaining Restoration Seventy continued to meet together after the Page/Juby division, but did not formally organize.

The reluctance of the Seventy to organize into a quorum has been rooted in the need for a conference beyond the Branch level that could recognize them. Presidents could not be set apart until they were presented to a representative body of the Church in conference for approval and ordination. No such conference existed until 2005.

In the year 2005, the first representative conference with delegates sent from the Branches in the United States was held in the Stone Church in Independence.

In 2007, the subject of a Seventy quorum was considered by the Joint Conference of Restoration Branches, the National Conference of Belize, the National Conferences of Liberia, Kenya and Nigeria. All five conferences voted overwhelmingly in favor of asking the Seventy to form a quorum.

At our meeting of December 2, 2007, at the Odessa Hills campground, all but one of the active Restoration Seventy were present. We agreed unanimously that the Lord was asking us to form a quorum, but we were unable to come to a consensus on *when* to form it, and no further action was taken at that time.

Our meeting of March 18, 2008, held at Lamoni, Iowa, began with prayers and consideration of our vision and mission as a group of Seventy. Initially, there were seven Seventy in attendance, one via web camera. Another was reached by phone during the meeting. One of our number left the meeting shortly after lunch, so there was a total of seven who participated in the afternoon session. The following resolution was formally presented to the group for our consideration.

Whereas, the Seventy have inquired of the Saints, the Lord, and among themselves, as to whether they should at this time form a quorum of the Seventy; and

Whereas, the Seventy have been urged by the Saints in five member conferences, the Spirit of the Lord, and various individual Seventy, that this is the time to act.

Resolved, that the Seventy vote whether to form a quorum and submit the result of this vote to the Conferences which have urged the Seventy to so organize, and be it further

Resolved, that if the Seventy vote to organize their quorum that they shall choose a minimum of four of the brethren to serve as presidents of Seventy.

After a great deal of discussion, and another round of prayer, the resolution passed with a vote of 6 affirmative to 1 negative. In accordance with the resolution, the names of four of our number have been given to the Chair of the Joint Conference of Restoration Branches with a request to have the Conference consider those calls at its earliest convenience. If those ordinations are approved by the conference, it is our intention to formally organize as a quorum of Seventy.

No Seventy has ever been turned away from our group and each of the Seventy known to us in the Restoration Branches has been repeatedly urged to attend the meetings. We have made great efforts to maintain unity among the Seventy in all that we do. We hold no ill will toward any of our brethren who may disagree with this action, but we feel that we are bound at this time to uphold the majority vote of the Seventy, and submit this matter to the Conference of the church for action, along with our continued affirmation of the love of Jesus Christ for his Church and the world.

Questions and Answers

This is a question and answer session held on Sunday March 23, 2008 with Seventy Neil Simmons. It was about the recent decision to officially form a quorum of Seventy, and to provide the April conference with the names of four men called to be ordained to the office of President of Seventy. Brother Simmons answered these questions from his home, and has reviewed his answers.

Q1. Is it true that the Restoration Seventy have voted to form a quorum?

A1. Yes, on March 18, 2008 they met and after many prayers and much deliberation they voted to take the steps to officially form a quorum.

Q2. Were they unanimous?

A2. No, there were six votes in favor and one opposed. Two chose to be absent.

Q3. Does this vote have to be unanimous?

Q3. No, a simple majority is the rule. In this case, two thirds of the votes were affirmative.

Q4. Why would the Seventy form a quorum?

A4. The Seventy are required by the scriptures to elect presidents of their quorum. Section 104 states that "Of necessity" there are presidents" arising out of these quorums. This means that it is necessary to have presidents of Seventy.

Q5. If it is necessary why have the Seventy not done this a long time ago?

A5. The Presidents of the Seventy must be confirmed by the vote of the Church. This means that a conference of Church members, larger than a single branch must consider the choice of presidents of the Seventy and vote to provide for their ordination. Until the Joint Conference of Restoration Branches of 2005 there was no conference of the church that could consider the question. Since then, the Seventy have observed a number of conferences where the members of the Church have not been restricted in their membership and where they have voice and vote.

Q6. Does this mean a General Conference is required?

A6. No. In the past the Seventy have been approved for ordination by district, stake and national conferences. But it is clearly desirable for the conference to be as comprehensive of the church membership as possible.

Q7. You say, the "Presidents." Why not just one president?

A7. The Scripture states that the Seventy are to choose seven Presidents to form a Council of Presidents of Seventy. That Council can function if more than half, or four, Presidents are chosen. If there are less than four Presidents of Seventy, then the Council of Presidents of Seventy cannot function.

Q8. I thought that it was unlawful for any ordinations to take place that were above the office of Elder. How can we approve of a Council of Presidents of Seventy?

A8. Let me divide my reply into two parts. **First**, there is a persistent but mistaken view that a Seventy occupies a higher office than the Elder. That is simply not true. Both the Seventy, and the Presidents of Seventy are Elders set apart by revelation and wisdom to travel in the preaching and teaching of the Gospel. So, the Seventy are Elders working in a specific area of ministry.

Second, Branches, and branch business meetings are restricted to priesthood approvals of Elders, Priests, Teachers, and Deacons, but larger conferences are not so restricted. The conferences of the church can provide for the formation of the quorums of the priesthood. In this case, the Seventy have both the right and obligation to select their presidents. A branch cannot confirm their selection, but a larger conference of the church has the lawful right, and the obligation to act.

Q9. What does the Council of Presidents of Seventy do?

A9. They have all the responsibilities of the Seventy, and in addition the Presidents of Seventy must provide support to the quorum of Seventy, in their study, worship and their witness. They are also called to seek out Elders who should be called and ordained to the Seventy, until all seven quorums are filled.

Q10. Does the Council of Presidents of Seventy have any role in governing the Church?

A10. No. The Presidents of Seventy do not have any role in the governing of the Church. They are called to support the Seventy and to seek the mind of God in the spirit of revelation and wisdom to call Elders into the quorum of Seventy.

Q11. I thought that the Seventy could become a presidency of the Church.

A11. The Presidents of Seventy have no such role. However, the Seventy, when organized into a quorum with approved presidents, may function in administration or in the executive branch of Church government. But it is highly limited. If more than half of their quorum is assembled and votes unanimously, their decision is equal to that of the First Presidency or the Council of Twelve Apostles. The requirement to have at least 36 Seventy unanimous in their decision makes it very difficult to imagine any circumstance in which the Seventy would exercise presidential authority. Additionally, if this circumstance should actually occur, it would have to be approved by the conference and the voice and vote of the membership. In any event, this cannot be implemented until there are about thirty more Seventies identified, called, approved by the conference, and ordained.

Q12. If the Seventy cannot exercise any practical governance in the Church what is the point in organizing a quorum of Seventy?

A12. The Seventy are currently unable to meet all of the missionary demands of the growing Church. Unless more Seventy are called and sustained by the Church, the missionary effort will languish. Many of the opportunities to spread the gospel into the nations of the world have already been lost. Furthermore, the growing age and infirmity of the Seventy imperil the possibility of calling more men, unless this step to organize the quorum is taken very soon.

Q13. Do the Seventy have reason to believe that God wants them to do this?

A13. Yes. The majority of the Seventy have expressed their conviction that the Spirit of God has been urging the Seventy to form their quorum. We also believe that many members of the Church have discerned the same need.

Q14. Are you aware that there are quite a few members who are upset at the Seventy for announcing that they wish to form a quorum?

A14. Yes. We are very conscious that there are those who oppose this step. We recognize the fact that the members of the Church have every right to speak for or against the organization of the Seventy into a quorum. That is why we have been patiently waiting these many years for this matter to be placed before a conference that is open to all Church members.

Q15. If the conference voted against the Presidents of Seventy, what would happen?

A15. The vote of the conference would be honored, and the four men named to be Presidents of Seventy would withdraw their names from consideration. The group of Seventy would continue to meet as it has in the past, unless the conference directs otherwise.

Q16. If someone wanted to object to this action what would be the right way to do so?

A16. The correct way to object to this action would be to register for the conference in April so that your voice and vote would be granted. Then you can speak against the motion to approve the the ordination of the Presidents of Seventy. If there was not a majority of the conference in favor of the Presidents of Seventy, the matter would fail, and the men would withdraw from any further consideration.

Q17. If someone wanted to support this action by the Seventy what is the right way to do it?

A17. It would be the same process as for those who object. You should register for the conference. Then you can speak for the motion to approve the ordination of the Presidents of Seventy and make your statement of support.

Q18. I understand that some of the Seventy have withdrawn their support at this time from the rest of the Restoration Seventy. Is that true?

A18. Yes. It seems to be true for now. We are very hopeful and prayerful that the ordination given from on High to our brothers in the Lord's Church will work in them to restore unity and solidarity to the Seventy. We would like to ask the Church to remember all of us in your prayers, especially those who are distressed.

I have appreciated this opportunity to share and I am hopeful that you feel that I have answered your questions honestly, clearly and openly. I am asking that you join with me in offering the prayer that Jesus Christ laid on the heart of every Seventy.

“The harvest truly is great, but the laborers few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the Harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest.” —Luke 10:2