

Linda:

Thank you for meeting with me and some fellow committee members last month. It was very gracious of you to provide us part of your valuable time.

In the past, you and I have worked together to heal some of the division that has occurred between members of the church. I hope that our continuing effort may one day help pave the way for greater unity among the saints. My original purpose in asking to meet with you in November was to discover ways of achieving that goal while meeting some basic unifying needs for church members meeting in Restoration settings. On the surface, these seem like disjointed goals, but I am hopeful that they can be woven into an integrated cord.

I believe that saints in Restoration settings, while clearly resistant to church leaders, have maintained respect for the church offices those leaders hold. They have refused any form of church government that infringes on the rights and duties of General Church officers. While that conduct has honored the leading offices, it has also hindered the saints in Restoration settings from enjoying many of the advantages that a unified church government provides. Realizing this need, our committee has agreed that a joint conference of branches is a lawful means (under the laws of the Reorganized Church) for us to use in achieving a unifying church government. We view that joint conference as a conference of exiled (or independent) branches of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

While saints in Restoration settings have always been welcomed by church leaders when they returned to congregations within church jurisdictions and thereby regained participation in a greater level of church government, that option is unacceptable for most. In some cases, people are so hurt or angry that they are unwilling to retain any ties with the Reorganized Church. Keeping Restoration saints in the church, such as organizing Restoration Branches as branches of the Reorganized Church, has been a long and arduous task. ~~Now that this goal seems about fulfilled, I hope that church leaders can extend a greater reconciling gesture toward those saints involved in a joint conference. I tried to express this hope when our committee met with you.~~ The underlying question at that time was: How do we explore ways with church leaders of achieving additional reconciliation between members meeting in sanctioned congregations and members meeting in a joint conference of independent branches?

Our plans were not specific and the requests we made were too general. You asked that we clarify our plans so that we could make more specific requests.

We plan to hold a retreat on March 4-5 to discuss the lawful scope of a joint conference and ascertain some idea of the number of branches willing to meet in conference. Its activities will be limited to worship, classes, and discussion. We expect that a second retreat will be necessary. The amount of material and anticipated discussion is probably too extensive for one session. The decision to hold a second retreat, probably on March 24-26, will be made at the first retreat in according to the will of the people in attendance. At the conclusion of the retreat(s), we plan to schedule the joint conference for a nearby date that will not be set until then. Three goals are currently planned for the joint conference: to determine an acceptable body of church law; to elect officers to carry out the will of the conference; and to develop and implement missionary strategies.

Since the time that we made our initial request to meet with you, the leadership of the church has changed. Now that we have evaluated its current condition, we can make specific requests. Here are three ways that church leaders can help.

1. Church leaders can recognize members of independent branches as members of the church. Most of our