

Section 96

Reading section 96 is like walking in on an interesting conversation that is already underway. You try hard to catch on, to understand what's being said, but you realize there's so much you've missed that you just can't make sense of what you're hearing. It would be nice, in such cases, if there were a way to catch up on the earlier parts of the conversation. Those parts are sections 42, 72, 78, and 82. Those sections reveal the law of consecration and establish an organization (of Church leaders) called the United Firm to be trustees of Church properties, manage storehouses, and relieve poverty.

Members of the Firm and others strategized in the spring of 1833 to acquire several farms in the Kirtland, Ohio, area, especially a farm and brick tavern owned by an early settler named Peter French. The Saints hoped to build a stake of Zion surrounding the House of the Lord, which they intended to build on French's farm. They sent a committee to ask the farm owners the terms on which they would be willing to sell. The committee returned with news that the farms were available, and the council decided to buy them, appointed agents to negotiate the sale, and called the elders out of their school to go raise funds among the Saints.¹ The funds were raised and the farms purchased, leading to another council on June 4, which disagreed about who should manage the French farm, "but all agreed to inquire of the Lord."²

¹ Zebedee Coltrin, Journal, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

² "[Minute Book 1](#)," p. 13, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 9, 2020.

The Lord answered that Newel Whitney, the bishop in Kirtland, was to “take charge of the place” as a good steward. The Lord, however, is the owner of “the place . . . upon which I design to build my holy house” (D&C 96:2). He begins the revelation by stating the rationale for buying the farm: “It is expedient in me that this stake that I have set for the strength of Zion should be made strong” (v. 1). The Lord instructs the bishop and others how to act relative to the land, by dividing it among the Saints and using the proceeds to fund the United Firm, called the “order” in verses 4 and 8 but “the Firm” in early manuscripts (see sections 70, 78, 82, and 92). The Lord says John Johnson “should become a member of the order” and use his financial resources and skills to pay the Church's debts (D&C 96:8).³

Bishop Whitney became steward of the farm and acted on the revelation's instructions to divide it and to finance the Church's publications with the proceeds. John Johnson moved from Hiram to Kirtland, joined the United Firm, became steward of the tavern, and tried to obey the revelation by paying the firm's debts.⁴

³ “[Revelation, 4 June 1833 \[D&C 96\]](#),” p. 60, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 9, 2020.

⁴ “[Letter to Church Leaders in Jackson County, Missouri, 25 June 1833](#),” p. [1], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 9, 2020.