

I'm grateful for the chance that I have been given to share my thoughts with you even if it is through writing and not face to face. I pray that you will feel the spirit through my words. I pray that you will know that each of you are loved and cared about by the leaders of this Stake. We appreciate the many acts of service and love that are extended between you. We have been charged with the task of helping you understand the importance of feeling connected. At times throughout this pandemic, I've personally felt isolated and disconnected from the ward and the members of the church. I'm sure that I'm not the only one, I'd like to start by sharing a story with you.

I had an interesting experience at the Lake this summer. I was blessed to go with a few friends and meet at Eagle Mountain Lake where there is a beach and a roped off swim area. The kids and I had a chance to have some social interaction in a fun environment where we could beat the heat and enjoy the outdoors. There were four of us ladies standing in a shallow area of the water talking. We were in a good sized circle while our children swam around us and entertained themselves. All of us had kids old enough that we had a bit of freedom to do this. Beside us in the water, there was a lady who was apparently watching over her 2 nieces. One was small and in the water playing. The other one appeared to be about 5-6 years old. She was riding all around on a giant unicorn float. I found out later that their mother was up on the sandy part of the beach with her attention elsewhere. I assume she felt that the other lady had her eyes on the kids and could relax a minute. The little girl on the float was floating all around the shallow area and the aunt kept playing with the younger child. Much to everyone's delight, a good strong breeze blew towards the water and cooled us off. My friends and I commented on how good it felt and kept up our happy chatter and enjoyed being out for the day.

About 5 minutes went by and all of a sudden the mother from the beach started running towards the water and calling to the lady playing with the child in the lake. "How did she get all the way out there?" and, "I thought you were watching her!!!" Her voice was both angry and frightened. We all turned to see what the commotion was about. The upset mother ran into the water and began trying to wade out and then she began to swim out towards the rope that separated this area of the lake from the open water. She was making slow time in doing so, We turned to watch and could see that the little girl on the float had been pushed by the wind all the way out to the rope, towards the deeper part of the water. I then noticed that a young boy about 12 years old was on a paddleboard in the same area. I saw him jump off of his board and swim

over to help the little girl . He stayed with her and began pulling her float towards the shoreline and towards her mom and the Aunt. I am happy to report that this story had a happy ending when mother and daughter were reunited safely. We went on with our day and I didn't think much about it again until I started asking Heavenly Father for help to write this message. It was then that he brought this experience back to my mind.

I began to think about the connections we need in our lives. In our families and in our wards we have many opportunities to make connections. We have all been given certain stewardships as members of Jesus Christ's church. We all have made sacred covenants with our Heavenly father to love and care for each other. Since March, it's been more of a challenge than ever before to keep connected with our fellow ward members, watch over them, and make sure they are also feeling connected to Jesus Christ and his gospel. I believe in our current circumstance, it's more important than ever before. We have all been given this charge when we became members of the church.

Moroni 6:4 “And after they had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ; and their names were taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who was the author and the finisher of their faith.” As sisters we have a duty to care for each other. And to help keep each other strong and safely moving forward on the covenant path.

My experience at the lake seemed to me to be a good parallel for our stewardships and why they are so vital. Those stewardships we have been given in our callings, those we have as parents and friends, and those we have been given as assigned ministering sisters and brothers. I wonder what parallels you might see as you ponder on this experience?

We are living in a time that has been most challenging for each of us. Everyone has had one kind of struggle or another with the global pandemic and the changes it has brought to us. I think one of the biggest ones for you sisters of the church has been a lack of emotional/ social connection. Having connections with others is an important part of our emotional health. I would define a connection as feeling in touch with

someone who cares about us. The phrase, In touch, to me would mean a face to face visit or a phone conversation or facetime call.

Let me go back to the story. The little girl drifted away and no one noticed. It happened quickly. She was too little to notice her own movement and too quiet voiced to get anyone's attention even if she did. The lady in the water was given stewardship or responsibility for her. The mom on the beach had assigned another the stewardship but ultimately it was her child and her responsibility to keep her safe. She knew this and felt the fear that comes when someone we love and care for is in imminent danger.

Who do each of us have stewardship over? Our families? Our friends and neighbors? The sisters we have been assigned to minister to? Those who fall within the calling we have accepted? In our wards, the bishop has been assigned stewardship for all of the people in his ward. He needs our help. Each of us has accepted the responsibilities of assignments and callings. We are to support and help the ward leaders by doing our part. The leaders want each member to feel the savior's love and feel like they are a part of his kingdom here on the earth. Especially now when life is more challenging.

I've thought about the little girl So many times in the last few weeks. Are there any sisters in our wards who just quietly go unnoticed and slowly drift away without the contact or connections that will keep them up in the shallow or safe area? I hope not. I pray that connections will keep being made for each sister.

I pray that if drifting happens, we will have members that even though they are not assigned, are willing to "jump off their own paddleboard" and swim out to help pull them back if someone else doesn't notice.

I think about the aunt in the story. She was playing with the one little girl who demanded more of her attention. She may have felt that the girl on the float was just fine and didn't need as much attention. She felt secure in not paying closer attention. Do we do that sometimes? Do we think some sisters, who we have been assigned to keep close tabs on, will be fine without us? Do we unknowingly ignore someone who may actually be floating away because they appear to need us less?

Heavenly father in his abundance of love for all of his children, has made a perfect inspiring plan within each ward boundary. He has given us a bishop, a relief society president and an elders quorum president. Then he gave us the inspired ministering program so none of us will drift away unnoticed. He gave us callings so

we can have a specific group of people to focus our love and service on. And the amazing thing is, when we do his work, we are given so much joy. He blesses us for doing it.

Sisters, please keep connecting, keep watching over and loving one another. These connections and small acts of love and care, will make us all stronger as a ward and a Stake. We will be blessed with deeper friendships and more unity among us. We will all be stronger and safer because of the efforts that we make in keeping our covenants and our charge from the savior to “Love one another, as I have loved you”
John 13:34

I look forward to the days when we will be able to have more opportunity to meet together, and socialize the way that we as women and sisters in the gospel love to do. I'm so thankful for all the ways you have stepped up and helped others during this challenge. I know we will all get through this by helping one another and staying connected to Jesus Christ. I share these thoughts with you in the name of Jesus Christ.
Amen.