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## The Work of Our Priesthood Quorums

By Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin Of the First Quorum of the Seventy



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I sometimes wonder how well the associates of the Prophet Joseph Smith understood the eventual consequences of the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood that took place in late May or early June 1829. Other than the Prophet himself, probably very few would have foreseen that the appearance of Peter, James, and John to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery would some day result in a worldwide priesthood organization consisting of more than 600,000 Melchizedek Priesthood bearers and 31,000 quorums and groups in 89 nations of the earth. They would certainly have been surprised if they could have viewed the great assembly of brethren who today gather for general priesthood meeting twice a year, or the many thousands who now attend individual quorum and group meetings each Sunday throughout the Church.

This army of priesthood bearers has a tremendous responsibility to carry out the great work of the priesthood and the Lord's purpose: "to bring to pass the ... eternal life of man." (**Moses 1:39**.) This work has taken on further focus with President Spencer W. Kimball's statement that the mission of the Church is to preach the gospel, perfect the Saints, and redeem the dead. (See *Ensign*, May 1981, p. 5.)

Priesthood programs are accordingly organized for the purpose of furthering these important objectives. Priesthood quorums around the Church focus their efforts on (1) strengthening individuals spiritually, (2) strengthening fathers and families, (3) performing missionary service, (4) fulfilling genealogical and temple responsibilities, (5) helping families to care for their temporal needs, and (6) watching over the Church always.

The quorum is the main channel for training Melchizedek Priesthood holders and fathers and strengthening them in their priesthood accountability. Most of the spiritual work of the Church is contained in the responsibility of the priesthood quorum.

President Joseph F. Smith spoke of the importance of priesthood units when in 1906 he said:

“We expect to see the day, if we live long enough ... when every council of the Priesthood ... will understand its duty; will assume its own responsibility, will magnify its calling, and fill its place in the Church, to the uttermost, according to the intelligence and ability possessed by it. When that day shall come, there will not be so much necessity for work that is now being done by the auxiliary organizations, because it will be done by the regular quorums of the Priesthood. The Lord designed and comprehended it from the beginning, and he has made provision in the Church whereby every need may be met and satisfied through the regular organizations of the Priesthood.” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1939, p. 159.)

As the Church has grown larger over the years, the role of the Melchizedek Priesthood quorum has indeed been gradually expanded. The future of the quorum and priesthood work was described in a 1937 statement by Elder John A. Widtsoe:

“The organizations of the Church are but helps to the Priesthood. That places the Priesthood quorums in the position of leadership. They should be so ably conducted, so faithfully attended, so thoroughly serviceable, as to set an example to all other Church organizations.” (*Improvement Era*, Dec. 1937, p. 760.)

### **Strengthening Individuals Spiritually**

Strengthening individuals spiritually is basic to all Church programs and activities and is usually accomplished by teaching individuals the gospel. The Lord gave this responsibility to Melchizedek Priesthood quorum leaders when he said that elders quorum presidents are to teach their quorum members according to the covenants. (See **D&C 107:89**.) This is a basic objective of quorum instruction each Sunday.

Since 1974 the scriptures have been the curriculum of the Melchizedek Priesthood quorums of the Church. The *Melchizedek Priesthood Personal Study Guide* is published as an aid to personal and quorum study of the scriptures. Quorum leaders have the responsibility to teach the brethren the doctrine of the gospel and the covenants they have made. They are also to teach their quorum members their priesthood and family duties.

The high priests group of the Bountiful (Utah) 29th Ward has taken these responsibilities seriously. The group leader, William G. McFarland, and his assistants take personal responsibility for the instruction given during the high priests group meeting. They carefully evaluate the needs of the group and plan lessons from the study guide that meet those needs. They frequently teach the lessons themselves as well as call upon other members of the group to teach. When a particular lesson relates to the work of one of the group committees, they ask that committee to take responsibility for the lesson.

As part of the priesthood meeting time each week, Brother McFarland asks one group member to give a brief (five-minute) summary of his life history. This promotes a closer

feeling of brotherhood and unity among the brethren and encourages the keeping of journals and histories. These histories are tape-recorded, along with the lesson and business, and the tape recording is taken to group members who are ill or who teach Primary and are unable to attend. When they finish hearing life histories of the brethren in the group, they plan to repeat the procedure by asking one brother each week to share a spiritual experience from his life.

A further aspect of strengthening individuals spiritually is the important task of activating the inactive members of the Church. This is done in an attitude of genuine love and concern using temple preparation seminars or teaching individual families in their homes. It's the great redemptive work spoken of by the Savior in **Luke 15:4-6**:

“What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

“And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

“And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.”

Under the leadership of President C. Terry Graff of the Federal Way Washington Stake, the Melchizedek Priesthood quorums of that stake have been able to activate more than three hundred prospective elders since their stake was organized in 1977. The president put the responsibility for the program on the shoulders of the Melchizedek Priesthood quorum leaders and organized the stake Melchizedek Priesthood committee to train the quorum leaders and receive weekly reports on their progress.

Capable priesthood holders and their wives are called and assigned to work with inactive families as fellowshippers and teachers. The inactive families attend a temple preparation seminar lesson each week and are also taught an additional lesson during the week by the assigned couple. The elders quorums of the stake organize and conduct the seminars, which are held quarterly in each ward.

It is the consistency of carrying out the program month after month that is the key to their success. Over a period of time as the number of those activated has increased, the percentage of attendance at meetings and tithing faithfulness have also increased.

George Skidmore was president of the Sunnyvale (California) 4th Ward elders quorum a few years ago. He took seriously his responsibility to strengthen the less active members of his quorum and invited the inactive couples to meet in his home to be taught the gospel by specially chosen teachers using the *Temple Preparation Seminar Discussions*. Conducting seminars twice a year for three to four years has resulted in many fine members coming into activity, including much of the current ward leadership. Brother Skidmore continues to direct the work as the current bishop of the ward. Don Bradley, himself activated through these seminars, is now the elders quorum president and carries on in the same tradition in the quorum.

## Strengthening Fathers and Families

“Fatherhood is leadership, the most important kind of leadership,” said President Kimball, quoting from the pamphlet *Father, Consider Your Ways*. “It has always been so: it always will be so. Father, with the assistance and counsel and encouragement of your eternal companion, you preside in the home. It is not a matter of whether you are most worthy or best qualified, but it is a matter of law and appointment.” (*Ensign*, June 1975, p. 5.)

Fathers benefit greatly from being trained in how to fulfill their family responsibilities, and the Melchizedek Priesthood quorum has the responsibility to see that they receive that training. Priesthood lessons are regularly devoted to topics of family leadership, and quorum leaders everywhere are feeling more and more their responsibility to teach and train their quorum members to be better husbands and fathers.

Alan Baczuk was an inactive member of the Auburn (Washington) 1st Ward elders quorum when the quorum leaders and others in the ward took a special interest in helping him to become a better example as a father. Russell Sly and Lawrence Hartley got to know Alan and taught him the importance of exemplary fatherhood and leadership in the home. They told him that training in these things was available in the elders quorum. Alan listened, attended the quorum meetings, and tried to be a better example. His sons later became Eagle Scouts and went on missions. Alan became a stronger father, a Scoutmaster, a stake mission president, and a bishop. He now teaches the importance of exemplary fatherhood to the brethren in his ward.

President Alan Grachan of the Littleton (New Hampshire) 1st Ward elders quorum also concentrates on helping fathers take more responsibility for the gospel progress of their family members. He teaches and encourages quorum members to hold regular private interviews with their family members to help prepare them for things like Church callings, priesthood ordinations, and advancement from Primary. As a quorum leader, he tries to set the example in his home teaching and personal interviews with the brethren of the quorum by always asking about their individual lives and challenges and what he can do to help them.

Under the leadership of stake president Richard Pitcher, all Melchizedek Priesthood quorums in this stake are being encouraged to put similar emphasis on training fathers and teaching parenting skills.

With the help of the study guide, the *Family Home Evening Resource Book*, and other approved materials, quorums and groups everywhere should focus quorum lessons and supplementary workshops on topics such as (1) improving family home evenings, (2) conducting effective family councils, (3) establishing regular family prayer, (4) supporting and building your spouse, (5) achieving proper family discipline, (6) sharpening family communications, (7) organizing family fun activities, (8) establishing regular family scripture reading, and (9) conducting personal interviews with children.

Efforts in these areas pay high dividends in strengthened families and, ultimately, strengthened quorums, wards, and stakes.

### **Performing Missionary Service**

Priesthood bearers concern themselves with several aspects of missionary service: (1) They serve full-time missions; (2) they friendship nonmembers so that they will want to hear the gospel; (3) they prepare their children—especially sons—for missions; and (4) they give financial support to missionary work.

The responsibility to do missionary work rests with every member of the Church. (See **D&C 88:81**.) Priesthood bearers and priesthood quorums have a particular charge to lead out in this work. Seventies, high priests, and elders share the responsibility and are to organize ways to help quorum members fulfill this sacred responsibility.

President Chang Suen Kim of the Seoul Korea West Stake has been especially anxious to have the Melchizedek Priesthood quorum leaders carry their share of the missionary work. He has concentrated on the role of the stake Melchizedek Priesthood committee to train the quorum leaders and see that they are well organized and functioning effectively. The seventies of the stake have been able to establish a good liaison with the full-time missionaries by holding regular meetings with them and have brought many new converts into the Church. Missionary preparation activities have also been carefully organized by the quorums of the stake. Through specific training classes and consistent emphasis, they have prepared a high number of young men to be called as full-time missionaries.

Under the direction of stake president Evert W. Perciwall and stake mission president Haken Palm, the Melchizedek Priesthood quorum leaders and other members of the Stockholm Sweden Stake organized a unique missionary project in the Exhibition Hall in downtown Stockholm. They created an outstanding exhibit entitled “Sweden’s Future Is Formed in the Home.” The exhibit included guided tours and professionally prepared visual displays telling the gospel message. Members staffed the exhibit from 9:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. each day for a month. They estimate that more than twelve thousand people visited the exhibit, resulting in many referrals and teaching opportunities.

### **Fulfilling Genealogical and Temple Responsibilities**

Genealogy and temple work are the responsibility of the individual and family, carried out under the direction of the family head. Quorum leaders are to organize activities that will help each individual and family to receive temple ordinances for themselves and their dead and to write personal and family histories.

High priest group leaders serve as specialists for genealogy and temple work on the ward priesthood executive committee. One high priest group leader, Pete Sorensen, found a good way to stimulate genealogical work among the high priests and members in the Spring Ward of the Houston Texas North Stake. He conducted a written survey among the ward members to determine what each family had accomplished in genealogy work

and where they needed help. Out of sixty respondents to the survey, only two said they didn't want further help. In follow-up interviews with each family, Brother Sorensen and his helpers encouraged members to set their own goals, and together they decided what help each needed. Individual help based on needs is his secret to priesthood genealogy success. He is also planning sacrament meeting talks, firesides, and ward bulletin handouts to offer further instruction and assistance.

In the Idaho Falls Stake the genealogy work centers around the genealogy branch library. Under the leadership of President Preston Brimhall, the stake decided several years ago to have a strong genealogy program. They established a branch genealogical library financed by the high priests quorum of the stake. Through encouraging genealogy work and suggesting that families visit the library together, they've had as many as six hundred visits to the library in a single month. They also conducted an extensive survey to find out the status of the four-generation program and the extent to which personal histories were being prepared. Home teachers were then asked to follow up with families to find out where they needed help and to accompany them to the library to get started. They promote genealogical research frequently and talk about genealogy and temple work in all their Church meetings.

During one month, March 1983, members of a ward in the eastern part of the United States completed 941 temple assignments in the Washington Temple, which is more than four hundred miles away. They have encouraged each recommend holder to use his recommend regularly, and this has greatly increased their work for the dead.

### **Helping Families Care for Their Temporal Needs**

Priesthood quorums teach and assist their members to attain good health, financial stability, and a year's supply of food and clothing. They also teach their members to be self-reliant and to give their time, talents, and means in behalf of the Church, community, and needy. Quorum leaders have additional responsibilities to teach prevention and to carry out rehabilitative measures for the unfortunate.

In the Columbus (Ohio) Westerville Ward, elders quorum president Gene Arnold held a special fireside for his quorum members on the importance of having a year's supply of food and clothing. He challenged those in attendance to try to accomplish most of that task by the end of the year—several months away. He then went to work to help them do just that—through loving encouragement and by setting the example. Many families in the quorum achieved excellent progress on their food storage during those months. President Arnold also takes quorum members with him to the cannery at the bishops' storehouse when he goes, and together they can their own food for their year's supply.

Bill Myers, president of the elders quorum in Bloomington, Illinois, has focused on service projects for those in need. He and his fellow quorum members assisted a single ward member who had been disabled by a shoulder injury by putting a new roof on her house and helping her with some home repairs.

Likewise, Darvel Allred, high priest group leader in the Upland (California) 3rd Ward plans a service project for group members each month. Typical of his desire to help people help themselves was one service project where group members performed repair work on a single parent's home and had her young sons work along with them so they could learn how to do the work themselves.

### **Watching Over the Church Always**

From the earliest days of the Church the Lord has given a charge to the priesthood to "watch over the church always, and be with and strengthen them." (**D&C 20:53**.) When the Church came to the Salt Lake Valley, this responsibility was carried out through block teaching. Later, ward teaching was instituted. Today, home teaching is the primary tool to fulfill this charge from the Lord.

Home teaching is carried out by the Melchizedek Priesthood quorums under the direction of the bishop. Two priesthood holders are called as home teachers to visit the homes of assigned families regularly. They represent the quorum leader and the bishop.

Leaders in the Brigham Young University 5th Stake have encouraged quorums to have frequent training sessions of five to six minutes each in an effort to strengthen home teaching. This includes brief suggestions on how to present an effective message, how to observe needs, how to be helpful to a single-parent family, and so on. "New ideas and encouragement have proven much more successful in motivating our home teachers than constantly reminding our brethren about the number of days left in the month," says stake president Niles W. Herrod. "We feel that if we can properly train home teachers in our student quorums, they will be much better home teachers when they leave BYU and serve in quorums throughout the Church."

Elders quorum president Terry Lenahan found that home teaching needed improvement when he was called to preside over the quorum in Woodstock, Georgia. He first identified all families assigned to his quorum and then organized the home teachers and Aaronic Priesthood junior companions into three home teaching teams under the supervision of the three members of the quorum presidency. He held special training sessions on home teaching as part of the regular quorum instruction to teach the brethren how to relate to families, how to fellowship inactive members, and how to carry out similar responsibilities. He and his counselors also concentrated on regular and effective home teaching interviews and careful follow-up and encouragement to individual home teachers. Home teaching statistics rose from 40 percent to 85 percent and higher. Effective training and interviews were his secrets to better home teaching.

Oduvaldo Salvador Amato, elders quorum president in the Aeroporto Ward of the Sao Paulo Brazil West Stake, is also diligent in strengthening home teaching in his quorum. When he was first called to preside over the elders quorum, only 20 percent of the families were being visited. He went to work to see that every family had home teachers and that the home teaching reporting was better organized. He says that the dramatic

improvement in home teaching percentages in his quorum “is mostly due to better planning in presidency meetings and the total activity of the quorum as a whole.”

President Amato also tries hard to properly fellowship the many new converts coming into his quorum. He or one of his counselors attends every baptism service in the ward, and he makes sure that all new members are introduced to their home teachers and receive instruction from the *Home Teaching Lessons for New Members*.

Home teaching in the Dallas (Texas) 3rd Ward is likewise going well. Month after month the high priests group leader John Bertrand, seventies group leader Paul Larsen, and elders quorum president Vern Larmen cooperate to attain nearly 100 percent, high-quality home teaching. These brethren encourage their home teachers to have a sincere interest in their families and to start early in the month with initial visits so that they will be more inclined to make additional contacts, remember birthdays, and perform other service to their families as “second mile” efforts to meet their needs. The stake presidency and high council, under the direction of Dallas Texas East Stake president Rulon Brough, set the example through their own home teaching efforts and regular and consistent home teaching interviews that motivate and inspire.

So much of this work depends on each individual priesthood bearer being diligent in his duties and obtaining the power of the priesthood in his life through personal worthiness. The Lord has said:

“Whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods of which I have spoken, and the magnifying their calling, are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies.

“They become the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God. ...

“Therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto [them].

“And this is according to the oath and covenant which belongeth to the priesthood.”  
**(D&C 84:33–34, 38–39.)**

Priesthood quorums and priesthood work constitute some of the most important keys to the future of the Church. If all priesthood bearers could catch the vision of the purposes of quorums and more fully understand the importance of priesthood work, the work would go forward with leaps and bounds. There is no limit to the potential of brethren working together in complete brotherhood and selflessness toward spiritual goals. The power of God working through such channels will bring unimaginable blessings to all concerned.

*Gospel topic: priesthood*